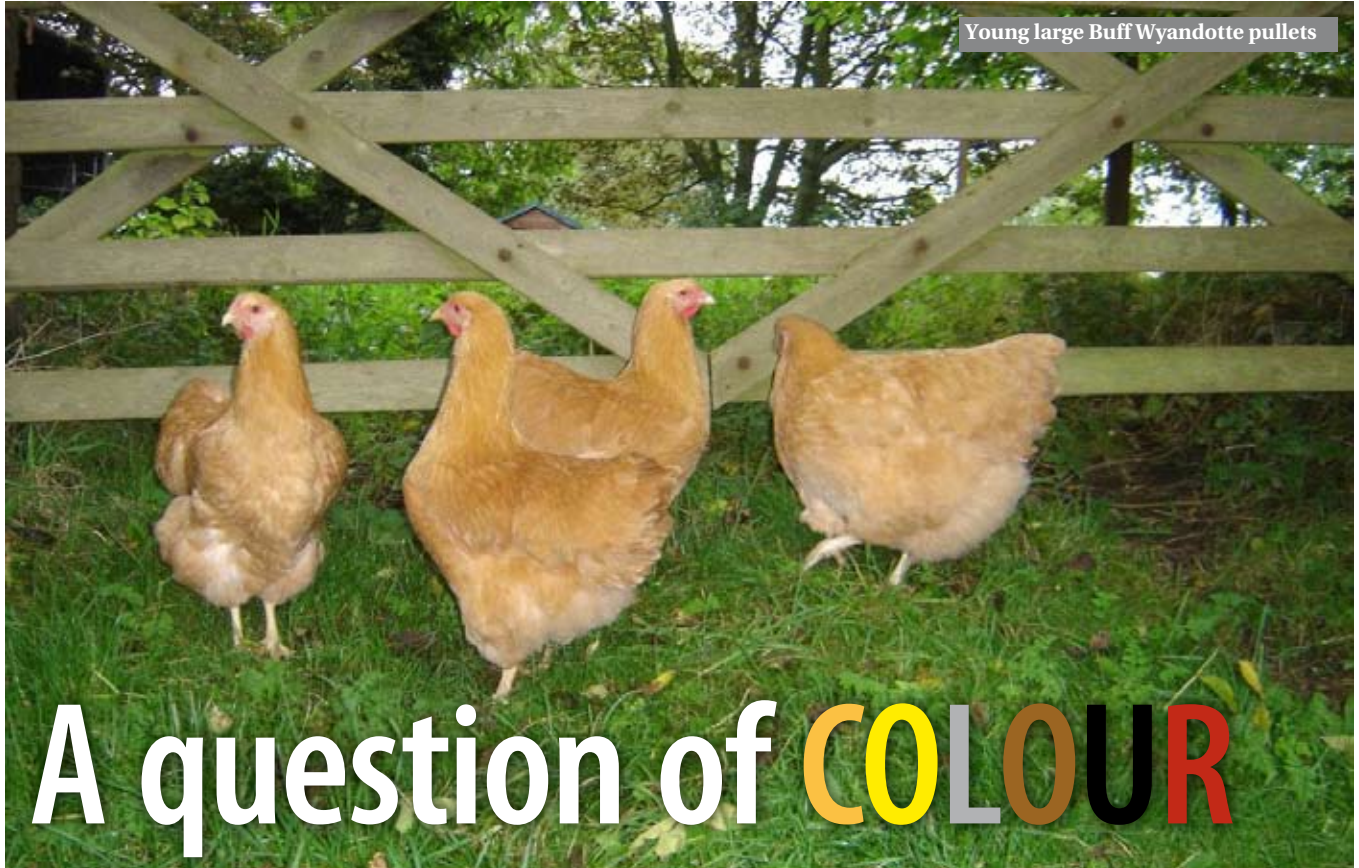


# Poultry talk



WITH GRANT BRERETON

Young large Buff Wyandotte pullets



## A question of COLOUR

### Why don't some colours take off in certain breeds? Grant explains

A few years ago, I made it my goal to recreate the large buff Wyandotte. They existed in bantam form and had been a recognised standard colour for many years within the Wyandotte Club here in the UK. However, for some reason, any strains that had been in existence had all but died out by 2003; I certainly couldn't locate any stock.

