

SEBRIGHTS

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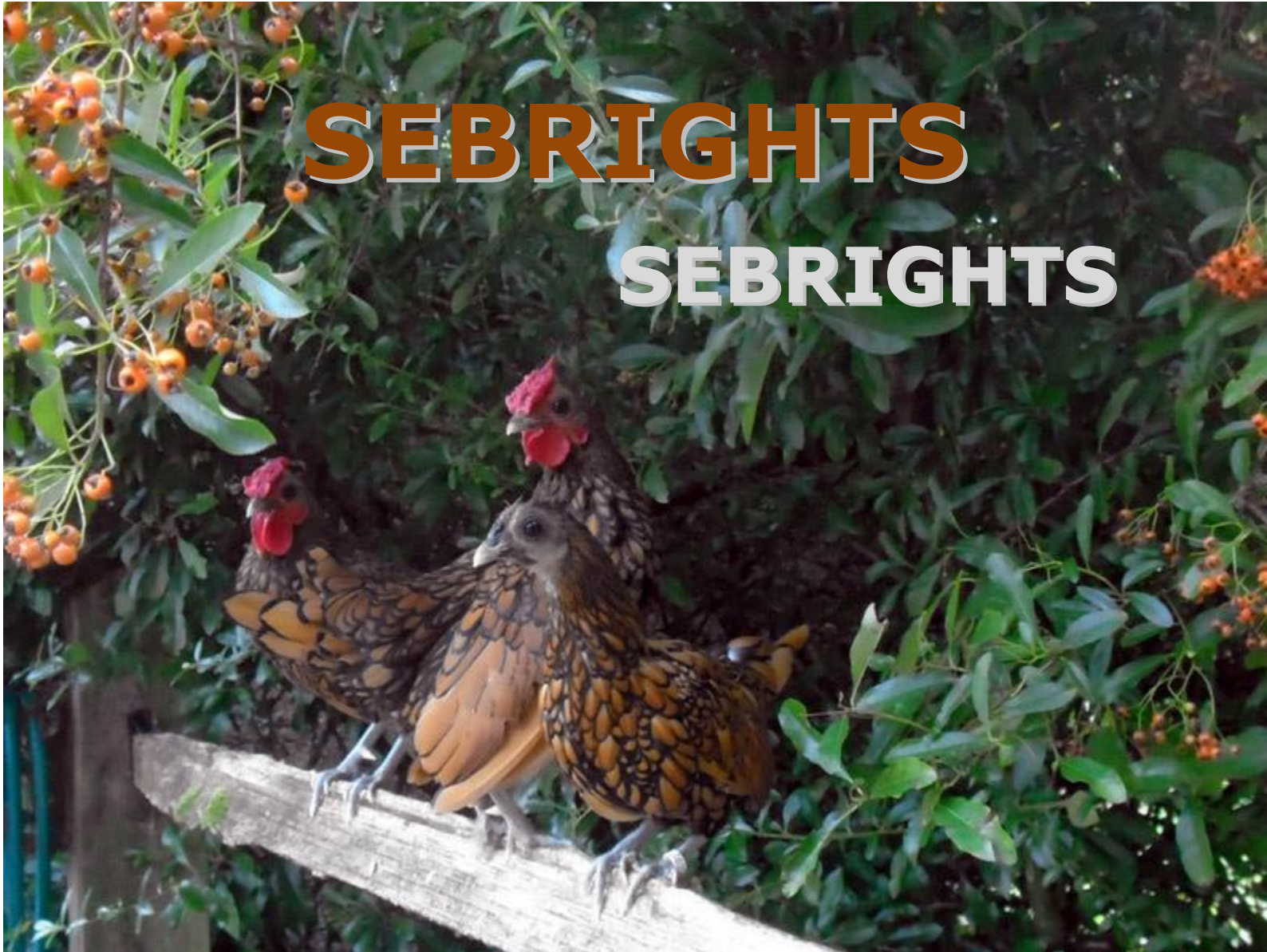


