

# Crèveœur Chicken Profile

## Breed Status

**Breed name:** Crèveœur

**Other Names:** Black Polish, Picardy, Normandy

**Livestock Conservancy Status:** Critical



*Chick*

*Juvenile*

*Rooster*

*Hens*

**Status Comments:** New interest in this breed is beginning to develop in the U.S., France, England, and Australia.

**Country/region of origin:** France/Normandy

**U.S. Population:** < 500 breeding birds

**Global population:** <1000

**Breed purpose:** Meat and egg production

**Breed type:** Standard

**Bloodlines:**

*historic* – Henwood, Urch

*modern* – Ideal, Abeln

**Foundation breeds used to create breed:** Unknown. Very old fowl thought to descend from a cross of common hens from Normandy.

## Breed History



*The Poultry Book 1867*

The Crèvecoeur chicken is among the oldest of the standard-bred fowls of France and the longest known French breed in the United Kingdom. The breed gets its name from the village of Crèvecoeur en Auge in Normandy, France. “Crève Cœur” translates literally as “broken heart.” Local history sites the origin of the name stems from the land in this region being less fertile than was hoped by farmers moving in to the area and thus breaking the hearts of the peasants. Little is known of the breed’s origins other than they were developed in Normandy and existed there for a very long time. By the twelfth century the Crèvecoeur was known as a source of pride by the Lord of Crèvecoeur-en-Auge. Historic tenant contracts indicated that to pay their rent on their farm, farmers had to provide two finished Crèvecoeur

capons to the landowner each year. This clearly shows the value of this breed to the locals! By the eighteenth century, Crèvecoeur capon was a preferred meat of the upper middle class in Paris. More than 150,000 were produced for this market annually. French poultry author Charles Jacque wrote in his 1858 book, *Le Poulailier*, “This admirable race produces certainly the most excellent fowls that appear in the markets of France. Its bones are even lighter than those of the Houdan; its flesh is fine, short, whiter, and it takes more easily to the fattening process. The chickens are of an unheard-of precocity; they are ready to fattening when they have attained two months and a half or three months, and for eating fifteen days after.”

**THE CREVECOEUR FOWL.**

This breed derives its name from Creve-coeur, a town in Normandy, France, where for several years past they have been extensively raised for the Paris markets, being highly valued both for weight and delicacy of flesh. The hens are low on the legs, with large, fleshy thighs, the wings large, and the body square; the abdomen is voluminous and pendant, especially in those which are more than a year old; they walk slowly, scratch but little, and rarely fly. Their plumage is black, except white feathers may appear in the tuft on the head; the tuft is large, and the comb small, upright, two-horned; while a large cravat of feathers under the neck gives to them a matronly air, the tuft and singularly shaped comb present a grotesque but not unpleasing appearance. They are very tame, and ramble little; in this resembling the Brahmas.

The cocks, which are similar in form to the hens, have a brilliant black plumage; their heads are handsomely surmounted with beautiful tufts, and large toothed, two horned combs, which together form a kind of crown; they have also dense cravats of feathers, and are adorned with pendant wattles of large size.

The chickens are of great precocity, being frequently put up to fatten at the early age of three months. The hen pro-

GROUP OF IMPORTED CREVECOEUR FOWLS.

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duces large eggs, and is an excellent layer, but scarcely ever sits. Such is the description given in French works on fowls. So far as the appearance is concerned it is correct, as seen in recent importations. The accompanying illustration was made from pure bred birds, imported from the *Jardin d'Acclimation*, Paris.

