

BREEDING AND CULLING BLUE LACED RED WYANDOTTES



By Jerry Foley

I receive numerous emails each week asking for tips on how to pick your best young Blue Laced Red Wyandotte's for breeding and showing. I have been breeding the Blue Laced Red Variety of Wyandottes for 7 years and I have accumulated a good deal of experience and knowledge from raising and showing them. I will share with you what I have learned over the last 7 breeding seasons in choosing the best birds for color, pattern and type.



The BLRW variety was first developed in Germany so you will notice that I will refer to the German breeders often. They have been working with this variety a long time and it shows in their beautiful birds. Just remember that the German standard is

different from the American standard. There are key differences between what we breed for and what the Germans breed for.

Wyandottes are very slow to mature and not considered full grown until they reach 18 months of age. I know it feels like these birds take forever to develop and quiet often, the last part to fully mature is the tail. This is the time to tap into your inner Zen and learn patience. The first rule of thumb is to not get in a hurry when culling for type. A pen full of large fowl Wyandottes will eat you out of house and home, but you have to stick with your program if your goal is to bring this beautiful variety to standard. Nothing would be more devastating than to give away a young bird only to see it 6 months later and it has turned out better than anything you kept at home. Keep your eye on the prize and be patient.

There are few things that you can cull for while the birds are very young and they are easy to spot in a young chick while still in the brooder. Early culling can help you save feed money and resources.



COMBS: The Wyandotte standard calls for a rose comb that follows the shape of the head. It should begin wide at the front in proportion with the head, and then taper off to a point in the back. The narrowest part of the comb is called the spike or leader. Faults in the shape of the comb would be a spike that does not follow the shape of the head closely. This would be a spike that grows upward towards the sky or that grows outward off the head in a straight line rather than curving gracefully down along the back of the head. Other faults are a small hollow spot in the center of the comb and inverted combs where the spike looks as if it has ingrown into the body of the comb. The texture of the skin on the comb should be finely pearly. This will look like hundreds of tiny raised beads over the entire surface of the comb. The skin should not be smooth like

the skin on the face. The shape of the comb should be free of lumps and bumps or growths that jet out from the sides (called side sprigs) leaving a smooth even shape.

Occasionally, you will hatch a Wyandotte that possesses a single comb rather than the desired rose comb. This is a disqualifying fault. The single comb is a recessive gene that still hides within many individuals of the breed. When you bred two birds together that carry a single copy of the single comb gene, 25% of their offspring will have a single comb. Some breeders believe having the single comb gene in their flock improves fertility, but I am not here to argue about that. Personally, I cull all single combed birds from my flock. It has not been my experience that breeding only rose comb to rose comb has anything to do with fertility. The decision to use single combed birds in your breeding program is a personal choice that you as a breeder will need to make.

However, don't throw the baby out with the bath water. If you have an exceptional bird with amazing type and color, but it has some faults in its comb, I would carefully weigh the severity of those comb faults against all the good attributes the bird has to

offer. You may need to use this bird in your breeding program and just cull for combs the next generation. BLRWs with excellent Wyandotte type are hard to come by. Unless you already have a correctly combed bird of equal quality in your flock, it would be best to use this bird regardless of a few faults.

Head: The head should be nice and round like a ball with equal width and depth.

Try to breed for shorter beaks, it will make the birds look less crow headed. A crow head will be longer than deep. The top of the head lacks roundness and the beak is long. (Compare a picture of a crow with a good Wyandotte and you will see what I mean)



Type: The Wyandotte is a bird of circles. Imagine a large circle and place your bird into that circle.

The undercarriage of the bird is round and would represent the bottom line of the circle. You should be able to see the lower portion of the bird's thigh directly under that line. The chest should be full and round.



The angle of a hen's tail should be at 30 degrees. The cock's tail should have an angle of 40 degrees. When viewing the tail from behind, it should resemble the shape of a tee pee. Wide and open at the base with a gentle taper to the top. When viewed in profile, the tail should not be overly rounded at the top like the "bunny tail" on a cochin. When viewing the tail from above, it should have plenty of width from the shoulders of the bird to the tip of the tail. Remember when raising Wyandottes you want wide, wide, wide.

When breeding for good type, I find using the biggest best type

hens will give you better results. You can get away with using a smaller cock bird for a breeder but he should have good type.

Back: The back should be very short. For me, the ideal length of back would give me just enough space to sit a golf ball right between the base of the neck and the base of the tail. You don't want anymore length in the back than that. You also don't want to go too extreme and wind up with no back at all or too much back.

