



## BREEDS:

# Matching a Breed to a System

BY DON SCHRIDER, AMERICAN LIVESTOCK BREEDS CONSERVANCY

**I**n selecting breeds it is important to remember that each breed was designed for a certain job within a specific production niche within a particular region. That is, historic purpose is linked to a climatic region and particular form of management. To succeed, this developmental history needs to be respected.

Poultry breeds can be divided based upon the products they were developed to produce. Some breeds were designed to produce eggs primarily, others meat, and still others both meat and eggs. Examples of egg laying breeds would include Leghorn, Minorca, and Campine. Meat breeds would include Cornish and Brahma. Dual-purpose breeds (designed for meat and eggs) would include most American breeds, like Buckeye, Delaware, Plymouth Rock, or Rhode Island Red.

Breeds can further be divided based upon the production system for which they were designed. Some production systems would include: homesteading, small farm, pastured production, house and run production, confinement.


Many older breeds were originally managed with very little husbandry. While these breeds may not lay or grow as well as more modern breeds, they are an appropriate fit for the system of production for which they were designed. For instance, Dominique chickens were designed to scavenge much of their diet, to lay a large number of eggs, to avoid predation, and yet be of sufficient size to make a nice Sunday dinner when roasted. You could say that the Dominique is a dual-purpose breed designed to fit a homesteading system of production. Two other good choices for homesteading fowl would be the Java and the Dorking—both of which had reputations for fine flesh, but neither breed having what would be considered a fast rate of growth by today's standards.

Someone planning to homestead that wished for a large number of eggs

might do well to consider the Dominique chicken.

By reading breed histories, talking to breeders, and by contacting organizations like the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy you can select a breed to fit the system you plan to use in the part of

the country in which you live.

For more information, contact the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (ALBC), PO Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312; (919) 542-5704; [albc@albc-usa.org](mailto:albc@albc-usa.org); [www.albc-usa.org](http://www.albc-usa.org). 

## The Dominique *America's First Chicken Breed*

BY THE AMERICAN LIVESTOCK BREEDS CONSERVANCY

**T**he Dominique chicken is recognized as America's first chicken breed. The exact origin of the breed is unknown, although their initial creation may have involved European chicken breeds and later in its refinement, some Asian varieties. The name

of "Dominique" may have come from birds that were imported from the French colony of Saint-Domingue (today known as Haiti) and which are thought to have been used as part of the development of the Dominique breed.

Barred chickens with both rose combs and single combs were somewhat common in the eastern United States as early as 1750. As interest in poultry



A promising Dominique pullet from Southern Oak Farm, spring 2007 hatch. Photo by Bryan K. Oliver, South Carolina.



breeding increased, attention was given to develop uniformity in chicken breeds. Early names of these fowl include Blue Spotted Hen, Old Grey Hen, Dominico, Dominic, and Dominicker. The breed was widely known on the eastern coast of the U.S. as the Dominique.

The Dominique was plentifully bred on American farms as early as the 1820s, where these birds were a popular dual-purpose fowl. In 1871 the New York Poultry Society decided that only the rose combed Dominique would become the standard for the breed. The single combed Dominiques were relegated to and folded into the Plymouth Rock breed—popular in New England, created by crossing large, single comb Dominiques with Java chickens. Dominiques were never used commercially, and the breed was eventually eclipsed on the farm by the gradual shift to the larger “Plymouth Rocks.” In 1874 the Dominique breed was officially admitted to the American Poultry Association’s *Standard of Perfection*.

The Dominique enjoyed popularity until the 1920s at which time interest in the breed waned due to the passing of aged, long-time Dominique enthusiasts and breeders. The breed managed to survive during the Great Depression of the 1930s due to its hardiness and ease of up-keep. By the end of World War II, as industrial poultry operations began to take a foothold in the U.S., the Dominique once again experienced decline. By 1970 only four known flocks remained, held by: Henry Miller, Edward Uber, Robert Henderson, and Carl Gallaher. Through the effort of dedicated individuals the remaining owners were contacted and convinced to participate in a breed rescue. From 1983, following published reports on the breed by ALBC, until 2006, Dominiques steadily rose in numbers. As of 2007, it has been observed by the breed’s enthusiasts that numbers are once again beginning to decline, as old time breeders of Dominique age and are no longer involved with keeping and promoting the breed.

The Dominique is a medium-sized black and white barred (otherwise known as “cuckoo” patterned) bird. The barred plumage coloration is also referred to as hawk-colored and serves the Dominique in making the bird less



**The low profile of the rose comb make this breed more resistant to frostbite than many other breeds Photo by Bryan K. Oliver, courtesy of the Dominique Club of America.**

conspicuous to predators. The Dominique sports a rose comb with a short upward curving spike that is characteristic to this breed. The males average seven pounds and the females five pounds. The Dominique’s tightly arranged plumage, combined with the low profile of the rose comb, make this breed more resistant to frostbite than many other breeds of fowl. Dominiques are also known to adapt well to hot and humid climates.

Historically the close feathering of this breed not only protected the birds in cold weather, but provided ample material for the pillows and featherbeds of their owners.

Dominiques carry their heads high up on well-arched necks. The males of the breed have an almost “u” shaped back outline. Their body is broad and full with long and full tail feathers that are held the highest of the American breeds. Females have back outlines that slope from head to tail.


Although categorized as a dual-purpose breed, these birds are first and foremost egg producers with hens historically averaging 230-275 small- to medium-sized brown eggs per year.

**Status:** Watch

#### **Related Breed Clubs & Associations**

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, PO Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312, (919) 542-5704, [albc@albc-usa.org](mailto:albc@albc-usa.org), [www.albc-usa.org](http://www.albc-usa.org)

American Poultry Association, PO Box 306, Burgettstown, PA 15021, [secretaryapa@yahoo.com](mailto:secretaryapa@yahoo.com), [www.amer-poultryassn.com](http://www.amer-poultryassn.com)

Dominique Club of America, 943 W. Bear Swamp Rd., Walhalla, SC 29691-5103; [www.dominiquechickens.org](http://www.dominiquechickens.org); [BRYAN\\_K\\_OLIVER@yahoo.com](mailto:BRYAN_K_OLIVER@yahoo.com). 



**Dominique males average seven pounds and the females five pounds. The tightly arranged plumage protects the birds in cold weather, but they also adapt well to hot and humid climates. Photo by Tracey Allen, courtesy of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy.**