

THE INDIAN GAME

Text: Elly Vogelaar

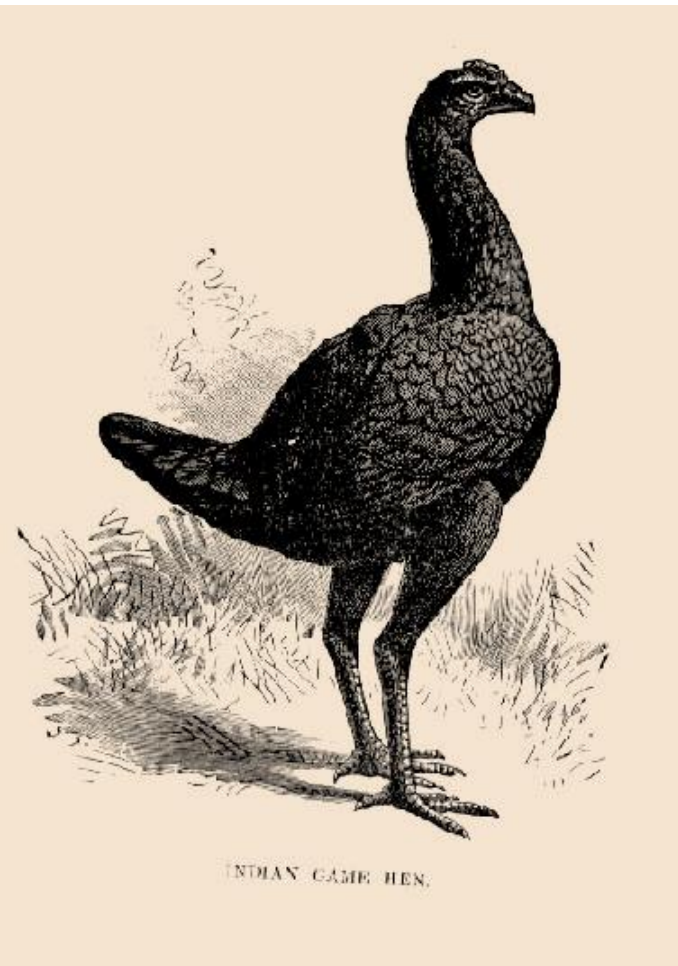


Photo above: [Jude Keogh](#)

At each show I can again look at them with fascination; that cock looking so intimidating with his provocative, broad bulldog-like stance, , a mysterious suggestion of strength and determination: the Indian Game, or, as they say in America, the Cornish. A game breed, but in this breed special it is my pleasure to just bring out the beauty and show quality of this ancient product of English breeding. Yes, an English product, because the Indian Game was bred, not in in India but was created in England in the 19th century. The breed is an imposing composition of various game fowl bloodlines; namely the Malay, Old English Game and Aseel. However, the type has changed a lot since the first creation.

Game Fowl

By the Middle Ages, England already had a game fowl breed, the English Game (later known as Old English Game); a lively, strong and well-fleshed land fowl, which could become a good fighter with the right education and training. The forward-placed legs with the long spurs pointing upwards made this bird an ideal 'spur fighter'. However, from India and other British colonies, 'new' breeds of game fowl were introduced again and again. Malays and Aseel varieties with a different way of fighting, namely with the beak. They were no match for the English Game, and as is to be expected, all sorts of crossings were soon tried, especially by breeders from the counties of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset.



According to Hilbert Pater's Dutch translation of the German book *Handbuch der Hühnerrassen* by Rüdiger Wandelt, Malay and black-red Old English Game were crossed with several Aseel varieties, such as the heavy and broad Kulang types from the Madras-Aseel breeding line. In turn, these were crossed with Pheasant Malays, which gave us the double lacing.

(Note: According to the history on the English [Indian Game Club's](#) website, the Pheasant Malays were used to produce the rich black colour in Indian Game.)

