



Araucanas



Melody, a Black Bantam Araucana hen.

ALAN STANFORD, PH.D.
EASTERN SHOW CHAIR OF THE ARAUCANA
CLUB OF AMERICA

Araucanas in a Nutshell

Araucanas have some bizarre features; they are rumpless and have ear tufts. Oh yes, and they lay blue eggs.

- Rumpless birds are missing more than just tail feathers; they are missing the entire coccyx.
- Ear tufts are quite different from the beards found on other breeds, for example Ameraucanas, Houdans, Faverolles, Polish, Crevecoeurs, Silkies, and the lady at the circus.
- Blue eggs, unlike brown eggs, are not just colored on the outside of the shell; the color is throughout the shell.

Araucanas were first bred in the United States in the 1930's. They came from a

cross between two breeds from Northern Chile, Colloncas and Quetros. Colloncas have no ear tufts but are rumpless and lay blue eggs; Quetros have ear tufts and tails but do not lay blue eggs. Araucanas are intelligent, alert, and, for a chicken, good at flying.

Ear tufts are very unusual and a breeding challenge. The short story is that you will always hatch Araucanas without tufts. The scientific story is ear tufts come from a dominant and lethal gene. This makes the odds of show quality offspring less than in other breeds. Since judges focus on tufts and rumplessness, type and color are secondary considerations.

Rumpless birds appeal to many people for lots of reasons. Some people like the rumpless look, the Araucana people think rumpless birds better escape

predators, and others believe rumpless birds do well in fights.

Why Raise Araucanas?

I raise Araucanas because they are unusual, graceful, beautiful, intelligent, friendly, and lay blue eggs.

I raise Silkies in addition to Araucanas. These breeds seem at first look to be very different. However, my favorite Silkies and my favorite Araucanas have similar personalities. My favorite Araucanas are Louis XIV and Harmony. Louis was a strong defender of his flock and did not put up with invasions of his coop, even if you were passing out treats. When I respected him as master of the coop, Louis was a good friend and was never aggressive. Harmony is the most independent yet at the same time friendliest bird I've raised. After I won her confidence, she began to hop on my arm just as I enter the coop. She always has to tell me about what happened while I was gone. When once I gave treats to Susie Q before Harmony, Harmony pouted for three days. She wouldn't hop on my arm, she wouldn't accept even her favorite treats, and she certainly wouldn't let me close to her.

Want to Learn More or Find Araucanas?

If you want to learn about or talk about Araucanas, join our club and discuss Araucanas on the Club's forum. The Araucana Club of America's website is www.AraucanaClubOfAmerica.org and the forum is at <http://aca.araucana.com/>



Yetti, a Salmon Araucana hen. Yetti is very talkative and friendly.



phpBB-2.0.21/phpBB2/. The club has an awesome newsletter and an indispensable list of Araucana breeders.

Shape of An Ideal Araucana

An ideal Araucana's back slopes slightly downward toward the tail end of the bird. The *American Bantam Association Standard* says, "Sloping slightly to the tail" and the *American Poultry Association Standard* says, "With posterior slope."

The old ABA drawings are a little inaccurate, showing Araucanas with a somewhat "dished" back that rises slightly at the end. This is incorrect and looks bad on Araucanas. The new ABA standard gives a better picture of the ideal back although the earlobes shown are too large.

If you want to use a numeric description of the ideal slope, Terry Reeder says, "About five to ten degrees of downward slope for females and about ten to fifteen degrees for males. Excessive downward slope is a common defect in Araucanas and should be discouraged".

Blue Eggs

Many people raise Araucanas just for their blue eggs. The Egg Lady on Dable Road in Mukwonago Wisconsin has quite a good business selling Araucana eggs. If you see her, say hi for me. Bantam Araucanas lay amazingly large eggs. Araucana eggs are blue, a very pretty blue, but not as blue as robin eggs. Different hens lay different hues of blue but older hens lay lighter blue eggs than when they were pullets. The first eggs in a laying season are bluer than the eggs late in the season.