Blue: What makes the BLRW so striking is the color contrast. The beautiful color and pattern is difficult to achieve, especially when dealing with the Andalusian Blue Gene (the gene in the BLRW that makes the lacing blue)

Let's talk briefly about the confusing Andalusian Blue Gene. If you put together a breeding pen using a Blue Laced male and a Blue Laced female you will get chicks that are blue, black, and splash.

Splash Laced birds have lacing that is very light blue-white with black-blue specks on the tail feathers.

The Black Laced chicks will have very thick lacing. We are looking for thin lacing to make a good BLRW.

If you use blue, black, and splash colored birds in your breeding program, you will get various percents of blue, black, and splash chicks. The goal is to produce blue chicks with a consistent shade of blue. If you use only blue birds, that will cut down the number of chicks you raise because the number of blue chicks will be at 50%.

This chart explains the different chick combinations you will get based on the color of lacing the parents have in your breeding pens.

Based on 100 chicks hatched

Blue to Black= 50% Blue 50% Black

Blue to Blue= 25% Black 50% Blue 25% Splash

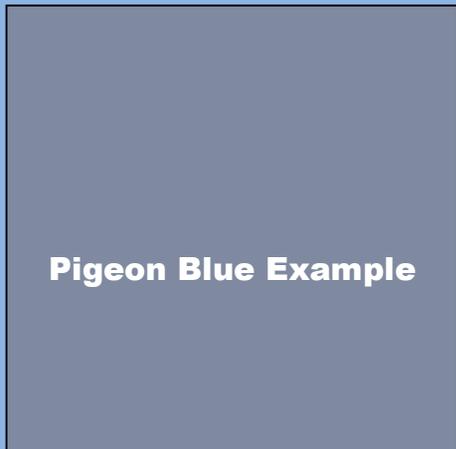
Blue to Splash= 50% Blue 50% Splash

Splash to Black= 100% Blue

Splash to Splash=100% Splash

I personally only breed Blue to Blue, however you can use a Black Laced Red on a Splash Laced Red and get all Blue chicks, but the blue will vary in shade from bird to bird. The German Master Breeders of BLRWs only breed blue to blue, but it is up to each individual to breed their birds the way they feel is best for their program. If the shade of blue begins to get too light after a few years, I will breed them to a Black

Laced Red Wyandotte to darken the blue.



The blue we are looking for is a pigeon blue. You can do a search on Google to see what this color looks like. I am including a small example of this shade of blue. The Germans breed for pigeon blue, but some American breeders like a lighter or darker shade of blue on their birds. Honestly, I don't think BLRWs in America are to the point of completion that we can sit around drinking tea and arguing what shade of blue we want in our BLRWs. We have bigger issues to deal with when working with this variety.

Red: The proposed standard for the BLRW requires the bird to be a rich dark red throughout the entire bird. One of the toughest challenges in breeding this color is achieving that uniform deep red color. A big problem area has been the hackle feathers in the hen and

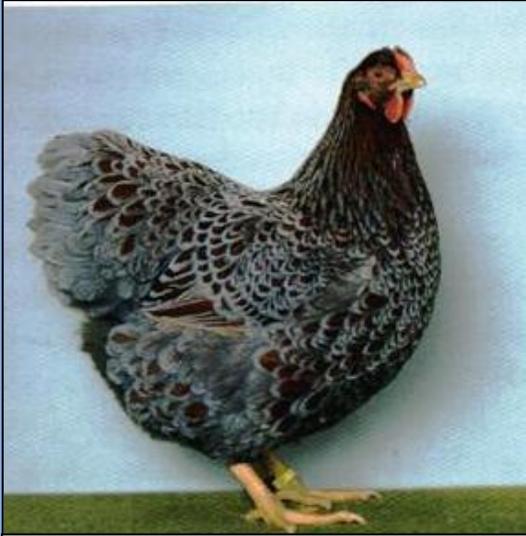
the hackle and saddle feathers in the cock. Ideally, these areas should be a rich red, but commonly they will be orange, gold, and brassy.

Try to use breeders with the deepest red in the hackles that you have available and you should get some chicks with good red color in the hackles. I have used hens in my breeding pen that have good type, but lighter colored hackles if I thought it would help me improve type. If at all possible, do not use breeders that have the brassy-yellow hackle color, especially a male, but you can use males with the deep orange colored hackles and still get good red hackle color in the offspring. I still get birds with light color or brassy color. I have been culling that out for 7 years, but I don't get it nearly as often as I did in the beginning.

I have found that using a male with good deep red hackle color will help improve the quality of the red in your flock of BLRW. Good lacing also seems to come from the cock bird.

The Germans bred two different shades of red background color. Kastanien-braun shade (which is a nice rich mahogany red) and Karamel-braun gold ground color (which is a Carmel brownish-red,

similar to the color of Hazel Nut hulls). Both colors are seen in lighter or darker shades of the ground color.



