

Copper Marans

The breed that they didn't want us to have!

Copper Marans, or Red-Browns in France, lay the darkest of all Marans' eggs. It also has been secreted into this country despite quarantine restrictions and the failed ARPIS importation scheme. In the past few years it has become the bird that most Maran fanciers must now have. Potential buyers be warned though – there are many very ordinary birds being sold as Copper Marans, so check out in these pages, out what they should be like, before you buy.



Copper Marans - a “must have” for the Marans’ Fancier

History

N.B. See the “Marans History” tab for the French Wheaten Marans to understand the general history of this variety.

The history of Copper Marans (a.k.a. as Brown – Red, Red - Brown or Copper Necked) in Australia is full of mystery. In sourcing birds for my current breeding stock, I have come across stories of French pilots and naval officers smuggling them in from Darwin to Fremantle, of blatant postage infringements (by importing fertile eggs as “ornamental eggs”) and of little old French ladies having hidden this variety from public scrutiny “for years”. Whatever the truth is of these rumors, it does add to the mystique of this fascinating French breed.

Some of this history however can be verified. Fanciers such as Paul Rodgers in the past painstakingly recreated them from the original Croad Langshan / Wheaten Marans cross. I saw some of the initial offspring (which were sent to Far North Queensland) and I have been lucky recently in being able to obtain some of this original stock. I will maintain this line for posterity but more importantly, use aspects of this mating, to improve the genetic pool of my own Copper lines.

Somehow though, I do not think that we will have to wait long before many of the ARPIS 1 breeds - culled by the authorities in September 2013, magically appear. The intense interest in importing these breeds by enthusiasts and the disappointing manner in which they were disposed of, will undoubtedly encourage the “black market” trade. Hopefully, those birds that do make it in illegally, will not carry the diseases that will wipe out our poultry and native bird populations.

Features

- Egg Laying** “Coppers” lay a large rounded dark red egg (65-80 gm.) the darkest egg of any hen.
- Fertility** Recent settings indicate high fertility, however care must be taken with breeding pairs.
- Hatchability** Chickens usually hatch quickly once they have started to pick.
- Rearing** The chicks like the Wheatens are strong and robust and enjoy foraging in the litter.
- Suitability** If anything the hens seem to be more docile than the Wheatens. Though the roosters that I have seem more feisty

Copper Marans have assumed an iconic status amongst Marans breeders. Be wary of the unscrupulous breeder passing off cross breeds as “Coppers”



What's in a name?

The name Red-Brown / Brown-Red name originated from the early fighting cocks, that started the breed in the French port of La Rochelle. To distinguish between breeds the “cockers” called the birds by the colors that they could see when they were fighting in the cockpits. Since the red speckled black breast and the reddish brown back were the obvious colors seen from above the pits, the name Brown-Red stuck. I think that the name “Copper” or Copper Black is more appropriate for both male and female so I am promoting that term when describing this variety in this website and when talking to customers.

The “Copper”, is in fact the most popular Marans variety in France. I predict that the same will occur in Australia as the coppery neck complemented by the black plump body of the hen, is distinctive and it certainly looks spectacular. The males are more difficult (at first glance) to distinguish from a Wheaten male with a similar feathering except for a more Birchen-styled neck and more red than gold in the hackles. To be really sure however you must look at the wings when they are outstretched. In the Wheaten there is a distinctive duckwing chestnut triangle, with characteristic light tan flight feathers, whereas in the Copper this has been replaced by an all over crow or black wing.

The fact that the “Coppers” are also the layers of the darkest reddish-brown eggs of all Marans, assists greatly with their popularity. They should remain popular for this reason alone as they are often used in France to breed back the deep red eggs, into varieties that are deficient in this regard. After all it is for this characteristic that Marans are famous.

The Copper Breeding Program

As for the Wheatens the genetic diversity of most Copper Marans is similar. The difference being that these have had different breeds inbred to get the colour.

I have embarked on a search of different lines from all over Australia for my breeding stock. I now have 5 distinct lines to select from. Again to protect the anonymity of worried breeders these breeding lines have been simply named after my nickname “Silky” and I have simply called them.

Silky A

Silky B

Silky C

Silky D and Silky E.

Each chicken hatched or egg sold will indicate the breeding combination. These hatch from June to November and will be ready for sale as breeding pairs or trios in March



Copper Marans pullets and hens are very docile and quite sociable birds. There are a number of variations to the shading and amount of copper in the hackles, but look for a deep copper color, such as this, as well as a strong body type.

Copper Marans – definitely a work in progress

This variety, like all other Marans is definitely one that needs to proceed slowly, with enthusiasts advised to only hatch the darkest of eggs from the birds with the best body type. Luckily there have been some other breeds introduced into the genetic make-up which has added a greater diversity to the variety and this should make them hardier than Wheaten Marans.

With their distinctive copper neck, they are a most attractive bird and their popularity is anticipated to grow rapidly.