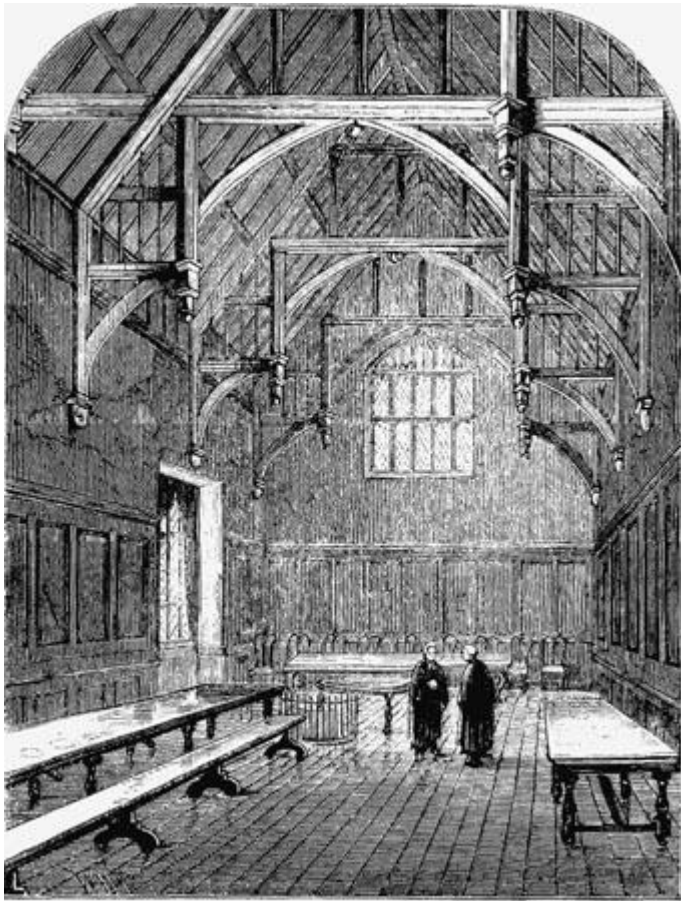
Photo: Gordon and Sylvia Sebright.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

By Christopher Parker, President of the Sebright Club of Great Britain

The original Sebright Club was founded by Sir John Sebright 200 years ago, several years after he started work on the development of the bird. It was the first of its kind, as were the private members' shows, held annually, first in a public house in Brick Lane, London and then in the Gray's Inn Coffee House at 22 High Holborn. The latter closed in 1865 and thrives now as the Citty of Yorke. Coffee was introduced to Britain in the mid 17th century and became the fashionable drink. Many coffee shops were the offshoots of taverns and sold beer and wine too.