A beautiful example of nice color in BLRW owned by Walter Rohrmann from Germany.

1) When the chicks are growing out, look at the wing feathers and keep the ones with the widest feathers. Wyandottes need wide soft feathering...I normally cull the ones that have thin wing feathers. Laced wyandottes have harder feathers than solid colored wyandottes. That is the reason it is so difficult to get a good tail on a laced Wyandotte and having birds with wide soft feathers is going to help you.

2) You can comparing how thick or wide the heads are even on young chicks. Wyandottes should have

wide round heads, so make sure you keep the ones with the widest heads. You also need to watch the length of the beak, short beaks are best.

3) Cull the single combed chicks. Single combed roosters especially should not be kept for breeding. Cull them immediately.

4) Keep an eye on how fast your chicks are feathering out. The chicks that take the longest to feather out carry the slow feathering gene. Slow feathering means better lacing. Don't get too hung up on mossy feathering on the young birds. Everything from a wet spring to laying eggs while feathering out can cause a laced Wyandotte to have mossy feathers. If you have a 2 year old hen with mossy feathers, I would not use her for breeding, but with that said, keeping a few of the mossy feathered hens for breeding will produce hens with good primary feather color.

5) Try to use the BLRW pullets and cockerels that show a good deep red on the hackles. Good red on the neck is the key to having good mahogany red through out the bird. Also keep an eye on the lacing in the hackles of the hens.....that is difficult to keep on the BLRW hens. If you decide to use splash hens in your breeding pens and you

have some splash hens with solid white or blue necks, DO NOT use them. I am not going to get into a big, in depth thing about if you should or if you shouldn't use a splash in your breeding program. I have strong feelings about the subject, but so does everyone else. I will tell you that in my experience, if you use a black laced on a splash you will get blue, but the blue is going to be various shades of blue. The only way you are going to get a good, consistent blue is by breeding blue to blue. The Blue will start to fade after a few years so you will need to use a good typed black laced rooster to keep that desired shade of blue.

6) Most important of all...the tail. Make sure it is nice and open in the back. If you are looking at the back of the bird, the tail should look like a TeePee.. The Germans say it should look like a horseshoe, but we are not breeding to the German Standard. We call horseshoe shaped tails bunny tails. Also.....don't forget the short back.

Every summer I mark what I think will be my best BLRW rooster and at the end of the grow out season that rooster ends up being my 3rd or 4th best rooster...happens every year, so be patient when growing them out.

This should be enough information to absorb for now!

Next is my take on a proposed Standard for Blue Laced Red Wyandottes. I use this standard as a guide when breeding BLRWs. If we get to the point of introducing them into the APA Standard of Perfection, this proposed standard should prove useful. I have based the standard on language used for Gold Laced Wyandottes and Blue Laced Cornish.



Color of Male

COMB, FACE, WATTLES AND EAR-LOBES: Bright Red.

BEAK: Horn shading to yellow at point.

EYES: Reddish bay.

HEAD: Plumage, rich dark red, each feather having a medium

bluish slate stripe tapering to a fine point near its extremity.

NECK: *Hackle*—web of feathers, lustrous, dark bluish slate with a narrow lacing of rich dark red, uniform in width, extending around the point, shaft rich dark red.
Front of neck—same as breast.

BACK: Rich dark red on surface.
Saddle—rich dark red in appearance, with a dark bluish slate stripe through each feather, laced with rich dark red, conforming to shape of center, the dark bluish slate stripe having a long diamond-shaped center of rich mahogany bay.

TAIL: *Main Tail*—bluish slate.
Sickles and Coverts—Lustrous, dark bluish slate
Smaller Coverts—dark bluish slate with diamond-shaped centers of rich dark red laced with rich dark red.

WINGS: *Fronts*—dark bluish slate with rich dark red centers.
Bows—Rich dark red.
Coverts—web of each feather rich dark red, with narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate, forming a double bar of laced feathers across wings.
Primaries—dark bluish slate with lower edges rich dark red.
Secondary—dark bluish slate lower half of lower webs, rich dark red

with narrow dark bluish slate edging wider at the tip; upper webs edged with rich dark red.

BREAST: Web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate.

BODY AND FLUFF: *Body*—web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate.
Fluff—medium slate.

LEGS AND TOES: Lower Thighs—web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate conforming to edge of feather
Shanks and Toes—yellow.

UNDER COLOR OF ALL SECTIONS: Bluish slate, shading to red at base.





Color of Female

COMB, FACE, WATTLES AND EAR-LOBES: Bright Red.

BEAK: Horn shading to yellow at point.

EYES: Reddish bay.