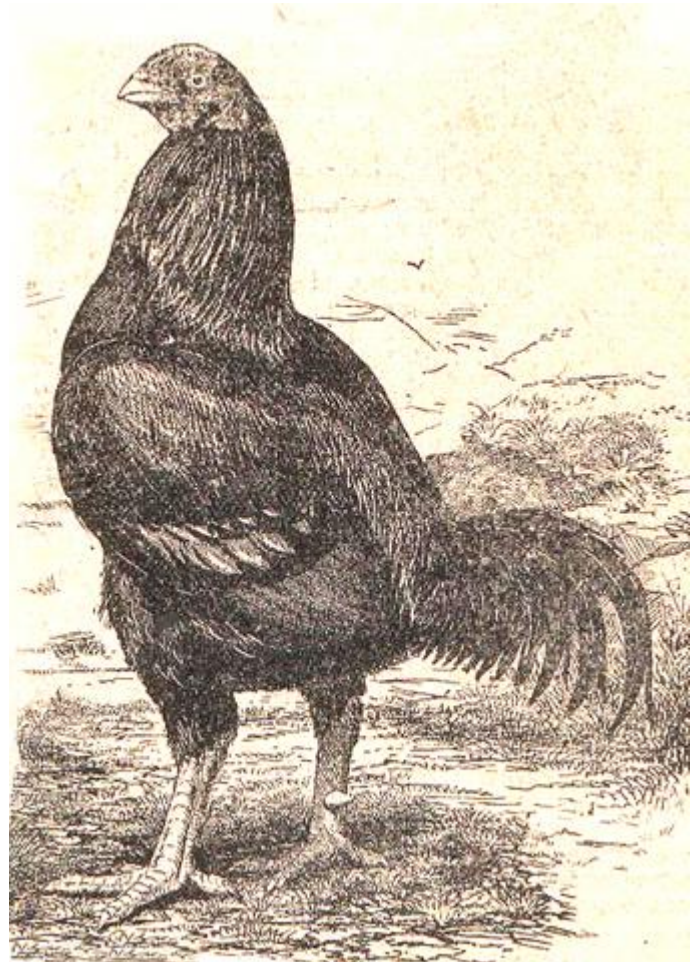
Left: Indian Game hen, 1892, William Cook-Poultry breeder and feeder.

Below: Indian Game rooster, 1920.

To distinguish them from the English Game, these new game fowl were commonly referred to as "Injees Game", which later became Indian Game. They were so heavy, however, that they were hardly suitable for cock fighting. Double-laced, called 'dark' in England, was the first recognised colour variety. In 1858 they were shown for the first time at the Crystal Palace Show. At that time they were long-legged, and more or less of Malay type.

After 1880 the breed went in a completely different direction; much more emphasis was placed on a very broad and low-slung chicken: on the one hand as a meat breed and on the other as an exhibition-game, finally resulting in the exaggerated, bulldog-like type. Among others, the name D. Brent is mentioned as the initiator.

Around 1930 it was mainly his two sons William and Cecil Brent who brought top animals into the exhibition cages. William was the then chairman of the Indian Game Club, and a judge. During these years this variety also won at every show for utility (meat) breeds. However, even better – especially faster growing – chickens were found to result when crossing Indian Game with other meat breeds, such as Dorkings and Sussex.



**Right: 1931. Two famous Indian Game breeders, Mr. William Brent (left) and Mr. Percy Fricker (bantams)
Photo: 'The Feathered World' Yearbook.**



**AN INDIAN CONFERENCE.
(Without a Round Table.)**

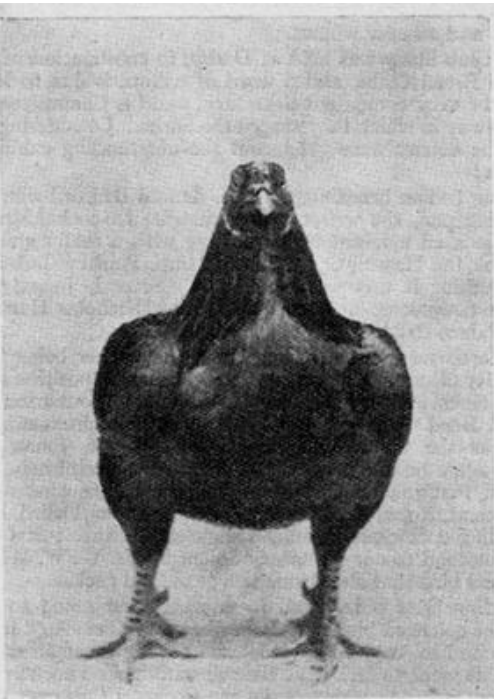
Below; photos of Indian Game at shows in 1931.

Cock, Mr. H. Whitley, S. Devon.

Cock, Mr. W.G. Brent, Cornwall.

Cock Mr. C.N. Belbin, Huddersfield.

Photos: 'The Feathered World' Yearbook.



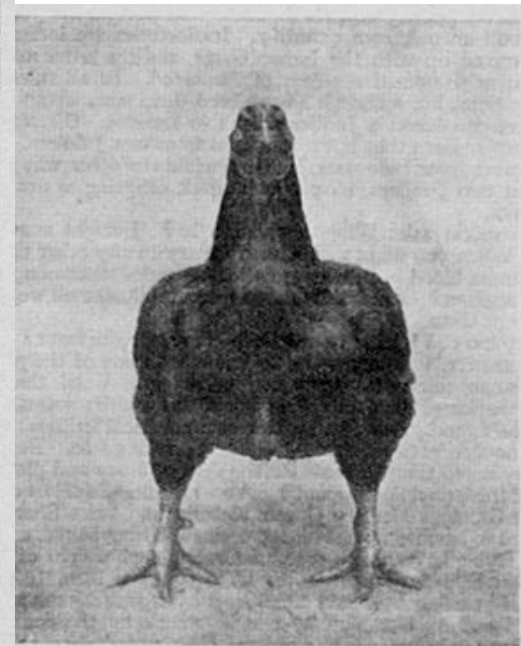
INDIAN GAME COCK.

