



Photo courtesy of Nicole Geijer Porter

2023 CONSERVATION PRIORITY LIST

Many populations of the endangered livestock and poultry breeds on the Conservation Priority List (CPL) remained steady over the last year. Even better, counts of some breeds improved significantly. Both outcomes are a testament to the committed efforts of breeders and breed associations as they work to ensure rare breeds do not disappear from our farms, ranches, and backyards throughout America.

CATTLE

Corriente cattle are being added to the CPL in 2023 as a Threatened North American breed. The breed is from northern Mexico and is part of the group of Criollo breeds of cattle that originated in Spain and were forged in the Americas. Criollo breeds are a very important genetic resource in the Western hemisphere. Agile and athletic cattle, the Corriente has long been valued and bred for rodeo competitions. Much of that appeal comes from the broader Criollo characteristics of good, strong horns and endurance. Corriente cattle in the United States (U.S.) are represented by the North American Corriente Association.

In the U.S., Corriente cattle are bred primarily in the Southwestern and Plains states. Their population has declined

significantly over the past 15 years, in both the U.S. and Mexico, mainly due to crossbreeding with other cattle. Today, the breeding population of purebred Corrientes is estimated to be fewer than 2,000 animals; annual registration numbers continue to decline.

The Corriente's long history of thriving in near-desert conditions makes the breed well-suited for ranging in areas plagued by persistent drought. Because these cattle eat a wide variety of plant species, they have a lower impact on native grasses than more popular, larger cattle breeds. Mature bulls generally weigh less than 1,000 lbs. and mature cows less than 800 lbs. While small in stature, Corrientes raised for beef on marginal lands reward ranchers with hardiness and longevity.

Also coming onto the 2023 CPL are **American Yaks**, long-haired bovines of Tibetan origin. The North American population has a surprisingly long history of isolation. They were imported to Canada and the northern U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s, first for zoo exhibition and later to evaluate them for beef production in cold climates. Several thousand purebred descendants of these American Yaks remain, distributed across the U.S. and Canada. With more than a century of genetic separation from their

cousins in the Himalayas, purebred yaks in North America represent a distinct genetic resource. As such, the group has been added to the CPL as American Yak in the Critical category. It is listed as a North American breed within the cattle group.

Yaks have proven useful for grass-based ranching in areas where stocking numbers must be restricted and environmental conditions are harsh. They produce lean, nutrient-rich beef; their hair, fine undercoat, and milk are valued by high-end fiber producers and cheesemakers. While yak-cattle crosses can yield viable offspring, these crosses produce sterile males. As with any other animal used for crossbreeding, purebred yaks must be carefully tracked by their registries to ensure the integrity of America's highly endangered pure lineages and to safeguard their future in North America.

Canadienne cattle will no longer appear on the CPL because the number of breeders in the U.S. with purebred cattle has declined below the minimum for the CPL parameters for imported breeds. The breed was developed in Canada and descends from Normandy and Brittany cattle brought to Canada between 1601 and 1660. This population was shaped by natural selection in the rugged environment of eastern Canada.

Fortunately, the breed has a brighter future thanks to the work of the Canadienne Cattle Breed Enhancement Association (AVRBC), the Canadienne Cattle Breeders Association, and other partners who are promoting these cattle for dairying in Canada. Their campaign is bringing attention to genetic selection, and a marketing collective for the breed's cheese and milk. While the U.S. now plays a very small role in the genetic conservation of this sturdy breed, The Livestock Conservancy wholeheartedly supports and endorses the work of AVRBC and others as they raise awareness and market value for the special, well-adapted qualities of this traditional dairy breed.

PIGS

After several years of investigation, the **Saddleback** pig, also known as the British Saddleback, will not appear on the CPL. The Saddleback is a hardy and adaptable pig breed known for its foraging ability and maternal qualities. While a small population of Saddlebacks resides in North America, The Livestock Conservancy's investigation confirmed the breed does not meet the minimal requirements for listing on the CPL.

HORSES

Morgan horses have a long and distinguished history in America, dating back to 1789 when the foundation sire for the breed, a colt named "Figure," was born. Once Figure was purchased by Justin Morgan, the owner's surname became synonymous with the breed. Figure was used widely as a prepotent breeding stallion, highly valued for his ability to sire fine saddle horses, harness horses, and tough working stock. That sort of strong "triple purpose" all-rounder has become increasingly rare among horse breeds.

The Livestock Conservancy listed the traditional type of Morgan horse on our CPL beginning in 2013, limited to horses free of known outcrosses to other breeds after 1939. These horses largely remain true to the original "all-purpose" character of the breed.

Listing bloodlines or subpopulations within larger breeds on the CPL has always been a difficult challenge. The complicated reasons are grounded in the basic question of "What is a breed?" Although the continuation of original populations and bloodlines of any breed is especially important for conservation,

it remains a considerable challenge to list them separately from most breeds.

