

BREEDING YELLOW LEGGED BLACKS

By Ian Selby. New Zealand.

There is no doubt that one of the most interesting poultry breeding programs is breeding black birds with bright yellow legs. Interesting because it is almost impossible to breed perfect colouring in both sexes from the same breeding pen consistently.

The first picture shown here are a pair of Black Leghorns and a pair of Black Australorps, clearly showing the different leg colours.

Very few breeds of Black Legged Blacks have red eyes; almost all have dark eyes, not always black but dark nevertheless. In these Fowls the pigment is dedicated to the whole bird and can and does penetrate into all sections, sometimes too much and penetrates into the face. This fault is called "Gypsy-Face," almost entirely seen in the females.

Double mating for good Blacks is not just for Poultry. The picture shows this is also practised when breeding Black Cayuga Ducks too.

It is true that the general rule is that distinct parts of a bird is inherited separately and independently of each other. But in Yellow Legged Blacks Nature is fighting against itself by trying to define where the black pigment should go and likewise where the yellow pigment should go. It is therefore almost impossible to breed constantly both males and females from the same breeding pen that have bright yellow legs and black feather plumage to the skin.

It is a matter of understanding what happens and simply put the Black pigment runs out before it replenishes itself when the final feathers are growing. Here are two examples; fig.1 from the hackle and fig.2 from the saddle. Both of these examples show where the pigment runs out and indicated by a white bar across the black feathers.

These feathers are from a Black Pekin Cock bird pictured. A bird that has produced excellent Black pullets with bright yellow legs and red eyes. But all the males from this bird were in-turn Pullet Breeders and useless for showing because of too much white in the undercolour and tail.



The Black Pekin Cock.



Blacks - Leghorns on the left and Australorps on the right



Fig. 1



Fig.2

On the other hand the Male line is completely different and best used with females that are dark in the legs, making sure the eyes are as close to red as possible. It is an accepted fact that the Black female carries more black pigment than the Black male. So to breed a good sound black male, rather dark legged, dark eyed, deep black female is a must for breeding in the Male lines pens. All the female progeny will be useless for showing because of the dark eyes and dark legs.

But in reality you have to decide what you want to do. Are you happy "plodding along" with what you have or take the project a bit more seriously and 'double mate' your birds. One line for breeding exhibition Cockerels and the other line to breed exhibition Pullets.

While anyone can put "double mating" into practice, there is an advantage to look more closely at your breeding stock too. It is just not a matter of getting any opposite sex and "plonk" it in the breeding pen. An old fancier once told me that breeder don't take the female side of the breeding pen seriously enough. I have always remembered that and it has served me very well.

It should be quite obvious that to head the Cockerel Breeding line is to be the best possible Male of that breed you have available. But what is not obvious is the importance of the female. She must be of the most outstanding type as possible. Everything needs to be in place as though she was a show champion, except for her colour.

Likewise, for the Pullet Breeding line the female has to be the best you have and again her mate should also be as good as it can be except for colour.

There are of course going to be mistakes at the start and quite a bit of wastage but like all Poultry Breeding, once you have established your line the rewards will come.

Don't be fooled by trying to obtain an outcross to improve your Cockerel or Pullet breeding lines. If you already have a reasonable line, of say Black Leghorns, don't be tempted to get a male with white at the base of the tail so you can improve your Pullet Breeding line. All you will achieve is bringing in the bad genes that bird is carrying. You can separate your original lines quite easily. All the tools are already in your birds, it is just a matter of selection from the one you have bred. One of your Black Leghorn Cockerels will have more white at the base of the tail than others. Likewise, you will have a hen or a pullet that has better leg colour than others. So your tools are there in your own line for the pullet breeding line just as they are for the Cockerel Breeding line.

The secret is to breed and rear enough for your selections and next years breeding pens. They need to be reared to maturity so that you can actually see your progress or not, as the case might be. Breeding good birds is a project with care, a plan and patience, it is not a first-up quick fix.

The one thing you must always remember when breeding Yellow Legged Blacks is that you are fighting against Nature, so be patient.



Black Cayuga Ducks.



Black Wyandotte Bantams.