1st P.C. Medal, best in show, Astwood Bank; 1st Yeovil, Bournville, Bagworth, Llantrisant and Histon; 1st P. Club Medal, also £5-5-0 Cup, best in show, Exeter Fat Stock Show, December 11th, 1931. The property of Mr. H. Whitley, Primley, Paignton, S. Devon.



INDIAN GAME COCKEREL.

1st Great Yorkshire, 2nd Dairy Show, 1931. The property of Mr. W. G. Brent, Warrens Park, Congdon Shop, Launceston, Cornwall

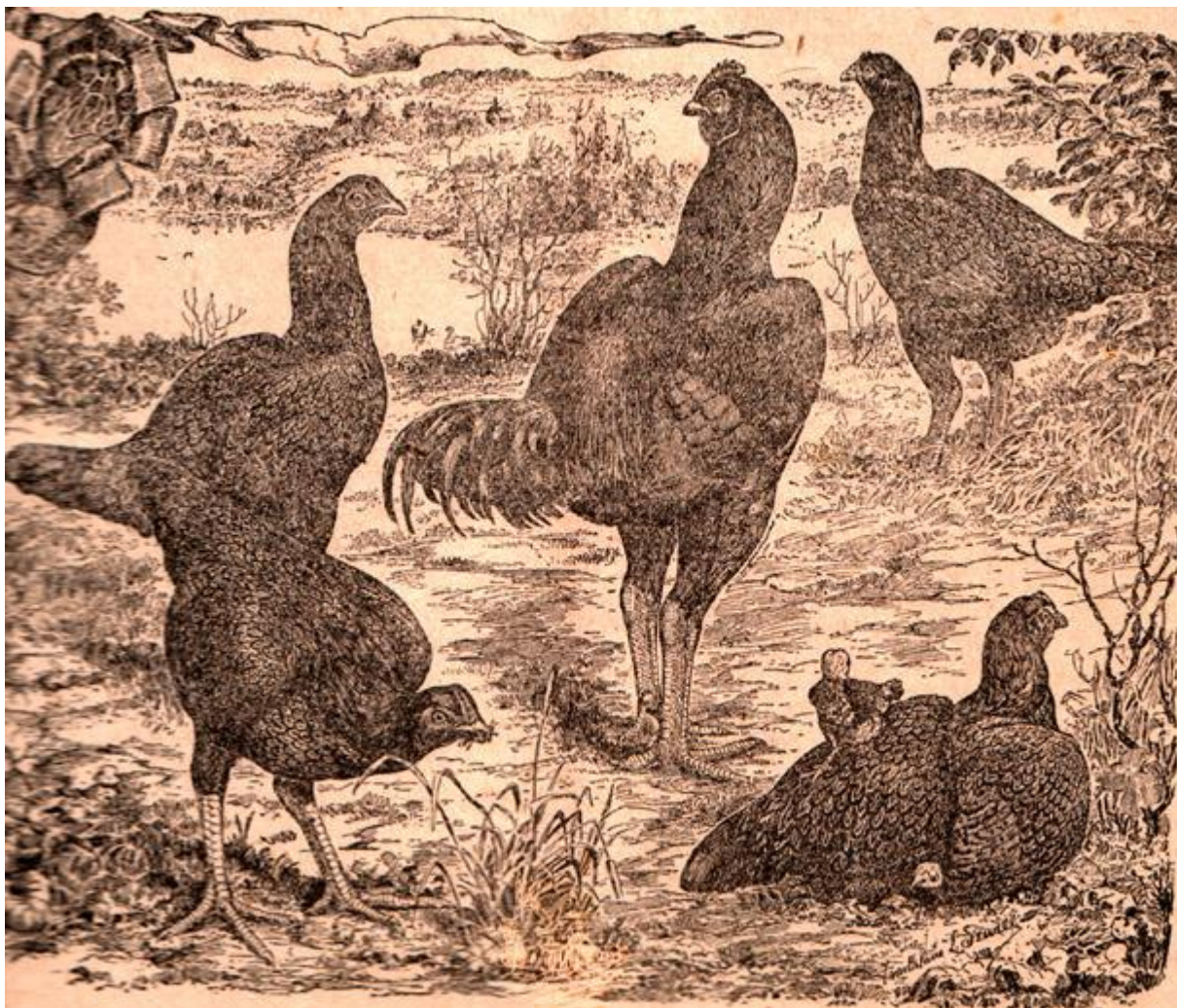


A WINNING INDIAN GAME COCK.