*American Stock Journal 1870*



The Crèveœur had reached America by 1852 (*Livestock of the Farm*, 1916) at a time when French breeds were becoming the rage in the country. According to the *American Agriculturalist* (October 1867) “The Crevecoeurs Fifteen Years in This Country – We found, a few days since, with surprise and pleasure, a fine flock of fowls bearing an unmistakable likeness to the fashionable “Creves” on the farm of Mr. J.P. Swain, of Westchester Co. The Johnie-Crapeau style and air of the cocks, their split combs, the top-knots, the tendency to muffle or ruffle, the color, and the character of the hens as persistent layers class them unmistakably as, at least, closely akin to the Crevecoeurs. The original stock was purchased by Capt. Funk, of the old line of Havre packets, under the name of “Layers,” (*Pondeuse*,) at Havre. Two importations were made of twenty and thirty-six birds respectively, but few of either importations survived, or long survived, the passage. Their descendants, however, are hardy and healthy, and Mr. S. [Saunders] gives them credit of being the hardiest and best hens for eggs he has ever had, although he has bred almost all the famous varieties, importing them from both Europe and Asia.”

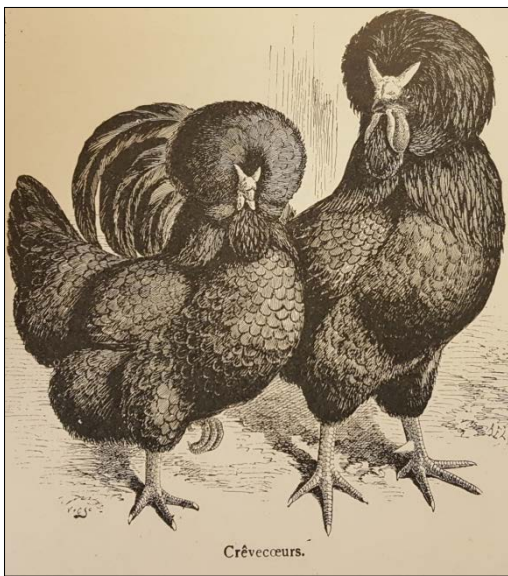


Fig. 1.—CREVEOEUR COCK.  
French Varieties of Fowls.

*American Agriculturalist* 1866

In 1867 imports were made by A.M. Halstead and Mr. Saunders of New York and by Benjamin Haines of Elizabeth, NJ. All got their stock from the Jardin d’Acclimation in Paris. (*American Agriculturalist* March 1867) Further imports occurred around the beginning of the 1870’s also from the Jardin d’Acclimation in Paris. (*American Stock Journal*, 1870) In France they were still quite popular at the time. One notable distinction

for the breed occurred in 1889 when there were two sets of awards offered for poultry at the first Exhibition Universelle (World’s Fair) held in Paris. One was reserved for the Crèveœur and the other for all the other chicken breeds at the exposition!



*Wrights Book of Poultry* 1912

The Crèveœur remained popular up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in France. In 1909 poultry author Willis Grant Johnson wrote “When staying in St. Servan, Dinan, and St. Malo a few years since, I noticed that the Crèveœur was the principal fowl offered for sale in the market, where they were mostly bought alive, and if unsold carried home, to possibly reappear on a future day.” He also mentions in regards to capons that “In Paris the finest of the “Crèves” realize as much as from twenty to twenty-five franc each, while from three to five

dollars is not an uncommon price in New York. The French capon, when really good, is

in its way the perfection of poultry.” (*The Poultry Book*, 1909) To put things in perspective, in today’s currency that price is equivalent to \$100-\$125 per bird!

Things changed dramatically for the Crèveœur when in 1940 the German army reached Normandy during WWII. The soldiers wished to eat as the middle-class French did so military bursars were tasked with collecting as many Crèveœur chickens as possible for their tables. Within two years, nearly all of the birds were eaten leaving only a scant few hidden away by dedicated farmers. Today they are still critically endangered but new interest is emerging in France, the U.S., and Australia to bring back this historic breed back to the culinary world.



