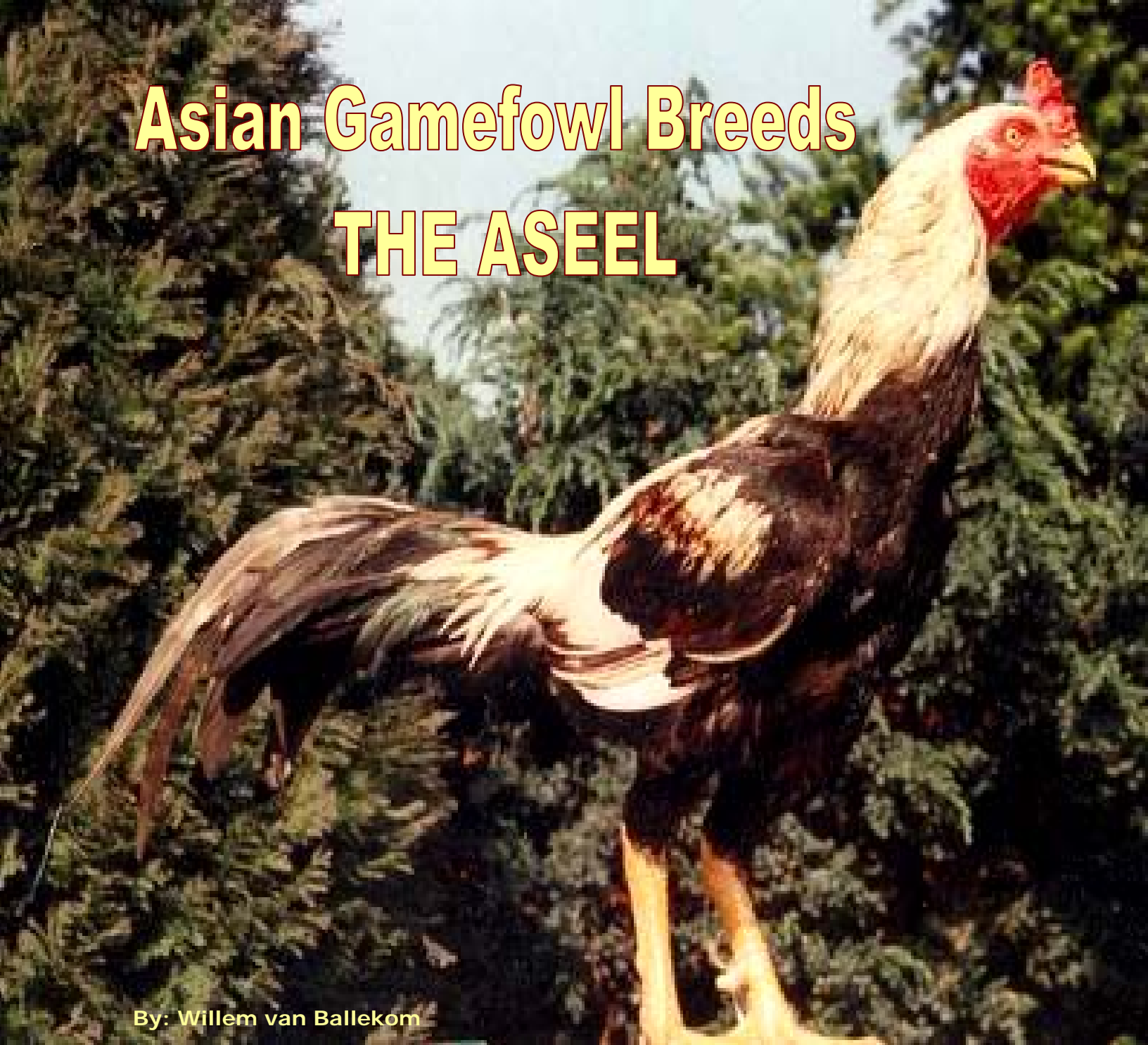


Asian Gamefowl Breeds

THE ASEEL



By: Willem van Ballekom

The origin of the Aseel or Asil breed is the landmass known as the Indian subcontinent which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The Aseel is probably the oldest domesticated poultry breed. It has already been mentioned in an old Indian manuscript titled "Dharmashastra Manus" (1300 BC) which is a work on law, ethics and social conduct. The Aseel family exists of two main varieties; the Reza Aseel and the large Kulang Aseel. The Aseel family has been expanded –recently- with the Aseel bantam, created the first time around 1890 by the English poultry genius William Flamank Entwisle. The first Aseel have been introduced in England somewhere between 1660 and 1680. End of the 19th century Asil specimens have been introduced from England to the European continent.

Let's review all the members of the Aseel family

**A Dutch-bred
Reza Aseel
Photo &
Breeder:
Willem van
Ballekom
(Holland)**

The most popular type of Aseel is the so called Reza Aseel. This variety is also incorrectly known as the 'Raja Murgh' Aseel. This expression is unknown in the Aseel homelands.