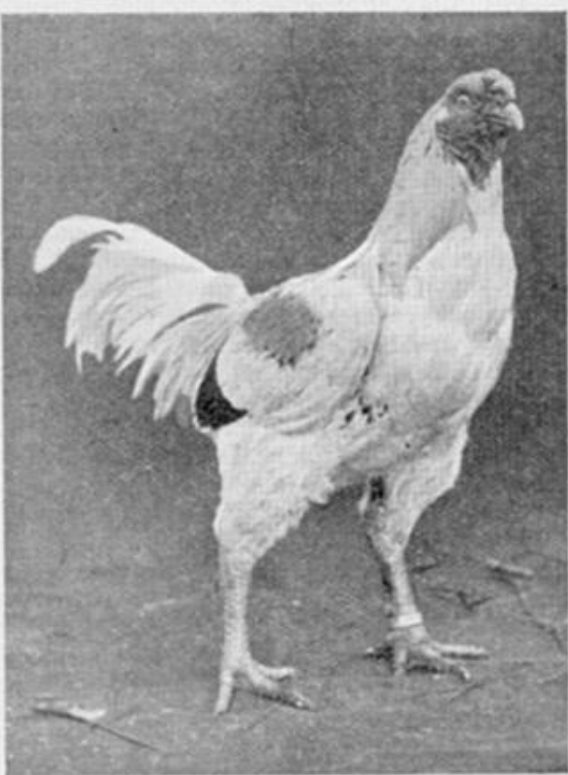
1st Challenge Salver and Medal best Cock in Show, The Highland, Edinburgh, 1931. Also first prizes at Worsley, Thirsk, Bridlington and Bakeswell. The property of Mr. C. N. Belbin, Nortonthorpe Hall, nr. Huddersfield.

In 1887 the first Indian Game chickens were exported to America, where they were given the name "Cornish", referring to the region of origin. According to an article by Awe van Wulfften Palthe (NL), the birds fetched prices three times higher than that for a horse, and ten times that for a sheep!

In America, the breed was crossed with, among others, the Plymouth Rock, producing a particularly fast-growing and heavily fleshed bird, the Cornish-Rock. In that way the Indian Game became the founding father of today's broiler industry.



**Above: Indian Game, as they looked in 1920 in America.
Drawing by Franklane L. Sewell.**



A JUBILEE INDIAN GAME COCK.
1st at the Royal. Bred and exhibited by Mr. Laurence Ardern.

