

# The Silver Call

The origin of the Call duck is still unknown. Unlike the Indian Runner, where there is a wealth of recorded history, the Call duck just seems to have 'arrived' on the continent in the 1800s.

The origins of the colours are an enigma too. First recorded in dark phase mallard and white, Calls went on to adopt the 'big duck' colour in 'silver', and then acquired the black gene to go with a bib. They also picked up the blue gene from the Swedish, and stole the pied and brown genes from the Runner. Not content with that, they recently went on to mix in light phase, then maybe mallard restricted, and even invent a 'yellow belly'. Not bad for a duck which weighs 1½ lbs!

Calls now carry the basic colour mutations of most other breeds of domestic ducks. So keeping track of what they really are (and how they will breed) needs specialist skill, including an awareness of the simple genetics.

## Early Colours

In *The Poultry Book* (1867), Tegetmeier described Calls as differing from ordinary breeds in that they were small and possessed a round forehead and broad, short bill. He described the Grey (Mallard) Call as the exact counterpart of the Rouen and wild breeds not only in plumage but in legs, feet and bill. The white 'should be clothed in feathers of pure unsullied white; the bill, however, is not flesh coloured as that of the Aylesbury, but a bright, clear unspotted yellow, any other colour being regarded as disqualifying the birds from success in severe competition'.

Calls in Britain and America may have stayed in these basic colours for decades, but we do get a suggestion from Harrison Weir that,

when bred in numbers, the Dutch Calls were already producing 'blues and buffis' as he called them in 1902.

In contrast to Weir's allusion to colour, the American standard of perfection allowed just the



■ The late Wim Bialosterski, from the home of the Silver Call, demonstrating the features of the duck at the Flemish Waterfowl group meeting at Hasselt, 2002 (Photo: Mike Ashton)

White and the Grey in 1905 and even Van Gink 1941 referred only to the Hollandse Kwakerke in white and grey (wild colour). It seems that, in Britain, we had to wait until the 1960s for much variety to be recognized here, when Jack Williams of Norfolk bred numerous colours in the imported Dutch type.

## The Meeshleuter or Silver Call

Despite the lack of early written evidence, 'silver' is a fairly early Dutch colour. R.R.P. Van Der Mark wrote in his book 'Tamme Eenden' ('Domestic Ducks') in 1979 that the 'Mees' Call was developed in the twenties in a place called 'sGraveland by a Mrs. Mees. So although 'mees' is translated as 'timonise' it has nothing to do with the bird: it is just a person's name.

Wim Bialosterski was an eminent breeder of the Call in Holland. He spoke of the Silver Call at an international meeting in Belgium in 2002. This is what his notes said:

"The Silver is a mutation of the dusky. In the duck the eye stripes are absent. The specula are iridescent greenish blue. Feather markings are present on every part of the body. The colour of the head should be as brown as possible and sharply divided from the breast colour. Legs bright orange. The bill may have an orange colour. Even in drakes an orange sheen may occur, especially in birds that are in very good condition." (translation: Andy Vereist).



■ This pair of John Hall's Silver Calls, photographed at Stafford shows a hooded Silver female in 1985. The drake is too dark and was almost certainly heterozygous for harlequin phase i.e. 'Dark Silver' (Roberts, Michael and Victoria, Domestic Duck and Geese in Colour, 1986 edition, The Gold Cockerei Series, <http://www.goldcockerei-books.co.uk>)

Most of the continental Silver Calls are much better marked on the head of the female than some of the pale, washed out specimens found in the UK many of which had harlequin phase mallard rather than the proper harlequin phase dusky.



■ Best Call: Silver female BWA National at Solihull, 2007

In the USA as well, their Snowy shows the same colour type and it is these birds that have long been popular over the last two decades in the UK. Line-ups of Silver Calls at the major waterfowl shows at Solihull, Stafford, Shropshire & Mid Wales for example, have consistently produced this dusky Silver Call with the desirable hood.

From this colour type, Graham and Sandra Barnard have also developed a Blue Silver and Apricot Silver Call which differ from the standard Silver in that they also have the blue gene. The Silvers, Blues and Apricots are therefore a colour sequence of 'not-blue' / heterozygous blue / homozygous blue. So they all have the same feather pattern, which includes the characteristic dusky hood.

Note that dusky with harlequin phase produces Silver Calls with a

coloured hood and more body colour than M+ (mallard) harlequin Calls. Unlike dark phase dusks, the harlequin phase dusky males retain a claret bib (fringed with white). 'Dusky' does not mean 'no bib' in the presence harlequin phase. It does still mean 'no eyestripes'.

For the hood characteristic to show well, the birds must be dusky (not mallard, nor mallard restricted). Pure dusky birds do not show eyestripes and the hood is entire. When the dominant mallard allele is introduced, the birds develop a white eyebrow and the hood fades.

This phenomenon also happens in Silver Runners. The fawn hood is a feature of the Silver Runner (the *Silberwildfarbig* of Germany) and the Abacot Ranger (*Streicher* in Germany). The hood fades when Silvers are crossed with birds with the mallard (M+) allele and so lose the dusky allele (m<sup>+</sup>). Intensification of the coloured hood seems to be caused by a modifier gene linked to the dusky allele.



■ Silver Call female from Belgium



■ Silver Call female, Hannover, Germany



■ Snowy (dusky harlequin) from the American Poultry Association Standards. A similar Snowy is illustrated on the National Call Breeders (USA) poster.