I have travelled to India and Sri Lanka myself and never ever could confirm these names. The name 'Reza' means 'little' or 'small' and is of Persian-Arabic origin. The word 'Asil' or Aseel means 'pure' or 'thoroughbred'. In the homelands of the breed the Aseel is known under its local name, which refers either to colour, region of origin, or its specific fighting character.

**Left: A Reza Aseel from Northern India
Photo & owner Mr.Mullapudi Narendranath
(India)**

The weight of a Reza type Aseel should not exceed ± 3 Kg (± 6.6 Lbs). The Reza Aseel is a medium-stationed, muscular and compact-build bird. It has a triple pea-comb, yellowish to pearl-white eyes which are embedded into the short, thick skull





protected by outstanding eyebrows and cheekbones. A fleshy head is not desired!

Left: A strong-build Reza Aseel spangle hen. Photo & breeder Willem van Ballekom (Holland)

Also very typical for the Aseel is the indented transition between the head and neck. In the homelands ivory-white coloured shanks are preferred above the yellow ones in Europe and elsewhere. These depend on the colour of the bird. The body seen from above should resemble a hazelnut (a bit rounded with a flat front). The slope of the back is about 45 degrees. The Aseels tail is of medium length, well developed (with sharp pointed sickle-feathers) and slightly drooping. A horizontal tail is acceptable.

Very important are the shoulders; these must be broad and sharp-edged. Not desired are outstanding shoulders free

from the body pointing upwards. These are typical features of the Japanese Shamo! The shanks of the Aseel are not round but square. Aseel spurs are thick, very slightly curved or straight. Long thin, curved and upwards pointing spurs are not desired. These are most of the time a sign of blood infusion with Bankiva-type gamefowl breeds. The Aseel can be found in a variety of colours but in Europe most of these are not standardized. The black-red and spangled coloured ones form the majority of the exhibited birds in Europe.

**A Kulang Aseel (North Indian type), please notice the large bird of prey-like beak
Photo & owner Jean Marie Vangansberg (Belgium)**





The AOC system as used in England would be a very welcome extension on European shows. Concerning colour, the Aseel should be judged on form, type and typical breed features. The last years I have noticed that a lot of judges and even gamefowl breeders focus on colour. I suggest that these people switch their interest to poultry breeds judged on colour and marking.

The second group of Aseel are the so called Kulang Aseel. These are big fowl with a weight ranging from \pm 3.5 to 6 Kg (7.7 to 13 Lbs). In India two varieties are known; the South Indian type and the North Indian type. The South Indian type also includes a sub-type known as the Madras Aseel. Both types don't differ that much but Indian breeders give importance to it. And who are we to judge this!

**Left: A South Indian Kulang Aseel with a walnut comb
Photo & owner Mr. Mullapudi Narendranath (India)**

North Indian type	triple peacomb, large beak (like bird of prey)
South Indian type	triple peacomb or walnut comb, beak short and thick (delta-shaped)
Madras-type	triple peacomb or walnut comb, beak short and thick (delta-shaped)

The Madras compared to the other types shows a broader body and a relative lower station.

In Europe and other countries the typical features of the various Aseel varieties are generally neglected. The reason for this is the fact that many exhibition breeders as well as cockfighters don't have a clue about their birds or the breed itself.

Many varieties are simply crossed between each other. The results are specimens with a mixture of features. This trend does not support the preservation of the breed and its varieties at all.

The large Kulang Aseel is not standardized in most European countries. This is a shame as this is probably the oldest gamefowl breed on the globe. There is one exception which is the Madras Aseel-variety. The first specimens of this variety were imported into Europe (England) around 1870 and introduced by a Scottish ship-captain. A second importation of Madras Aseel was undertaken by a certain Mr. Fowler. After a few years the breed disappeared. The first birds being imported were all blue-red. This is the reason why they were known afterwards as "Blue Madras". In the homeland of the breed the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India many colours are found, even cuckoo-coloured ones!



Above left: Madras Aseel hen from Southern India (Tamil Nadu) with a very strong built body and excellent head. Right: Madras Aseel from Southern India (Tamil Nadu), with a bully-looking body. Photos & Owner Mr. Mullapudi Narendranath (India)

Then in 1968 a German called Paul Hohmann exchanged some Madras Aseel against Vietnamese Game from an East-German breeder Franz Todenhagen. Years later the breed was standardized by the East German Gamefowl Club as "Madraskämpfer" (Madras Game); this to prevent any confusion with the existing Aseel. Later the breed has been promoted actively by the East German breeder Mr. Manfred Pinkert.



Madras Aseel are spread in Germany, Holland, Belgium, England, Bosnia and Russia. In some of these countries the breed has also been standardized.