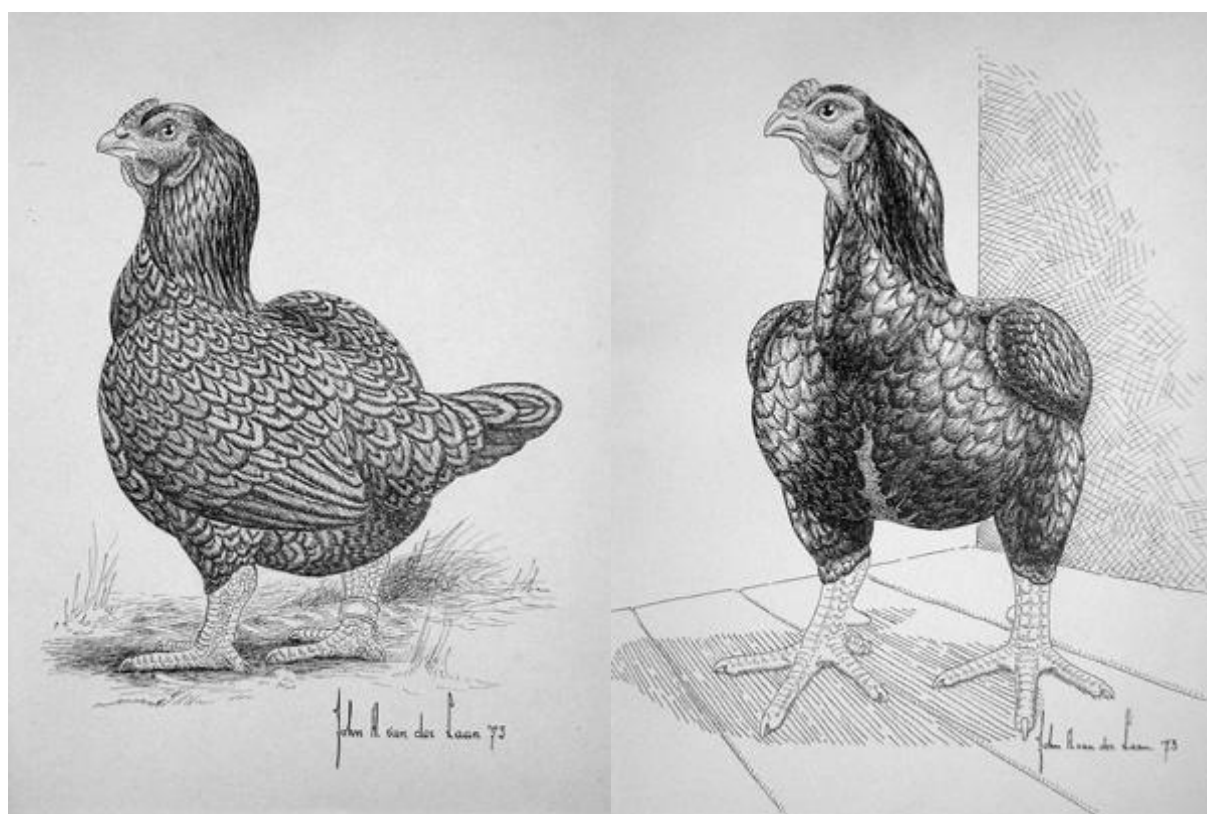
Show breed around 1900

In *The Feathered World Yearbook* of 1932 you can read a striking piece by Henry Hunt about the colour variety Jubilee, the breeders, and the specialty club in the last decades of the 19th century. He first refers to the sad history of the Shanghais (forerunner of the Brahma, the very large chickens with sparsely feathered yellow legs) that Queen Victoria received as a gift around 1850. She was so deeply impressed by the excellent commercial quality of this breed - in a year-long Laying Test in 1852-1853, four hens together laid 1059 eggs, or 264 each - that she ordered them to be sent out to serious breeders, but unfortunately they got into the hands of 'The Fancy' and in no time all their great qualities were sacrificed. The sparse leg feathering was encouraged to grow more luxuriant at the expense of their eggs and flesh. Then around 1880 the "buffing and blueing" craze began and a general assault was made on the Indians. But the Indian Game men realized that their choice was the best meat breed ever, and Poultrydom's greatest triumph of the century. The Indian Game Club was established and the breeders decided to fight this madness tooth and

nail. The Club was holding its own very well when, out of the blue, two specimens of Red Laced White Indian Game turned up at the Dairy-show in 1897, the 60th jubilee year of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. The cat was now truly among the pigeons. At a special meeting of the Indian Game Club a resolution was carried: "That any Indian Game judge recognising any but the Standard variety (the 'dark') of Indian Game at any show, should be immediately crossed off the official Judging List"! Despite that, the new colour was recognised and named 'Jubilee', and by 1932 60 Jubilees had been entered on the Norwich Show. Unfortunately, Hunt, who is registered as the developer of this colour variety, does not describe exactly how he created it, simply stating that the jubilee and the dark are inextricably linked and can be bred together.

In the pictures you can clearly see how the type has changed over the years; in England around 1930 the bulldog model was already common, though the stand is not so abnormally low.

In America, people held on to the original type for longer.

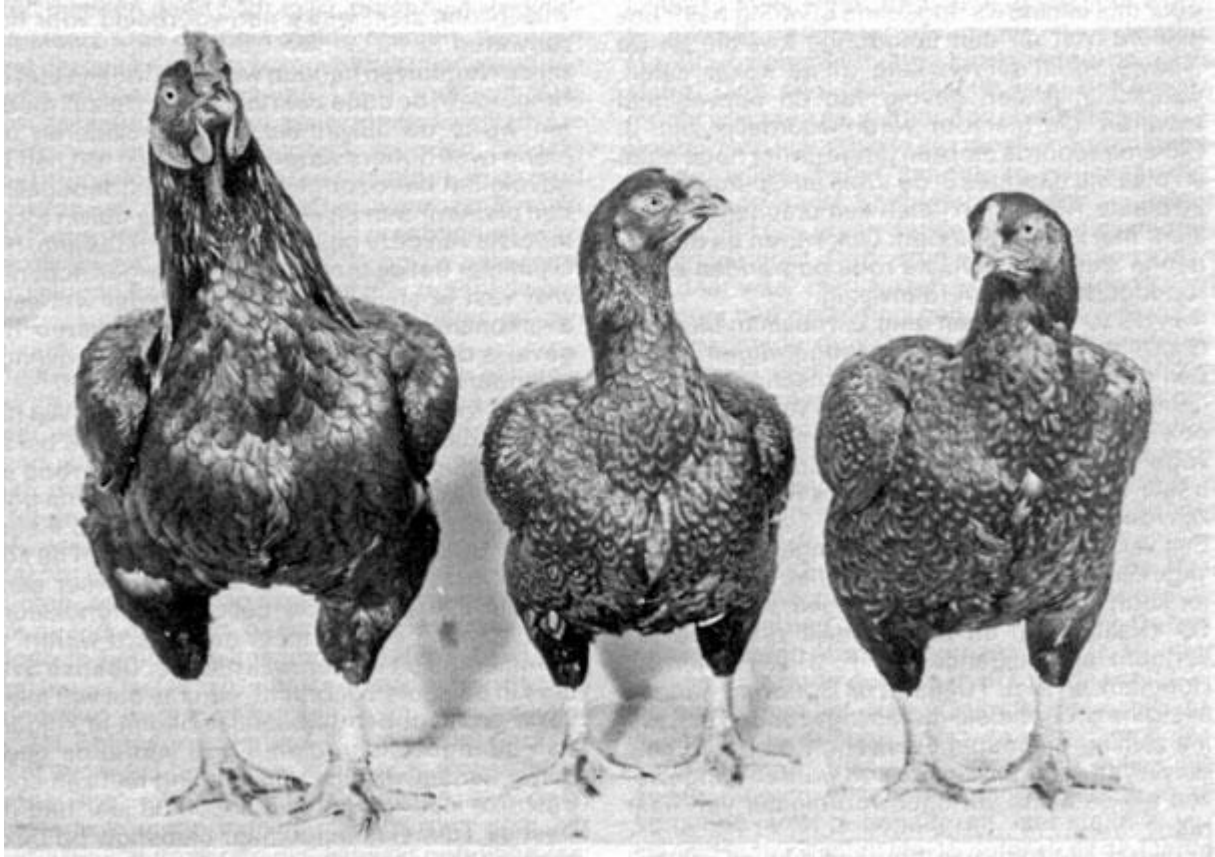


**Above: Indian Game in The Netherlands.
Drawing by John A. van der Laan 1973, hen and rooster.
Photo: Archief Aviculture Europe, courtesy of R. Jansen.**