Breeding

Show quality Araucanas are a challenge to breed. Only one in four or five chicks has visible tufts; far fewer have symmetric tufts, and different judges favor differently shaped tufts. The tuft gene is lethal; two copies kill the chick a few days before hatching (an occasional double tuft gene bird does survive). Of the chicks with just one tuft gene about 20% die. Since most tufted Araucanas have only one gene for tufts, 25% of eggs from tufted parents yield Araucanas without tufts.

The rumpless gene decreases fertility 10-20%. Some breeders say the longer

Araucana Tufts

Tufts are difficult to perfect for showing. They can grow in many different ways, sizes, and shapes.

- Tufts can grow on both sides of the head or on only one side.
- They can be very big or very small.
- They can be just a fleshy peduncle with no feathers.
- They can be different sizes on different sides of the bird or the same size on both sides.
- They arise near the ear, on the throat, or even internally (often fatal).
- They are often not at the same place on opposite sides of the bird's head.
- They can be upswept, spiral, tear drop, ringlet, fan, ball, rosette, powder puff, or other shapes.
- There can be a different shape on each side of the head.
- Some birds with the tuft gene have no visible tufts.
- Rare birds have more than one tuft on the same side, I've had a few Araucanas with four tufts.



Above: A closeup of Quinon, a White Bantam Araucana hen, displaying her tufts.

Below: Popcorn, a White Bantam Araucana hen. Popcorn has four tufts, two on each side of her head, and is very friendly.



A few of the myriad forms of tufts






one breeds rumpless birds the shorter the offspring's backs become. Eventually the birds' backs become too short and natural breeding is impossible.

The best way to learn about breeding birds "to the Standard" is to show them, talk with everybody at the show, and politely ask the judges why they liked or didn't like specific birds. Soon you'll learn chickens are an art form and not a science. If you stick with chickens, you'll form your own idea of the perfect bird; stick with it longer and people will recognize your birds just by their look. Several Araucana breeders' birds have unique looks all of which "meet the Standard."

We frequently remind others and ourselves that if we sold every bird somebody doesn't like, we'd have no birds at all.

Once Again, Why Araucanas?

These birds have personality, intelligence, shock value, blue eggs, are beautiful, weird and, wow, can they fly. Why not Araucanas?

Alan Stanford, Ph.D. is the owner of Brown Egg Blue Egg Hatchery. Visit his website: www.browneggblueegg.com or see his ad on page 33. 

A Bantam Ameraucana Wheaten cockerel. Photo by Susie Winder, Idaho.



Ameraucanas

JOHN W. BLEHM, PRESIDENT
AMERAUCAANA BREEDERS CLUB

To say that Ameraucana, Araucana and Easter Egg chickens are the same would be like saying Cornish, Brahma and Sex-Linked brown egg layers are the same. The chickens in the first group all possess the gene for blue shelled eggs and the birds in the second

group produce brown shelled eggs. Having one or even several traits in common does not make two different breeds the same breed.

Ameraucana and Araucana chickens are completely different breeds just as Cornish and Brahma chickens are different. Each breed is different from all the others and the differences are listed in the *American Poultry Association's Standard of Perfection*. We generally refer to it as the APA Standard and it tells what characteristics or traits are needed to classify a chicken under any of many different recognized breed descriptions. The Standard is the final word in the world of exhibition poultry in North America

An Araucana chicken has ear tufts (not the same as muffs) and is rumpless, meaning it doesn't have a tail. An Ameraucana has muffs and a tail. Both breeds have pea combs and lay blue eggs, but have just as many differences as similarities or common traits according to the Standard.

What is referred to as an Easter Egg chicken or Easter Egger is not a recognized breed, but rather a mixed breed bird that possesses the gene for blue eggs. These birds can be of any physical description. As far as "Americana" chickens go there is no such breed. It is just that many commercial hatcheries can't spell Ameraucana and try to pawn off their mongrel chickens as such. When you see Araucana/Americana chicks for sale you can bet they are



A Bantam Ameraucana Black pullet. Photo by Michael Muenks, Missouri.