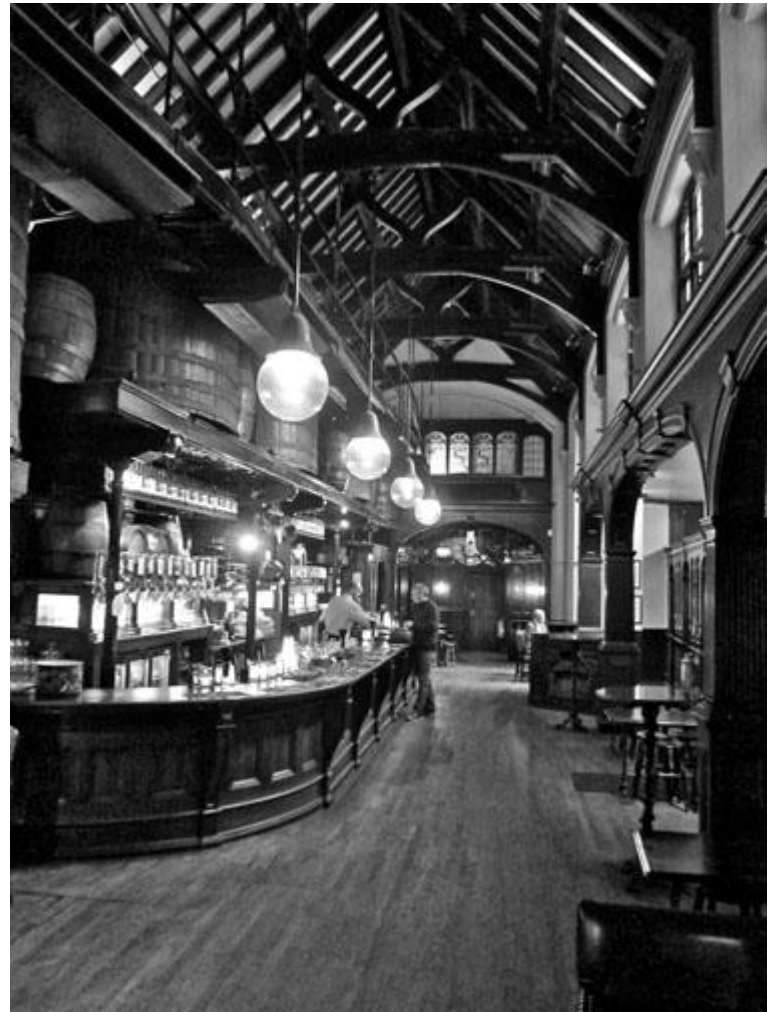




Left: The hall of Gray's Inn Coffee House, in early days.

Below: Today's 'Cittie of Yorke' in London's High Holborn.

See also [here](#).



The front bar is panelled, dark and comfortable. The cellar bar forms the brick foundations of the much older building. The bar to the rear is both fascinating and unique. In a great church-like hall, under a high pitched roof, a long bar counter sits below large oak vats. These are dwarfed by massive wine vats near the entrance, said to hold 1000 gallons each. On the opposite wall is a series of small cubicles, like confessionals, where it's easy to imagine lawyers in confidential conversation with their clients. Another unique feature is an ingenious triangular stove (c.1815) which stands in the centre of the bar. It has no visible chimney, the smoke is ducted away below the floor.



The annual subscription was two guineas for the Golden and two guineas for the Silver, which formed the prize money at the Show. Each bird had to be the bona-fide property of the exhibitor bred by him and under one year old; and the stock was compared that each member had bred in that year and each exhibit had to be offered for sale, but the breeder was allowed to buy back his own stock if he so wished. It was the custom to admit strangers to The Sebright Bantam Club, on application, after the award of the Judges, but the Club was essentially private and all members had to be proposed and seconded by a member, and afterwards balloted for.

Harrison Weir

Harrison Weir whose work 'Our Poultry', published in 1902, thought that laced fowls of both Silver and Gold existed in the country well before 1800 (when Sir John Sebright began his work) and some confusion existed between the breed names. For example, the breeds we now know as "Hamburghs" and "Polish" were both commonly called "Polish" at various times in those early days. This leads to the possibility that the birds recorded as playing a major part in the formation of the Sebright were in fact some kind of Hamburgh rather than Polish, or perhaps even a cross between the two. The Hamburgh comb and leg colour make it a more probable ancestor than the Polish with its peculiar comb, skull and crest. Moreover the Hamburgh has white earlobes, which were so sought after by the earliest Sebright breeders.

Mr Weir wrote about Sir John obtaining a buff-coloured hen at Norwich. She was very small with clear, slate-blue legs (almost certainly a Nankin). He also bought a cockerel destitute of sickles and possessing hen feathered hackles from Norwich.

Ian Kay in his excellent article published in the Smallholder (2007) mentions a Gold Pencilled hen that was bought from Watford at the same time. 'Our Poultry' goes on to say that it took a further 20 years for Sir John to obtain the gold laced feather that he was seeking. He later had a white cockerel from the Zoological Gardens, by which he made Silvers.



Above: Various Bantam Chickens in the yard, H. Weir.