Indian Game today

Indian Game are unique and impressive to see. The main breed characteristic is the type, i.e. the shape of the body, and certainly also the extremely broad and low stance; the body is, as it were, between the legs, because the short thighs are placed on the outside of the body. For this reason we can literally and figuratively refer to the Indian Game as 'outsiders'! The yellow legs are short and stout, round and thick (ring size 24mm!) and set well apart and parallel. No in-knees or bent legs ('o-legs') so that the feet are too close together, which really detracts from the impressive appearance. The body is cube-shaped, as high and as wide as long. Because of that wide breast and wide, short legs, they have the same stance as a bulldog seen from the front. And more so than with other breeds, the rooster and hen have almost the same shape. The wings are short, carried close to the body and rather high in front, so that the shoulders are just above the back line. With the most beautiful birds, the short broad body tapers slightly towards the tail – elegance is required with substance.

The feathering is short, hard and close to the body, and the red breast is visible at the sternum. The hackle feathers are short and do not reach to the shoulders, and the tail is short and narrow. They have a broad head, but not as thick as in Malays, with slightly protruding eyebrows above the pearly, fierce eyes with an inscrutable look. Then add a three-row pea comb, closely set on the head; a short, strong beak; small wattles and a dewlap.



**Outstanding Trio Indian Game, bred by Mr Hengeveld in 1985.
Photo Archives Avicultura.**



**Left: Indian Game hen double laced.
Linter Show (B) 2018.
Photo: Danny Camerlinck.**

Although in the original game breeds like Aseel and Shamo the colour and marking do not matter so much, here, the feather colour is also included in the assessment. The most common colour is the dark (black double-laced). The rooster is mainly black with a rich green lustre, the base of the neck and tail hackles a little broken with bay or chestnut. Shoulders, wing bows and tail coverts also have some red or chestnut in the bay of the shaft, laced with green glossy black. A bay or chestnut wing triangle should also be present.

The female's plumage is also hard and glossy; a dark chestnut colour is preferred with each feather double

laced with a delicate lacing of glossy green-black. The outer lacing is around the edge of the feather, and the inner lacing encloses the feather shaft.

In the colour variety Jubilee, the marking is the same, except that they should be white where the dark variety is black. With the males we sometimes see a few black colour spots, but that is of minor importance.



**Above and left: Jubilee Indian Game hen and rooster at the Show in Linter, 2018.
Photos: Danny Camerlinck.**

Below: White Cornish. Photo: Archives AE, source unknown.

There are also white Indian Game, originating in 1890 from crossings of white Malays and dark Indians. Red white laced (single lace) also exists. They were created in America in 1893, from crosses of Shamo with dark Indian Game. Although the latter two varieties are also recognised in the Netherlands, we rarely see them at our shows. The weight of the cock is 3.75 to 4.5 kg, the hen weighs 2.75 to 3.25 kg.

This breed is also recognized in bantam size. Indian Game bantams originated in England around 1900 and were especially perfected in the USA. Except for weight and size, there is little to no difference from the large ones. The bantams are recognized in the same colours, plus blue double-laced (with all the black replaced by blue). The bantam cock weighs between 1250 and 1350 grams, the bantam hen 1050 to 1150 grams.

In America, the 'Cornish' is a very popular show breed, perhaps even more so than in England and other European countries. There the bantams are also recognized in buff and black. Both in England and in America, this breed is not