An attractive basket of blue eggs from large fowl Ameraucana wheaten hens. Photo by Barbara Campbell, Tennessee.

really Easter Eggers. Generally speaking these are fine chickens for the backyard, but would be disqualified at an APA sanctioned poultry show. Many novice poultry fanciers have fallen for the false advertising of these hatcheries and been very disappointed. Some hatcheries now have disclaimers saying their Araucana/Americana chickens are not for exhibition yet they continue to advertise them using APA breed names.

Araucana and Ameraucana chickens are both relatively new breeds. The APA accepted Araucanas as a breed in 1976 and Ameraucanas in 1984. Before Araucanas were accepted and became a standard breed the term Araucana was used interchangeable with Easter Egger to describe all chickens that possessed the blue egg gene. Today some people still mistakenly get it wrong and that is partly due to all the misinformation and outdated information on the Internet and elsewhere.

Myth Busting

While on the subject of misinformation let's try some myth busting. For many decades some commercial hatcheries promoted "Araucana" eggs as being lower in cholesterol and higher in nutritional value than other chicken eggs. Even though those claims were proven false over 27 years ago many people still believe them to be true. Remember that Araucana, back in the day, meant any chicken with the blue egg gene. Heck, those same commercial hatcheries even claimed that "Araucana" meat had a taste similar to quail! Imagine that—chicken that doesn't taste like chicken.

Oh, and how about those pink, green,

olive drab and gold colored eggs that the catalogs advertised. The reason the egg colors vary so much is because the birds are of mixed parentage. There are only two true egg shell colors, blue and white. The gene that makes blue egg shells is dominant over the gene for white eggs. Brown eggs are really white eggs with a brown tint or coating. Green eggs are really blue eggs with a brown tint or coating. Just as there are many shades of brown eggs there are many shades of green eggs. You can tell if an egg is truly white or blue when the inside egg shell color matches the outside. Blue chicken eggs are not a robin's egg blue color. They are a light pastel blue. Getting that good true blue color is still a problem that dedicated Ameraucana breeders are trying to get right especially in some of the large fowl varieties.

Which came first the Araucana or the Ameraucana? Actually since both are now legitimate names of official APA breeds let's say the Easter Eggers



Large fowl Silver Ameraucana chicks

came first. They came to this country as mongrel chickens and were bred to other types of chickens. Over the past several decades some breeders bred them to look the way they wanted. Some bred for tufted and rumpless characteristics, some bred for muffs and tails and others bred for whatever they wanted. Araucanas were not developed from Ameraucanas and Ameraucanas were not developed from Araucanas. They were both bred up from Easter Eggers or mixed breed chickens. The tufted and rumpless breed was officially accepted first into the Standard. They took the name Araucana. There was still a large following breeding the muffed and tailed blue egg layers, so they had to come up with a new name for their breed that they had also referred to as Araucana up to that time. They organized a breed club and chose the name Ameraucana over American Araucana by a 9 to 5 vote.

Bantam Ameraucanas and large fowl Ameraucanas actually add up to two standard breeds of Ameraucana chickens. The big difference between the two is size. Bantams are just miniature versions of large fowl chickens or maybe large fowl are big versions of bantams. Either way the APA recognizes the same eight varieties in each breed. They are: black, blue, blue wheaten, brown red, buff, silver, wheaten, and white. Some breeders are working on new varieties such as lavender and black gold.

More Breed Information

There are photos and much more information about Ameraucana chickens on the Ameraucana Breeder's Club website: www.ameraucana.org. The website includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), a breed and club "History," Breeders Directory and more. There is also a link on the site to our ABC Forum.

John W. Blehm, Birch Run, Michigan has been a member of the Ameraucana Breeders Club (ABC) for more than 25 years. He offers Ameraucana chicks through his website: www.ChickHatchery.com. ChickHatchery.com is a "hobby hatchery." John's main hobby with poultry is as a breeder of chickens, but he also enjoys operating the hatchery and attending a couple poultry shows each year.