HEAD: Plumage, rich dark red.

NECK: Rich dark red in appearance, each feather dark bluish slate with a narrow lacing of rich dark red. Shaft, rich dark red.

Front of Neck—same as breast.

BACK: Web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate.

TAIL: *Main Tail*—bluish slate.

Coverts and Lesser Coverts—rich dark red, laced with dark bluish slate.

WINGS: *Fronts, Bows and Coverts*—web of each feather rich dark red with a narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous dark bluish slate.

Primaries—dark bluish slate with lower edges rich dark red.

Secondary—dark bluish slate lower half of lower webs, rich dark red with narrow dark bluish slate edging wider at the tips; upper webs edged with rich dark red.

BREAST: Web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate.

BODY AND FLUFF: *Body*—web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate.

Fluff—medium slate.

LEGS AND TOES: *Lower Thighs*—web of each feather, rich dark red, with a narrow, sharply defined lacing of lustrous, dark bluish slate to conform to edge of feather

Shanks and Toes—yellow.

UNDER COLOR OF ALL

SECTIONS: Bluish slate, shading to red at base.

Frequently Asked Questions about BLRW Chicks

Q) My young cockerels have legs that are crazy long, arent Wyandottes suppose to have shorter legs?

When Wyandotte cockerels are growing they go through a "teenage stage", they are all legs and kinda look like a Ostrich...they will grow into their legs.

Q) What percentage of Protien should I be feeding my young birds?

Once the young Wyandottes are out of the brooder you don't want to get too crazy with high protien....you can make them blow up and get to big for their legs causing serious leg injuries. I normally try to feed my young birds a good meat based feed with 16-18 percent protien..and the most important thing is to try and free range the birds during the day. It will take less feed to grow them out and all those bugs and seeds are good for them.

Q) Some of my young birds have single combs?

For some reason the single comb Wyandottes will be very typey and have great color almost everytime,

you will be very tempted to use them..I suggest you don't, but that is a personal choice, many breeders feel like the single comb gene running around in their flock will increase fertility, from my experience it makes no difference.

Q) Can I show my Blue Laced Red Wyandottes at APA Poultry Shows?

Yes, but they are not officially reconized by the APA yet, so you will have to enter them in the AOV Class (All Other Varities)

Q) Can I cross other Varieties of Wyandottes onto my BLRW to improve type?

The German Breeders cross the BLRW on Whites and Blues, however, I don't recommend it. I have done this cross before and it will take 4-5 generations to get them to look like a BLRWs again.

Q) My older Cock Bird is not fertile this spring..

It seems like the older Males need plenty of sunshine and green grass under their feet before they get fertile, on the other hand, the cockerels are normally very fertile in early spring. If you want chicks

from your older rooster you will have to just be patient and keep candling eggs until they are fertile.

Q) My young birds are picking feathers off of each other...

If you pack the young birds into a pen that is overcrowded you can run into feather picking quickly. Try not to crowd the young birds into small pens and if at all possible free range them..it will make a big difference. You can also try increasing the protien in their feed.

Q) The Lacing is not very good on my young BLRW..will it get better?

Yes...probably...well maybe. You really cannot tell how dark the red will be and how good the lacing will be until they get their adult feathering in, with BLRW patience really is a virtue.

Q) Is it my imagination or is the red getting lighter as my birds get older?

The red does tend to get lighter as the bird gets 3 yrs old or older, also the sun will bleach the color during the hot summer months.

Q) What are some of the things you look for in a male to use in the breeding pen?

I generally try to use males that have really good lacing, dark red in the hackles, stiff tail feathers, and open tail. You really have to keep an eye on the tails or you will start getting birds with pinched tails.



Splash Laced Red Wyandotte



Notice how thick the lacing is on a Black Laced Red Wyandotte



Brassy-orange hackle color in the male.



Example of good mahogany red in the hackles of a male



Incorrect Pinched Tail



Correct open tail



Shaft of the feathers a much lighter shade of red



Shaft of the feathers the same shade of red. Giving a nice clean look and color

Helpful Links:

Our home website
www.Foleyswaterfowl.com

Wyandotte Breeders of America
<http://www.wyandottebreedersofamerica.net/>

Poultry Auction Website
<http://featherauction.com/>

Grant Brereton's Site featuring
many well written e-books on
poultry genetics
<http://gbpoultry.com/>

Disclaimer

The information contained within this E-book is formed from my opinion. There are breeders with more experience than I have...especially when it comes to type. However, when it comes to the blue laced red variety, I probably have more experience than most. Unless you live in Germany!

This E-book is intended to be used as a guide. You are welcome to take from it what you want and leave what you don't want. I hope you found this information to be useful

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