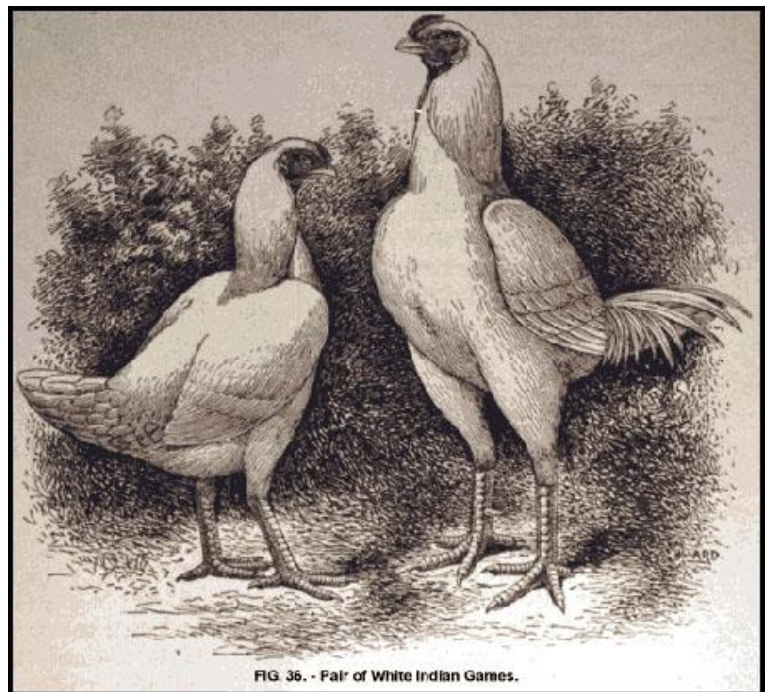


FIG. 36. - Pair of White Indian Games.

classified in the Gamefowl class at the show, but mostly as AOV (Any Other Variety). Also in old books, the Indian Game is classified as a utility breed.



**Above: Indian Game at James Harvey's in Liskeard, Cornwall.
Photo: Ferdinand van der Wal.**

The Breeding Pen

Well begun is half done, and that starts with the purchase of birds for the breeding pens, because, frankly, this breed still has quite some demands and also some problems, partly because of the extreme physique (poor fertilisation due to difficult mating).

Around the eighties, the birds that achieved the highest points at the show were of almost unnatural proportions, to quote a known Indian game breeder in the Netherlands, Awe van Wulfften Palthe: "A stand as deep as a bad Chabo (Japanese Bantam) and so wide that you could run a pig between their legs." Fortunately, we have repented; such extremes are just not working because it is no longer possible to breed with such birds. However, they must have strong and thick legs to carry their heavy body and keep them in balance.



**Left: James Harvey's hens.
Photo: Ferdinand van der Wal.**

What should you be looking for when buying breeding birds? Try to find a young or two-year-old cock that is a bit high on the legs, or to put it better, one that has longer legs. (Not long thighs; then the

balance will be different and he will carry his body more vertical.) The legs must be strong and thick, with a parallel position.

The hens with the best rating at the show are also the best for breeding. In the breeding, the sire should have the ideal type; the chicks will inherit the double-laced colour/marking of their mother, so perfect laced hens are extra valuable in the breeding stock. Yet the colour of the breeding cock is not entirely unimportant. Cocks with a violet colour sheen should not be used. A little too red in the neck feathers is okay. And they say that uninterrupted lacing of the wing coverts could be a guarantee for a proper lacing in the offspring.

Usually you breed with pairs or with trios. If there are more hens in the breeding pen, the chances of fertilisation will be smaller, but it is nonsense to let hens run without a rooster, so try to join them with others. That will not be a big problem with hens who have grown up together. However, adding a 'new' hen to the breeding pen will not be easy; the hens of this breed can have a pretty feisty temperament! Do not put your breeding birds in a large run, because the cock will not continue to chase the hens for long and quickly loses his lust.

According to various reference works, the hens lay around 80 light brown eggs of 50 grams per year. They also become broody and are caring mothers.

Left: One of James Harvey's roosters.

Photo: Ferdinand van der Wal.



Care

The chicks of this heavy breed can be reared with a good brand of chick starter. Around eight weeks of age they can sleep at night on a pallet roost, made of smoothly planed battens with gaps of about 3 cm. Place the pallet roost 20cm above the floor so the manure falls through and there is sufficient air circulation around the chicks. The biggest advantage of a pallet roost is that crooked breast bones are prevented.

Exercise is a must, not only to get good muscle development, but old cocks become stiff in their legs due to lack of movement. Apart from a safe and dry night shed, a good run is ideal, especially if there are some bushes in it, because Indian Game prefer to be in the shade rather than in the sun. (Keep in mind, the jubilee colour is very sensitive to sunlight!) Of course, not everyone has that much space. Put the feed trough and waterer as far apart as possible so that they are obliged to walk.

In addition to the chick starter, you can also add some grain: barley, wheat, pointed oats, corn, although some say corn can affect the pearl eye colour. In addition, it is recommended to regularly administer a proper mix of vitamins and trace elements.



Jubilee chicks. Photo Archives Aviculture Europe.

From four months on, you need to switch to normal maintenance feed. Now people have the idea that all kinds of extras have to be fed in order to get a perfect and solid bird at the show, but if you feed too many extras the ratio in the standard feed is distorted. It might seem to be successful: they grow like cabbages and with a bit of luck the judge might assess them as a beautiful solid bird. But do not make that mistake! After all, you have simply been fattening them instead of allowing the birds to develop through sufficient exercise and normal feed. And fat hens will not lay eggs.



Even if your birds are in optimal show condition, you will have to ration the feed a bit as soon as the breeding season starts again. Lean but vital birds – that is what is important now. It makes sense to switch to breeding-pen feed. Later, if the chickens are starting to moult, they must gain some fat again.

Left: Head study jubilee bantam pullet.