Since being added to the CPL, the situation for Morgan horses has changed favorably. Today, owners demonstrate an increasing interest in maintaining genetic diversity, breeding all types of Morgans, and promoting the Morgan horse in all its varieties and uses. In response to these developments, The Livestock Conservancy is removing the Morgan (Traditional) classification from the CPL. We will continue to monitor the breed to help assure this uniquely American treasure continues to be available for future generations. Breeders and their breed associations are critical partners in this important work. Their knowledge of and attention to the importance of maintaining genetic diversity and the original characteristics of the breed can assure success for Morgan horses by working closely together.

POULTRY

The CPL includes heritage varieties of chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys. Data from several larger flocks and mail-order hatcheries have now been added to the results of the 2021 Murray McMurray Poultry Census as reported in the Spring 2023 *Newsletter*. Detailed charts and tables from the Census are available online at <http://livestockconservancy.org/>

mcmurray-national-poultry-census/. Many of the changes in poultry breeds have been positive!

On the 2023 CPL, there is good news for **Buff** and **Silver Appleyard** ducks, which both improve from Threatened to Watch. Mail-order hatcheries play an important role in conserving heritage breeds of ducks. More complete numbers from hatcheries, added to counts from individual breeders, revealed that both breed populations had grown sufficiently to support this move. Both breeds are good choices for all-around use as egg layers and meat producers.

Australian Spotted ducks join the CPL in the Critical category. Despite its name, the Australian Spotted duck is an American breed developed around 1920 by crossing an unidentified wild Australian duck with Call ducks, mallards, and pintails. Australian Spotted ducks are a small and friendly bantam breed that retains the ability to fly. The breed is not recognized by the American Poultry Association (APA) but retains a small and loyal fanbase in the U.S.

CPL graduation for poultry depends on global population numbers because chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys are not individually registered. The threshold is a global population above 25,000. With the growing popularity of keeping chickens, certain breeds have had a



Buff ducks - Watch

renaissance both in the private sector and mail-order hatcheries.

Chicken breeds graduating from the CPL this year include **Australorp**, **Rhode Island Red**, **Plymouth Rock**, and **Brahma**. The first three are important dual-purpose birds that have become popular choices for small flock owners interested in both eggs and meat. Brahmas stand out for their extreme size and gentle nature, making them an appealing breed for many bird enthusiasts.

Australorp chickens now boast more than 28,000 birds in the U.S. Developed in Australia as champion egg layers, they are a great choice for beginning poultry owners. Australorps are easy keepers which means you can harvest more eggs on less feed. Their easy-going temperament also makes them popular with families. Australorps have been recognized by the APA since 1929 and are popular for youth projects.

Rhode Island Red and **Plymouth Rock** chickens have enjoyed long popularity since their creation in the U.S. in the 1800s. Both varieties have experienced a resurgence in the past 20 years because they have returned to their productive roots. Today, these heritage breeds figure strongly in the pastured poultry movement. Exhibition breeders have supplemented their income with sales of non-show birds to production breeders.



Australorp - Graduate



Brahma - Graduate

These dual-purpose chickens are perfect for family use. They lay sufficient eggs throughout the year to keep the pantry replenished, and are just the right size for table birds.

Brahma chickens are also graduating thanks to increasing popularity around the world. These gentle giants are known as the "King of All Poultry" and are appreciated for their great size and strength. This breed, together with the Cochin, fueled what became known as "Hen Fever," a national obsession for poultry that hit both America and England around 1850. Standing up to 30" tall, today's females average 10 lbs. while males weigh about 12 lbs. This hardy breed is a superior winter layer and thrives in moist, cool climates.

Other moves for chicken breeds include **Buttercup**, **Campine**, **Houdan**, **Sultan**, and **Yokohama** improving from Critical to Threatened. Movement in a positive direction is always welcome! The Livestock Conservancy is also pleased to report renewed interest in **Sebright** chickens, which improved from Critical to Watch this year with more than 1,000 breeding birds.

Moving from Threatened to Watch are **Andalusian**, **Buckeye**, **Cornish**, **Crèvecoeur**, **Minorca**, **Old English Game**, **Rhode Island White**, and **Spitzhauben** chickens. Improving from Watch to Recovering are **Delaware**, **Jersey Giant**, and **Polish** chickens.

Three bantam chicken breeds join the CPL because the 2021 Murray McMurray Poultry Census revealed declining populations in both the U.S. and the countries of origin. The **Belgian Bearded D'Uccle**, **Booted Bantam**, and **Japanese Bantam** are showstoppers with no standard-sized counterparts. Many breeders enjoy bantams for their smaller size, which allows for less coop space and a lower feed bill. Plus, bantams are often excellent layers. Two of their small eggs are equal to about one extra large chicken egg, with a slightly higher proportion of yolk to egg white. You can learn more about these new CPL breeds at livestockconservancy.org/heritage-breeds/poultry-breeds/.