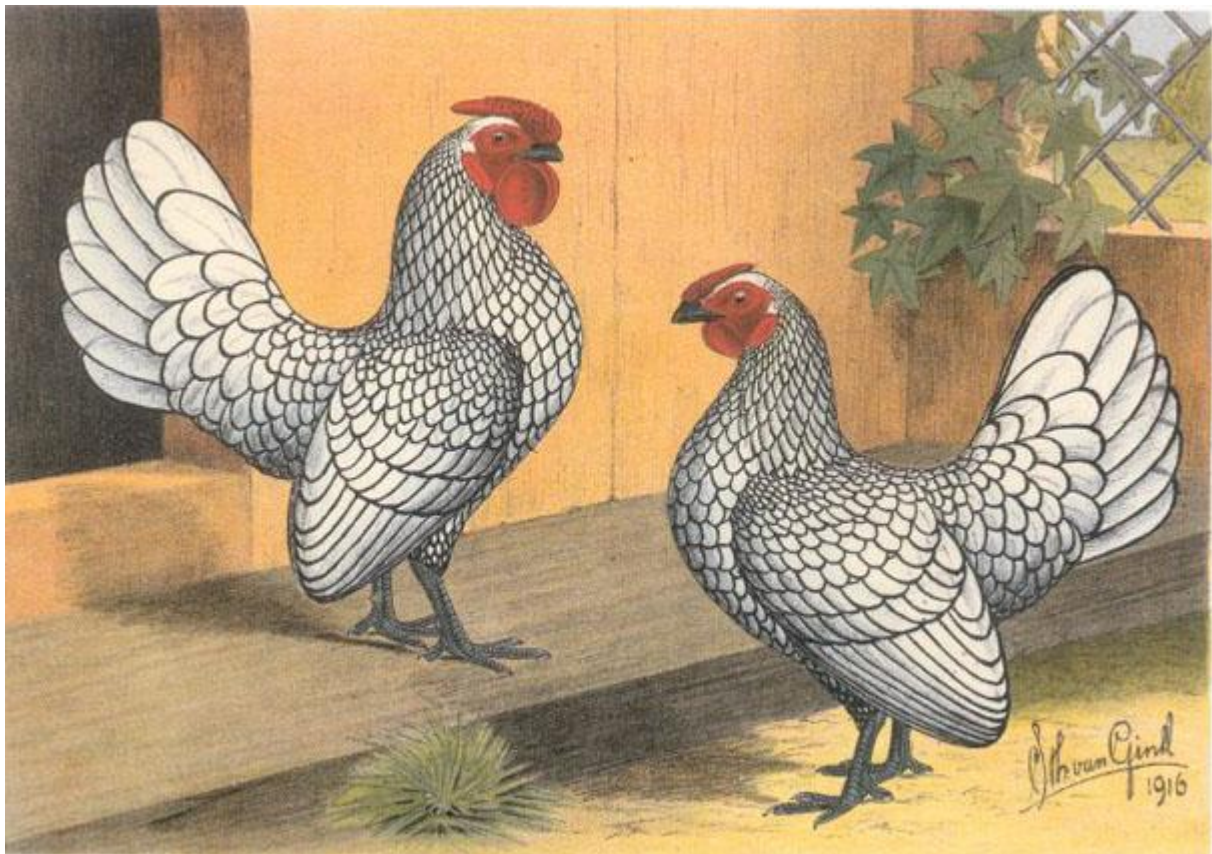
Mr Weir thought it difficult to eliminate the Polish top-knot and mentions that his brother was presented with a pair of Sebrights in the early 1830s which were more inclined to spangling than lacing. Furthermore they showed no sign of a crest, nor did it appear in any chicks bred from them. Although the facts were never precisely recorded at the time, the author seems to have reached the conclusion that the true Polish played no part in the production of the Sebright. Mr Weir was present at the first open Live Poultry Show, held at the Zoological Society's Gardens, Regents Park, London in 1847 – just a year after Sir John Sebright died.