There were only a couple of breeders in Holland at the time who both let me have the odd bird, but, try as I did, I couldn't get any fertile eggs out of them. I even imported 30 eggs from Bert Molderman, who lives on the German border and had the best buffs. Unfortunately, a dodgy plug socket connection to my incubator put paid to them. I ended up with a single chick who survived for six weeks before perishing suddenly one day. As the youngsters of today would say, 'epic fail'.

As chance would have it, I was on with another project at the time - the buff-columbian Wyandotte. I was, I felt, making

great progress with these, when one day a pullet emerged that was almost self-buff in colour. She had a little black in the tail, wings and neck area, but nothing like her buff-columbian sisters.

I decided she would be very useful for my buff Wyandotte project and so set about obtaining a buff Plymouth Rock male to breed to her. I also set up another breeding pen consisting of a cross-bred male that was primarily buff but nowhere near the type of a Wyandotte, and put him with some Buff Orpington females.

I managed to successfully cross the progeny of both breeding pens together the following year and this produced some very pleasing results. There were some undesirable factors to select out, however, including: white legs, single combs, birds with black in the tail and the odd dark ginger specimen.

The buff Wyandottes that did arrive looked fantastic. They had the desirable shape, good yellow legs, decent bone and width of body, as well as excellent size and conformation. Furthermore, they would breed true when bred together the following year.

Being slightly deluded, I imagined they would be hugely popular, especially since there had been none around for so long. However, apart from the odd interested breeder, they were largely ignored and I soon realised that I would be showing against myself with the buffs at every big show, which is no fun.

When you're into a breed the way I am with Wyandottes - partridge being my main love, you tend to have discussions about the rarer colours with fellow enthusiasts. The fact there were no buffs around gave a false impression that they would be greatly sought after, but this thinking was proved wrong in time.

My only reasoning is that perhaps some colours are just suited to particular breeds, or at least only a couple of breeds. Nothing compares to the popularity of the Orpington insofar as the buff colour, and I believe people associate the buff plumage with the breed itself.

It was a similar story with the Columbian Wyandottes imported back in 2001. It was hyped about how popular they would be, and 'how lucky I was to have them.' However, their popularity was short-lived





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**LEFT:** The ever-popular Buff Orpington, seen here as a breeding flock. **BELOW LEFT:** Grant Brereton's strain of large Buff Wyandottes in 2005. **BELOW:** A breeding pen of Light Sussex at Cheshire Poultry. **BOTTOM:** Large Columbian Wyandotte pullets.



and people soon got over the novelty a colour of Wyandotte resurfacing that hadn't been seen for many years.

It may be difficult to envisage, but a Columbian Wyandotte Club existed in the UK as far back as 1907. In 1927, it had 180 members and produced an annual year-book packed full of interesting reading. This club has long since perished and didn't survive beyond the world wars.

As with the buff Wyandotte, Columbians are very similar in plumage to another breed which is far more popular: the Light Sussex. It can only be theorised, but it would seem that some breeds claim a plumage variety as their own, winning the majority of poultry people over and standing the test of time. I would certainly think this is the case with the buff and columbian plumage varieties in poultry; particularly with the large fowl versions of the Wyandotte breed.

When it comes to production, both columbian and buff Wyandottes hold their own, laying in excess of 200 eggs per year. With that in mind, a lack of production can-

not be cited for the little interest shown in either colour of the breed.

## WHY DON'T SOME COLOURS TAKE OFF?

So, why don't some colours take off in cer-



tain breeds? Is it because they are already represented by a popular breed? I would say so to a large degree. Sadly this seems to impact the survival of rarer plumage varieties in some breeds. Another reason could be the availability of so many beautiful colours within the breed in question. The Wyandotte has the Partridge, Laced and so many other options which are difficult to ignore when it comes to choice.

Needless to say, large buff, and columbian Wyandottes are becoming very scarce here in the UK (particularly good examples), but the odd specimen can still be seen occasionally at shows or sales. If you have an interest in either variety, you will have to keep your eyes peeled and your ears to the ground to stand a chance of locating stock. My advice would be to join the Wyandotte Club and search eBay for hatching eggs. You just never know what might turn up.

Both varieties are worthy of more support.

● *Wyandotte Club. Secretary: Jeff Maddock. Tel: 01229 772556.*