A wide variety of chicken breeds are available to meet the needs and interests of poultry breeders, farms of all sizes, and backyard keepers. It is encouraging to see so many heritage breeds growing in popularity, securing genetic resources for years to come.

Three varieties of turkeys have benefited from small farms and even larger operations raising pastured turkeys for the holiday market. Many of these farms are purchasing turkey poults from mail-order hatcheries, and at least one larger pastured operation is making a real difference for heritage turkeys by maintaining their own breeding stock. **Black**, **Royal Palm**, and **Slate** turkeys improve from Threatened to Watch in 2023.



Buttercup - Threatened

All heritage turkey varieties are well suited for pastured production. They mate naturally and have healthy immune systems. Breeding birds also have long, productive life spans. Hens are commonly productive for five to seven years while toms can service a flock for up to five years. Farmers can choose the right variety for their production goals based on size, color, and availability in their region.

COOPERATION

Each year hundreds of livestock breeders, breed associations, and global conservation partners contribute information about more than 200 individual breeds to The Livestock Conservancy. This data about each breed's status, risks, and opportunities is weighed carefully to rank their risk of extinction. The Conservation Priority List is the annual product of that rich context of information and drives specific conservation programs. Stock selections across America often start by reviewing the CPL.

Past conservation efforts that arose from information provided by partners include the importation of semen for **Large Black** and **Gloucestershire Old**



Spots pigs in 2015. The 2019 Poultry Summit and detailed censuses of **Poitou** donkeys and **Gulf Coast** sheep in 2021 also resulted from CPL preparation. Even the establishment of The Livestock Conservancy's pedigree registration services in recent years is directly due to monitoring the populations of vulnerable heritage breeds.

Thank you to all the individuals and organizations who steward rare breeds. Your work to register their pedigrees, support their breeders, and partner with The Livestock Conservancy to monitor and promote each of the breeds on

SUPPORT CONSERVATION

Want to support heritage breed conservation? Consider adding a rare breed to your farm or homestead. First consider your production goals, housing, pasture access, egg needs, and climate to find the right breed for you.

Expert: **Australian Spotted** ducks, **Old English Game** chickens

Intermediate: **Corriente** cattle, **Buff** ducks, **Buttercup** chickens, **Royal Palm** turkeys

Beginner: **Silver Appleyard** ducks, **Campine** chickens, **Rhode Island White** chickens, **Black** turkeys

the CPL makes a difference. We also appreciate the generous support of Manna Pro for sponsoring this year's List. Working together, not a single breed listed on the CPL has been lost to extinction in more than four decades.

How can you help move the needle to sustain your favorite rare breed? ■

CPL PARAMETERS

Livestock and poultry breeds on the Conservation Priority List conform to specific genetic and numerical parameters. Breeds that originate in the United States (native breeds) are especially important for conservation because they rarely exist outside the U.S. Native breeds and those in America for more than 100 years are included on the CPL largely based on a continuous presence in the U.S., as well as census numbers.

Breeds with a shorter history in America and breeds created in the 20th century undergo a more complex evaluation. The primary goal is to include breeds that contribute significantly to global conservation, and breeds that could not be re-created because the foundation stock no longer exists.

Importation has brought many new breeds to America's shores in the past century. In most cases, the ideal situation is for imported breeds such as Icelandic sheep or Andalusian horses to be conserved in their country of origin.

In other cases such as Arapawa goats, the U.S. animals represent a significant portion of a globally endangered population.

Parameters for inclusion on the CPL are summarized as follows:

1. The breed is from one of the following seven traditional U.S. livestock species: cattle, donkeys, goats, horses, pigs, rabbits, and sheep. Rabbit and poultry parameters are defined separately.

2. The breed census satisfies numerical guidelines.

3. The breed is a true genetic breed; when mated together, it reproduces the breed type.

4. The breed has had an established and continuous breeding population in the United States since 1925. If the breed was imported or developed since 1925, it may be included on the CPL if:

- The foundation stock is no longer available
- It meets global numerical guidelines
- At least three breeding lines are present in the U.S.
- At least twenty breeding females are present in the U.S.

- At least five breeders reside in different locations in the U.S.
- An association of breeders is organized in the U.S.
- The U.S. population is contributing to the breed's survival internationally through:
 - being reciprocal to other international populations. The registry must be sanctioned by the mother organization so as not to be a dead-end for the breed; breeding stock must be licensed according to the rules of the mother organization
 - an important and numerous population when compared to other countries
 - the non-U.S. populations of the breed being at risk geographically or politically

Additional details may be found on the website at <https://livestockconservancy.org/heritage-breeds/parameters-conservation-priority-list/>.