Right: Head study rooster.
Photos: Archives AE.

The feathering of this breed is very hard, and the feathers, especially the flight feathers, damage quickly and break easily. Do take this into account when picking up the birds; put both hands around the wings, then you will not damage their plumage.

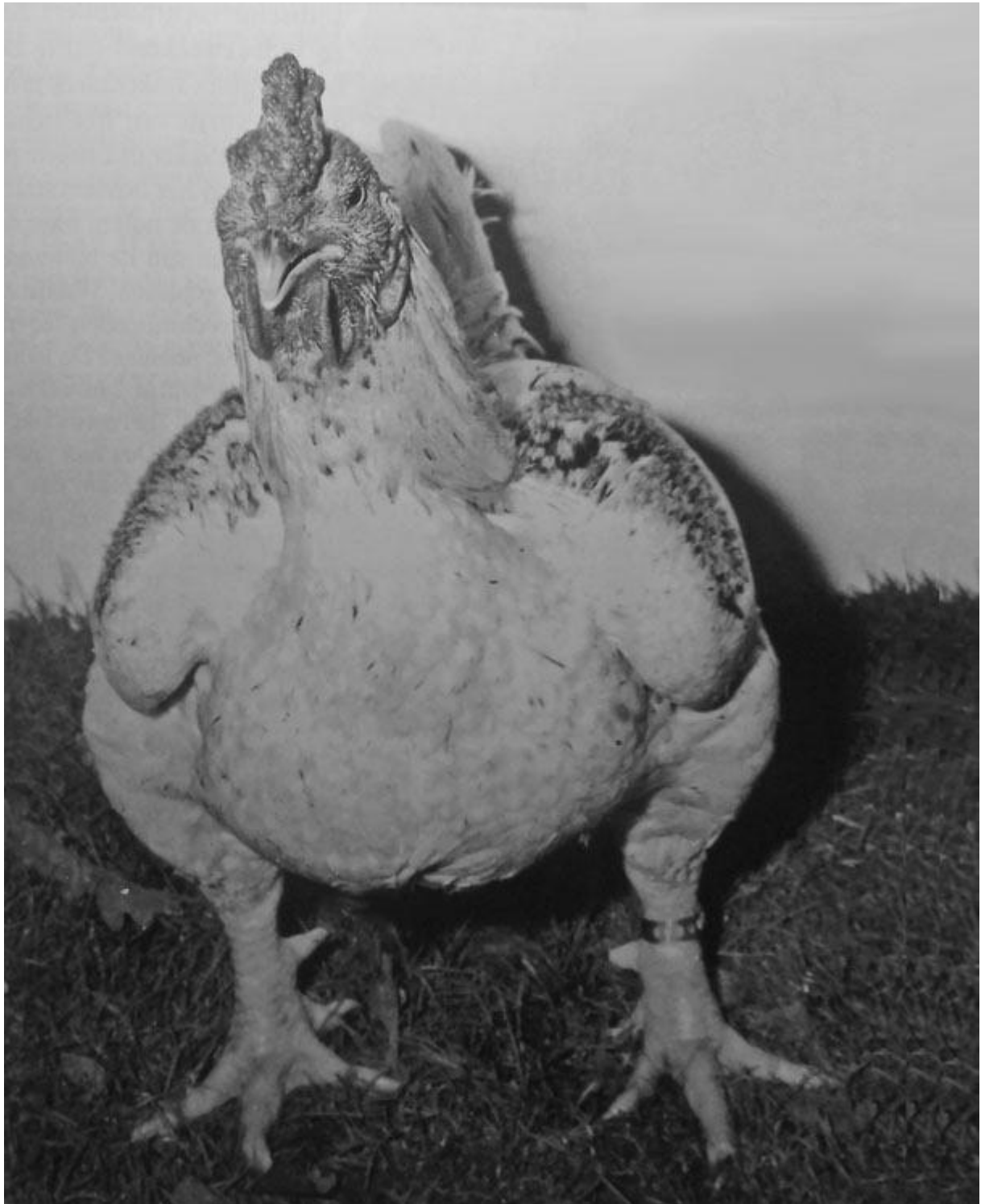
As a rule, these chickens are not aggressive towards their caregiver.



To end

This concise breed description is written in the hope that from now on you will look with new interest on the Indian Game at the show. Those who feel attracted to the breeding of this unusual breed will want and need to know much more. No one can tell you more than the specialists of the Indian Game Club in England, or a Game Breeders Club that covers all Gamefowl Breeds.

**Below: This Indian Game rooster in the jubilee variety, entered by Miss H. Brent, England, won Champion Indian Game at the 1965 Avicultura Show in The Netherlands. We don't want them this extreme anymore!
Photo Archives Avicultura.**



Copyright ©2018 All rights reserved by the Aviculture-Europe Foundation.

This is a publication by the online magazine www.aviculture-europe.nl

English edition ISSN: 2352-2445.

You are not allowed to copy, distribute, send or publish these texts or photos without our prior permission in writing.