The breed was developed principally for the quality of its flesh. Crèveœur chickens have small, fine bones and the proportion of meat to offal (edible internal organs) is high. Their skin is white and their legs are dark leaden blue. The breast meat is noted for being fine, short, and very white while the leg meat is very dark and almost duck-like in color. Crèveœur chickens grow slowly, reaching mature size in about 10-12 months although modern producers observe that the roosters seem to reach their full glory in appearance at two years of age. The breed fattens readily and was a French favorite to “gaver” or stuff – an old traditional practice of making birds eat more by inserting a tube into their mouths much like is done with geese and ducks to produce foie gras. This was done one month prior to butchering the birds.

Another historic fattening method involved confinement and intermittent light cycles throughout the day. They were fed a specially blended wet mash including whey and malted oats along with other items (to this day kept a local secret by Norman producers) to develop a fine carcass for the table.

In the U.S. they are mostly found to be solid black in color but recently the blue, white, and splash varieties has been imported from France in 2017. The black birds have a beautiful beetle green sheen that can be seen on the crests, hackles, and tail feathers of the roosters. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century long time British poultry breeder, Mr. W. Blinkhorn, wrote of the breed “Crèveœurs have been described as black or black and white variegated. This variegation, sometimes white and sometimes golden, is most noticeable in the crest, and after that in the hackles and saddles, but I have never seen it in other parts of the birds. I scarcely remember a bird that did not show it more or less the second year, and as they grow older it increases. I have seen good combs of both varieties – two-horned and antlered – and think both are common to the breed; but the former are more general and I think preferable.” (*The Book of Poultry*, 1886) Of the color in very young birds Willis Grant Johnson writes “in color they are black, with white on the breast; and in their first feathering they not unfrequently have white in the wings and tail, which generally is moulted out in the nest, and they become a soft, clean, uniform black.” (*The Poultry Book*, 1909)

Crèveœur chickens should have crests and beards of moderate size, compact, well-proportioned bodies, and short legs. Traditionally their crests and beards, being smaller,

did not restrict their vision as the crests do on the Polish chicken breed but the show ring has encouraged more profuse crests in recent decades. They have “v” combs but “leaf” or “stag” combs are known to occur occasionally within the breed. In movement they are



quiet and deliberate. The breed stands confinement remarkably well, appearing quite content. Crèveœur chickens are moderate layers of large white eggs. They were noted by both English and American poultry men as being rather delicate in constitution and prone to catch colds in damp conditions although modern breeders find them to be more robust. Crèveœur chickens are easily reared on any moderately dry soils. They do seem to exhibit digestive systems that can be a bit more sensitive than other breeds. It's recommended that when in stressful situations or weather extremes, use of probiotics prophylactically may be of benefit to the birds.

The Crèveœur chicken was recognized by the American Poultry Association and admitted in 1874. Males should weigh 8 lbs and females weigh 6.5 lbs. as adults but many in the U.S. have become much smaller over time. Attention should be given to returning the breed to standard weight and conformation.

### Physical Description and Breed Characteristics

**Unique breed characteristics:** Black crests, full beards, and plumage, and short legs on a compact Dorking-like body.

**General description:** Full, well curved tail; medium sized v-shaped comb; highly arched nostrils; eyes reddish bay; beak black, shading to horn at tip; shanks and toes dark leaden blue.

**Age of maturity (M/F):** 12 months – 2 years

**Mature weight range (M/F):** 8 lbs. (3.63 kg) / 6.5 lbs. (2.95 kg)

**Colors (M/F):** predominantly black in the U.S. but blue, white, and splash varieties were recently imported from France in 2017.

**Temperament (M/F):** Calm and deliberate, occasional aggression in males should be culled

**Flocking/ranging behavior:** This breed is stands confinement remarkable well. It is poor to moderate at ranging, individuals remain close to the flock while ranging, can be easy target for predators.

**Regional adaptations:** Suited to any moderately dry, well-drained soils.

**Faults to avoid:** Avoid under sized fowls; shanks and toes other than black or dark leaden blue in color; more than one-half inch of positive white in any part of the

plumage; two or more feathers tipped in white, except in crest. Individuals aggressive toward people should be culled.