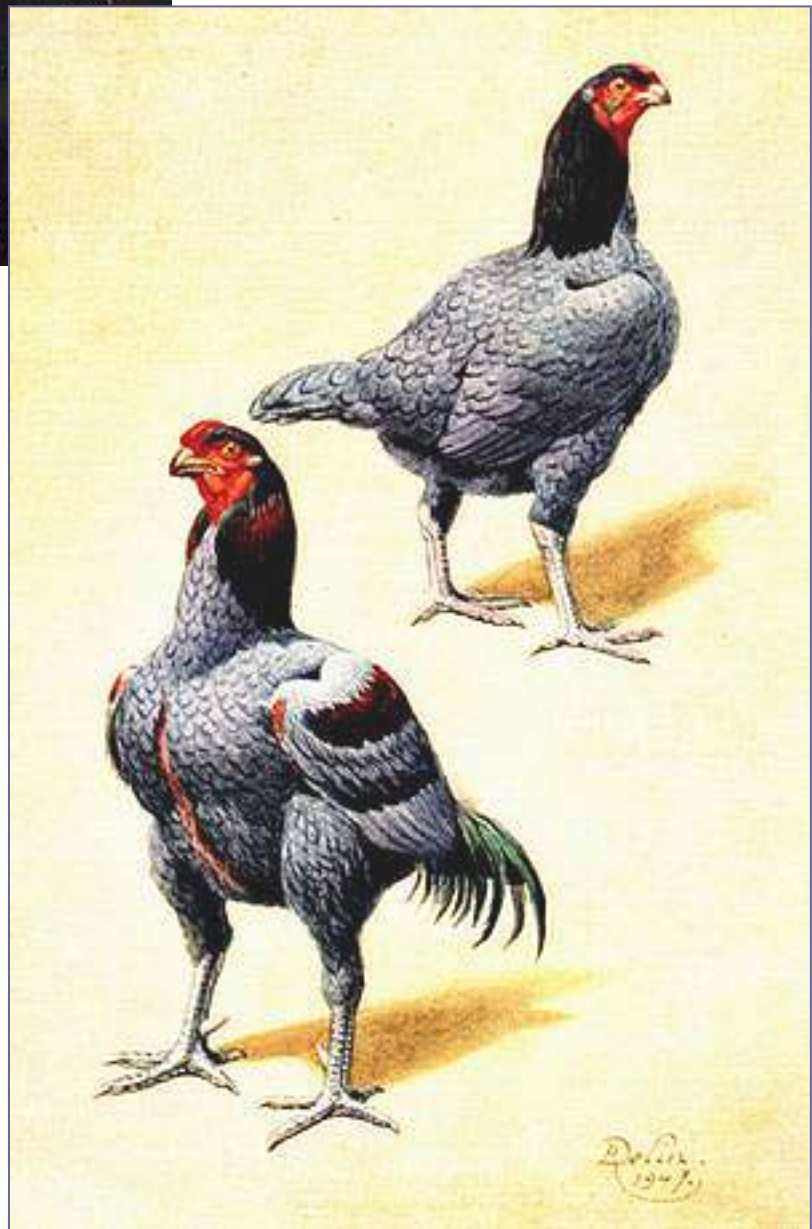
Above left: Madras Asil hen from Southern India, showing the very broad and short beak, also displayed the for Asil typical indented transition between the head and neck

Photo & Owner Mr. Mullapudi Narendranath (India)

Right: A pair of Madras Aseel painted after Lewis Wright's description of 1902. Painted in 1947 by Rene Delin (Belgium)

A very welcome addition to the range of Aseel-varieties is the bantam Aseel. The breed was created by Mr. Entwisle around 1890. After a period of popularity the breed vanished completely. The breed was standardized in Holland in seven colours! But also in Holland popularity declined and the breed has disappeared there too. In the beginning of the 1980's the Belgium breeder Willy Coppens took up the plan to revive the bantam Aseel.

After crossing the Reza Aseel with the Ko Shamo and Indian Game, the bantam





Aseel was born again. The quality of the breed got improved due to the efforts of the Belgium breeder Karel van Loy and fellow-breeders Andreas Niehsen and Hartmut Vieregge from Germany. Due to the breed's easygoing character and many available colours popularity is rising. These days Bantam Aseel are present in Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria, England and Hungary.

Left: A nice bantam Asil bred by Andreas Niehsen (Germany) showing a compact body and a typical head.

Photo & owner Willem van Ballekom (NL)

The Aseel is still a very popular gamefowl breed today, despite the ever-growing popularity of the Japanese gamefowl breeds. It is a real pity that the present-day exhibition regulations only allow breeders to show their Aseel in a limited number of colours and varieties. Everyone judging Aseel should remember that type, form and typical breed features are the one and only criteria to judge. Colour is of non-importance! Breeders should also try to preserve the game character of a gamefowl breed. It is difficult to judge gameness in the pen but anyone can see the difference between a timid bird standing at the back of pen or a bird with a cocky attitude pulling up against the front. These are the kind of birds you should look for. The preservation of genuine Aseel is a matter of a strict selection based on proper physical and mental criteria. This is of utmost importance and the only way to do justice to the oldest gamefowl breed alive . . . the Aseel.

For more information:

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club website <http://agsglobal.tripod.com/holland/index.htm>