A Description of Copper Marans

Copper Marans A well - built bird of average size. Plumage held close to the body. Giving an impression of strength without looking heavy and awkward. The best eggs must be very big and a dark red-brown color.

N.B. All details have been summarized from the now inactive “French Marans Club of Australia”.

The Copper Cock

For general appearance see general “Show Specifications” tab for general characteristics of all French Marans.

The distinguishing feature of the Copper Marans is the feathering and color and this will be the main discussion point here.

The current SCAF Standard states:

- the cock must be "black with copper finery, the lancets of the hackle and of the small of the back which are widely copper-red edged, and a black or lightly reddish-brown marked breast."

Feathering

“With a majority of black feathers, the head, the hackle, the saddle and the lancets must be copper-colored. In respect to the definition of this "coppery color", some variation is allowed but must however remain a mid-copper to red-copper. We must reject that which is too light, an ochre, yellowish color, or straw-colored at the hackle. Shades such as fawn and golden-buff are also incorrect. Copper is not fawn. The color must always be strong enough, so that any ambiguity might be avoided in these differing shades. Some feathers, especially in the lower part of the hackle and the lancets, can be more or less black-red. The shoulders should be crimson-red colored exactly the same as the Black-Red Duckwing cock (e+ wild type).

This color shows itself to be quite velvety, and can turn a reddish-brown color especially when the whole tone is mainly "copper-red". This red color of the shoulders must be sufficiently spread to the whole of the small wing covers, making a uniform mass, which it will be, if it is not blended with the black. Such black spots, when they appear blend into the red of the shoulders, as well as on the saddle and on the lancets revealing a color unbalance (there is a too much dominance of black in comparison to the copper). Their breast is black whereas the ideal breast as well as the throat is well marked by coppery spots, but not excessively so.”

N.B. Many people think that a red spotted breast is a fault – not so according to the French! See below for typical characteristics of a Copper Marans Rooster’s feathering.

characteristics



Strength and rusticity with a shorter than average shank, are the desired characteristics in Copper roosters.



A typical Wheaten rooster showing gradations of red, bronze and gold.



c.f. A beautiful young copper Rooster showing a true even and distinctive copper color.



The Copper Hen

Copper hens do not have the same difficulty as the roosters in being easily distinguishable from their Wheaten cousins.

The SCAF standard describes them thus:

The copper color markings of copper hens are the same as that for the cock except that they have an overall black, coppery color at the hackle and nothing else.

The head and the hackle are more or less a strong copper color, varying from mid-copper to red-copper, this variance seems to be the result of black dominance.

Consequently, it is a little more difficult to control the ideal balance with the red-copper color than with the incorrect light-coppery tone of the hackles that is sometimes encountered. Hens with these overly light yellowish or straw colored hackles, extensive breast markings, and shafty feathers must be avoided.

The hackle feathers have a black-colored tip, the ear tufts are usually blackish fawn colored but are darker than in the cock. All the rest of the body, including the breast must be black without white feathers or other fawn shades, and without a green sheen. On the other hand, the coppery color of the hackle must also be present on the front of the neck or throat, and spread out almost down to the breast. The hens, which are correctly copper-colored, produce a very satisfactory proportion of cockerels with an ideal red mark on the breast. These two color characteristics have a very strong correlative between them; hens that have nice hackles, and cocks that have nice breasts.

We can find another color flaw in the Brown-Red hens. It's the appearance of feathers, which are speckled, stippled, with more or less light marks, fawn-colored, coppery colored, or with light shafts. They are said to have stippling on the breast and even on the whole body. Such hens have sometimes been shown as "partridge" Marans, which is totally unacceptable. The true genetic "partridge" color present in some breeds (like the wild type Duckwing) has nothing in common with these Marans hens, which can only be considered as bad Brown-Reds from which you can get nothing good. These hens often correspond to cocks whose breast red color is too spread out down to the thighs, and whose coppery tones are often replaced by a pale light fawn or straw-colored feather shades, which are considered to be incorrect. Once again, it is advisable to choose as breeding stock only the cocks or hens that are neither too black nor too pale, fawn colored, or which are a bad, light coppery, color.

The selection must maintain a fair balance between what are the best black, and the best copper shades."



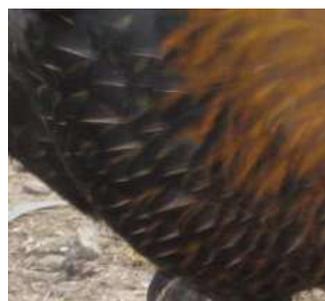
Two nice pullets in both type and feather. These will be put into the pen with a well-marked rooster. Both display vibrant copper in the neck hackles and should throw males with large strong breasts and females with a similar strong color.



typical faults in hens



Mossiness such as this in the breast is to be avoided



Shaftiness in breast feathers is also a fault



Although a nice type, the pullet above shows too much gold in the hackles and will be put in with the Birchen rooster.