### Production Traits

**Age of sexual maturity (M/F):** 6 months/ 6 months.

**Length of breeding season:** December – June, may be longer in cooler climates

**Breeding seasonality:** breeding diminished in late fall

**Expected longevity:** 7-9 years

**Optimal breeding ratio of males to female:** 1 male to 4-8 females

**Incubation period:** 21 days

**Mate bonding:** none observed

**Rate of lay (# eggs/ year):** 120-150

**Egg color and size:** white to tinted, medium to large in size

**Fertility:** fair to excellent depending on bloodline

**Hatchability:** 70-75+%,

**Hatch weight:** 30-35 gms

**Maternal capacity:** non-broody

**Feed requirements:** Similar to the majority of breeds, fertility may be improved by feeding a vitamin and mineral fortified breeding ration at least one month prior to collecting eggs for hatching. They seem to have more sensitive digestive systems than other breeds so using a probiotic prophylactically may be of benefit during stressful times.

**Foraging ability:** Fair. Best suited to small areas or confinement.

**Harvest age (M/F):** 20 weeks

**Harvest weight (M/F):** live weight 5 to 6 lbs. for cockerels, 3-4 lbs. for hens

**Carcass yield (M/F):** 70-72%

**Nutritional values:**

A study conducted by Mother Earth News has found eggs from pastured raised hens have higher values for a number of nutrients than USDA data for eggs from hens in confinement houses. Pastured eggs contain:

- 50% more Vitamin E
- 4 times the Beta Carotene
- 35 times the Omega-3 fatty acids
- Half the Cholesterol
- And they contain 10.5 mcg of Folic Acid
- (That is 10.5 mcg more than USDA's data for eggs.)

A study funded by the USDA shows meat from chickens raised on pasture contained:

- 21% less total fat
- 30% less saturated fat
- 28% fewer calories
- 50% more Vitamin A
- 100% more Omega-3 fatty acids

A Study conducted by James Madison University found bacterial contamination to be lower in pastured poultry:

- 133 colony-forming units per milliliter (cfu/ml) in pastured poultry
- 3600 cfu/ml in conventional poultry

A Virginia Tech study found pastured poultry to be 70% lower in fat, and of the fats present, poly-unsaturated were much higher than mono-saturated.

And a study by Pennsylvania State University found 3 times the Omega-3s, twice the Vitamin E, and 40% more vitamin A in the eggs of chickens on pastured compared to conventional confinement.

For more information visit: <http://www.motherearthnews.com/eggs/> or [www.eatwild.com](http://www.eatwild.com).

## Marketing

**Products:** meat, eggs, fertilizer, fly tying feathers

**Services:** soil improvement, pest control

**Markets (current & historic):** A solid producer of tender flesh and a moderate producer of white eggs. A good choice for producing specialty meat if attention is paid to fattening during the last month of growth prior to harvest

## Contacts

### Clubs and Associations:

American Poultry Association, 5757 West Fork Road, Cincinnati, OH, 45247, (513) 598-4337, [secretaryapa@yahoo.com](mailto:secretaryapa@yahoo.com), [www.amerpoultryassn.com](http://www.amerpoultryassn.com)

The Livestock Conservancy  
Pittsboro, North Carolina. 919-542-5704  
info@livestockconservancy.org www.livestockconservancy.org

*Conserving Heritage Breeds Since 1977*



Conservatoire des poules de Crèveœur du Pays d'Auge (France)

<https://www.facebook.com/poulesdecreveoeur/>

Crèveœur Chicken Conservation Project (U.S.)