The following excerpts are taken from the late Ian Kay's article published in the Smallholder magazine:

"I have often wondered why it took the group forty years to develop the birds before they were shown to the general fanciers and an article by the Reverend Saul Dixon in 1848 says that the final product was imported from the far East, other people both here and in the USA were quick to endorse this statement, in fact a Mrs Williams goes so far as to give the name of the importer. I think that there may be a little innocent truth in these claims because Sir John also mentions getting a male bird from a Zoological gardens without declaring where it had originated before having been put on display, so obviously it could have been imported from possibly Japan and carried some form of lacing without the crest of the Polish, which has often been suggested as being the breed from where he obtained the perfect lacing.

The breed of Japanese was originally called the Chabo and was imported into Japan from either Southern China or the Singapore area, and some of the earlier reports do mention a laced colouring as well as the Greys and Black tailed Whites etc.

It does not really matter where they obtained the finishing touches to the breed; what was achieved is unique in that not only are the body feathers laced but also the main tail feathers. Silver Laced Polish have this feature that could be a pointer to them being part of the Sebrights origin.



Above: Silver Sebright, a drawing by the Dutch artist Van Gink, dated 1916.

Several unique features

There are several features about Sebrights that are different to most other breeds, whether they were deliberately included in the first vision of the breed or were included as they occurred in the breed's development we will probably never know. One point is that the male birds do not have long flowing side hangers and sickle feathers and are known as being "Hen feathered"; this presumably came from the Campine blood, rather than Henny Game Fowl that

also have this feature. This lack of sickle feather in the cock bird was blamed for the breed's reputations being poor on fertility; consequently a small amount of extended feather in the sickles became more acceptable than previously condoned.

**Right: Head study of
Rebeca Thorpe's Gold-Sebright.
Photo: Rupert Stephenson.**

Until more recent times Sebrights had a mulberry colouring to their combs and faces, this has gradually faded away, especially in the male birds and again it is reluctantly becoming half acceptable, but if one appears with a dark colouring it is immediately proudly shown as being the old fashioned original colour. This Mulberry colouring has often been assumed to come from the introduction of Silkie blood, which are the only breed with such a colouring, however, I have another theory, certain strains of Old English Game Fowl, in both Brown Red and self Blacks, even at the present time have what is usually called "Gypsy Faces" and I would guess that some of the Black Bantams used in the breeds early origin had this feature and it has been recurring ever since, especially in the females.



Standard Book photo.

In most of the old books it is thought that the lacing on a Sebright came directly from Polish blood, but other writers dispute this by saying that you have never seen a Sebright show any sign of a crest, nor have I ever seen one with five toes, which again casts doubt on the Silkie blood being involved, but during the 1940s it was not uncommon to hatch a Sebright that was rumpless, a feature almost proving that the Manx Bantam had at one time been involved, it was also

quite usual to hatch a few chicks with single combs that was only to be expected with all the different birds that had been introduced into the breed.

Another feature that is always shown in the early paintings of Sebrights is their "Fan Tail" that was fully spread and showing the correct lacing to each feather. This point is hard to achieve and many of today's birds do not have a fully spread tail. Maybe it is not too serious a fault providing that they are good in other features and they still look very attractive and acceptable.



**National Federation Show at Stafford, December 2011,
Jamie Robinson's champion Gold Sebright trio.**

During the period some sixty years since, great emphasis was placed on the feather shape, especially on the females. This is described in the standard as being "Almond Shaped" and birds with body feathers ending in a point were frowned upon as were the ones where the feathers were "Square Ended". The thickness of lacing around the feather has always been debated with a narrow width being the correct one, but if the lacing was slightly wider the appearance could be more striking and these birds often proved successful at the summer agricultural shows where the sunshine had tended to fade the original colour on the fine laced birds. The ground colour in Silvers never seems to be a problem, but in Golds it can be. A debate on the correct depth of colour has been discussed for close on a hundred years with writers expressing concern that they were getting too light in colour. I know that during the 1940s if you did not have a good depth of colour you might as well leave your birds at home and save the entry fee, as they would not win anything. Another very important feature was with birds having a pale shaft to their feathers. I know that the Standard says that shaftiness is undesirable, but in my young days it was unacceptable and certainly the birds look better if the feather is one even colour without the distraction of a pale coloured shaft.

To close with I will say that no other breed of poultry has ever been so frequently painted and in almost all cases shown to the originators concept of perfection, may this type continue to be bred and exhibited for many more centuries."

**Some additional
information by the editors
of Aviculture Europe (NL)**

In Great Britain, the Sebright is only standardized in Gold and Silver, but in the Netherlands an intermediate colour sported from the Golds in the middle of the 20th century; these are the **Lemon Sebrights**. The colour of these birds is lemon yellow with fine black lacing around each feather.

**Right:
Lemon Sebright cockerel.
Photo: Jan Schaareman (NL).**



**Left: Lemon Sebright pullet.
Photo: W. Klunder (NL).**

Chamois Sebright

Approximately 20 years ago the Chamois Sebright was created, by outcrossing with other breeds. These are light golden birds with a white lace around all feathers.

This colour variety does not have the same deep dark brown eyes as the Gold, Silver and Yellow Sebright. This seems genetically impossible. We have to be satisfied with a red brown eye colour. The same holds for the 'gipsy face'; a purple comb on this colour is too much to ask.

**Right: Chamois cockerel. Very
good type and wing carriage.
Very good eye colour for
Chamois. Photo W. Klunder
(NL).**



Right: Chamois pullet.
Beautiful type and feathering.
Tail not fully grown.
Photo W. Klunder (NL).

SEBRIGHT STANDARD

Origin: Great Britain

Classifications: True Bantam

Egg Colour: White or cream

This breed is a genuine bantam and one of the oldest British varieties. It has no counterpart in large breeds. There are two colours, gold and silver.

General characteristics: male

Carriage: Strutting and tremulous, on tip-toe, somewhat resembling a fantail pigeon.

Type: Body compact, with low broad and prominent breast. Back very short. Wings large and carried low. Tail square, well spread and carried high. Sebright males are hen feathered, without curved sickles or pointed neck and saddle hackles.

Head: Small. Beak short and slightly curved. Comb rose, square fronted, firmly and evenly set on, top covered with fine points, free from hollows, narrowing behind to a distinct spike or leader, turned slightly upwards. Eyes full. Face smooth. Ear-lobes flat, and unfolded. Wattles well rounded.

Neck: Tapering, arched and carried well back.

Legs and feet: Legs short and well apart. Shanks slender and free from feathers. Toes, four, straight and well spread.

Plumage: Short and tight, feathers not too wide but never pointed. (Almond-shaped feather is desirable)

General characteristics: female

The general characteristics are similar to those of the male, allowing for the natural sexual differences. Her neck is upright.

In both sexes and colours

Beak dark horn in golds; dark blue or horn in silvers. Eyes black, or as dark as possible. Comb, face, wattles and ear-lobes mulberry or deep red. Legs and feet slate-blue. Although in males the mulberry face is seldom obtainable, the eye should be dark and surrounded with a dark cere.



Colour

The Gold - Male and female plumage: Uniform golden-bay with glossy green-black lacing and dark undercolour. Each feather evenly and sharply laced all round its edge with a narrow margin of black. Shaftiness is undesirable.

The Silver - Male and female plumage: Similarly marked on pure, clear silver-white ground colour.

Weights: Male 620g (22 oz) Female 510g (18 oz)

Note: There is at present a decided move to improve type and to discourage the prevailing whip tails and narrow build, particularly in females.

Serious defects

Single comb. Sickie feathers or pointed hackles in the male. Feathers on shanks. Legs other than slate-blue. Other than four toes. Any deformity.