[www.facebook.com/CreveoeurConservation](http://www.facebook.com/CreveoeurConservation)

Society for the Preservation of Poultry Antiquities, Dr. Charles R.H. Everett, secretary,  
122 Magnolia Lane, Lugoff, SC, 29078, email [crheverett@bellsouth.net](mailto:crheverett@bellsouth.net)

## Resources

American Pastured Poultry Producers Association – [www.apppa.org/](http://www.apppa.org/)

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) – National Sustainable  
Agriculture Information Service <https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry/>

Breeds of Livestock – Oklahoma State University, Department of Animal Science  
[www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/)

Feathersite Poultry – The Poultry Page

[www.feathersite.com/Poultry/BRKPoultryPage.html](http://www.feathersite.com/Poultry/BRKPoultryPage.html)

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) – [www.sare.org/](http://www.sare.org/)

## Case Studies

*Apport Des Marqueurs Moleculaires A La Caracterisation Des Races Anciennes De Poules*, by Rognon Xavier, Berthouly Cécile, Coquerelle Gérard, Legros Hélène, Tixier-Boichard Michèle, Septièmes Journées de la Recherche Avicole, Tours, 28 et 29 mars 2007

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*The American Standard of Perfection*, by The American Poultry Association, Inc.,  
published by American Poultry Association, Inc. (2001)

*The American Stock Journal*, Vol. V, No. 7, *The Creveoeur Fowl*, N.P. Boyer & Co.  
(July 1870)

*The Book of Poultry*, by Thomas McGrew, Thomas Nelson & Sons (1926)

The Livestock Conservancy  
Pittsboro, North Carolina. 919-542-5704  
info@livestockconservancy.org www.livestockconservancy.org

*Conserving Heritage Breeds Since 1977*



*The Business Hen, Breeding and Feeding Poultry for Profit*, by H.W. Collingwood, The Rural Publishing Company (1892)

*Counting Our Chickens: Identifying Breeds in Danger of Extinction*, By Marjorie Bender, Robert O. Hawes, and Donald E. Bixby, published by American Livestock Breeds Conservancy (2004)

*Farm Poultry*, by George C. Watson, M.S., The MacMillan Company (1903)

*Judging Poultry for Production*, by James A. Rice, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (1930)

*Livestock of the Farm*, edited by C. Bryner Jones, The Gresham Publishing Company (1916)

*Making Poultry Pay*, by Edwin C. Powell, Orange Judd Company (1904)

*The Mating and Breeding of Poultry*, by Harry M. Lamon and Rob R. Slocum, published by Orange Judd Publishing (1920)

*Our Domestic Birds*, John H. Robinson, Ginn and Company (1913)

*The People's Practical Poultry Book*, Wm.M. Lewis, D.D.T. Moore publisher (1871)

*The Perfected Poultry of America*, by T.F. McGrew & Geo. Howard, The Howard publishing Company (1907)

*Popular Breeds of Domestic Poultry*, by John Robinson, Reliable Poultry Journal Publishing Company (1924)

*Le Poulailleur*, Charles Jacque, Hachette Livre-BNF (original 1858, reprint 2012)

*The Poultry Book*, Harrison Weir, Willis Grant Johnson, George O. Brown, Doubleday, Page & Co. (1909)

*The Poultry Book*, by John C. Bennett, MD, Phillips, Sampson and Company (1850)

*The Poultry Book*, by W.B. Tegetmeier, George Routledge and Sons (1867)

*Poultry Craft*, by John H. Robinson, I.S. Johnson & Co (1899)

*Poultry Culture*, I.K. Felch, W.H. Harrison, Jr., Publishing (1889)

*Poultry Husbandry*, by Morley A. Jull, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. (1938)

*Poultry Science and Practices*, by A.R. Winter and E.M. Funk, published by J.B. Lippencott Publishing (1947)

*The Practical Poultry Keeper*, Lewis Wright, Cassell and Company, LTD. (1901)

*Practical Poultry-Farming*, by Louis M. Hurd, The MacMillan Company (1929)

*Profitable Poultry Keeping*, by Stephen Beale, David McKay, Publisher (1895)

*Stairway to the Breeds*, by Ian Kay, Scibblers Publishing Limited (1997)

*Standard American Perfection Poultry Book*, by I.K. Felch, M.A. Donohue and Company (1903)

*Updated 02/19*