**Scottish National
Poultry Show, January
2018
Best Silver Sebright
owned by Gerry Logue.**

Keeping and breeding Sebrights

Addition - with our thanks to the Dutch Sebright Club

Sebrights are docile, diligent bantams. The hens lay well, and only sometimes get broody. Contrary to usual behaviour, Sebright females put together without a rooster will often fight each other, but males can easily be kept together. Although the roosters are hen feathered, they do have spurs and defend their hens as any cock will.

Yet they are known as a difficult breed to propagate, a belief borne out by the legendary saying: 100 eggs, 50 fertilized, 25 chicks, then you are lucky! Sometimes things get really bad, there are cocks that do not fertilize for example and you should keep a close eye on such things. Moreover, the Sebright is apparently very sensitive to Marek's disease, but if they are vaccinated against this, the losses are almost nil.



**Left: Gold Sebright cockerel.
Outstanding body type, head, comb and
eye colour. The tail feathering looks a bit
disturbed.
Photo: Frederic Verheyden.**



You don't need two distinct breeding lines for producing exhibition-quality hens and cocks because both sexes are marked exactly the same. However, there is still plenty to watch for. The body type is the most important thing. Furthermore, a warm golden ground colour - not too red - and broad feathers, laced as completely as possible with narrow black showing a sufficient sheen. The tail, wingbows and primaries are first to lose the lacing, As are the top neck and the head, which is sometimes completely golden, and sometimes completely black- both are wrong. Don't be too hasty in purchasing other birds; first try out what you have in your pens. In any case, you should never mate two identical faults together. You have to know what you did, see the faults and learn from it.

**Above: Gold Sebright hen.
Very good type and feathering. Photo: Willie Klunder.**



**Above: Silver Sebright rooster and hen.
Outstanding type with very good wing and tail carriage and very good broad feathering. Photo: Willie Klunder.**

The Dutch Sebright Club

Last year the club celebrated its 50th anniversary and a Jubilee Show was organized in Apeldoorn. 25 members entered over 250 Sebrights in all four colours, Gold, Silver and Lemon black laced and Yellow White laced (Chamois). A beautiful day with many beautiful Sebrights. Mister Parker of the English Sebright Club had planned to come, but unfortunately at the last moment he could not make it. We did receive their beautiful English rosettes and handed them out for the Best Silver and Gold Sebrights.

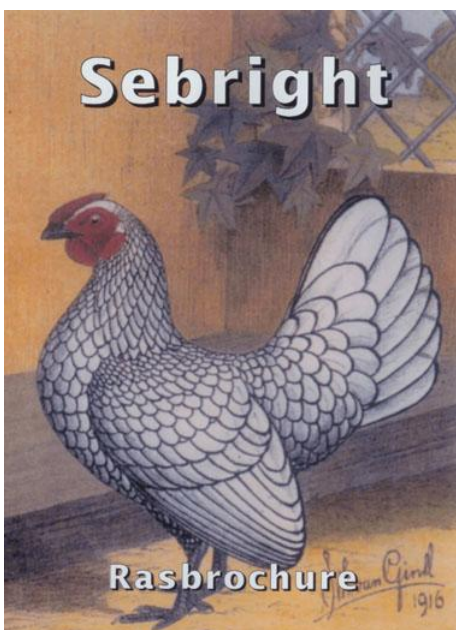
The NL Sebright Club currently has about 80 members, the atmosphere is friendly and the members are helpful. Most of them come from the Netherlands and Belgium. The quality of the Sebrights is very high nowadays, which is sometimes considered difficult for the judges. All colour varieties have several good breeders and the lemon black laced have improved considerably in quality in recent years.



The NL Sebright Club publishes three club magazines per year for their members and has already issued a Breed Booklet, an Information Leaflet and a Flyer. Every year there is a club day and a club show; the latter housed at a national exhibition.

Left: Rosette from England, for the Jubilee Show.

Below: Proud winners in Apeldoorn at the Jubilee Show.



Club's websites www.sebrightclub.co.uk and www.sebrightclub.nl

***In our next issue we will publish an extensive article
on
the breeding of the Sebrights.***



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