

A Historical Perspective on the Polish Rabbit

By Grant Olson

There are a number of possible scenarios put forth as to the origins of the Polish breed of rabbit. The Ruby-eyed whites were the first variety of Polish. They probably originated in England and Germany but definitely not in Poland. They were mentioned in English rabbit raising literature by 1860. In 1884, seventeen Polish were exhibited in Hull, England. One source noted that the breeder developed them from wild rabbits. Other breeders worked with albinos from small Silvers, albinos from the Dutch breed or possibly albinos from the Himalayan rabbit to develop their strains of Polish. The Polish rabbit was known also as the "hutch rabbit" and was mentioned in one source as being a very common breed in English rabbitries.

According to an article written by Samuel E. Rice in the 1952 APRC Guidebook, W. E. Dexter of Boston, MA imported the Polish rabbit in 1912. The Ruby-eyed whites were the only recognized variety by the National Pet Stock Association for many years. Judge John Weltevreden in an article for the magazine "Rabbit World" said the REW Polish rabbit looked like miniature New Zealand Whites. Some Polish breeders imported some of the best stock from England to improve their Polish herds but were greatly disappointed in the animal's type and over all appearance. American breeders were able through selective breeding to develop Ruby-eyed whites that were not racy or blocky in type.

In 1938 the American Rabbit and Cavy Breeders Association recognized the Blue-eyed white variety of Polish. Mr. Samuel E. Rice of Saugus, MA is credited with the development of this variety. In 1920 he had purchased 6 REW does and 3 REW bucks from W.E. Dexter. He used a 2.5 lb REW buck bred to two 8 lb BEW Beveren does. It required 3 generation of crossing half brother to half sisters before he was able to produce pure whites with blue eyes. His first show with the BEWs resulted in a BOB out of 60 Polish. Judge Weltevreden wrote in his article on the Polish rabbit that BEW Polish were shown at the 1919 World Exhibition in Leipzig, Germany. These breeders used the same type of cross to develop their strain of Blue-eyed white Polish.

Various colored varieties of Polish were beginning to show up in the United States around 1932. Mr. Samuel E. Rice is credited with being the breeder behind the development of the chocolate and black varieties. He developed these two colors by initially using a 2.5 lb REW buck, a Havana doe along with a small black Rex buck. The black and chocolates were thought to have had an ARBA working standard around 1947. A number of other Polish breeders were known to have colored Polish: Mrs. Jack Ross and John Mellozzo (~1948) and since 1952, F.A. Arnold, Arnold Wolfe, Floyd Tobias, Austin Gaver, William F. Thompson, Frank Call, Andrew Bain, Charles A. Henry, the Cushing brothers and Alan L. Mitchell. In Alan Mitchell's article for the 1957 APRC Guidebook he mentioned that one breeder had developed red Polish using a New Zealand Red and Ruby-eyed White Polish cross. Some breeders used Polish/Dutch crosses as well as "solid black sports" from English Spots to produced colored varieties. Mrs. Jack Ross (APRC Secretary) used Ruby-eyed white and Havana crosses to produce her black and chocolate Polish as noted in an article written by her for Small Stock Magazine in 1949. Another very prominent breeder of colored Polish was Judge Carlton Gaddis of IN. He acquired his initial stock from Charlie Henry of Saugus, MA around 1954. He developed a black strain that consistently produced show winners and competed equally with the Ruby-eyed whites.

The blue variety of Polish proved to be the more contentious of the varieties to get approved. They were first introduced at the 1977 ARBA Convention in Houston, TX. Elois Liebman of CA was the variety sponsor. Her blue strain originated from a chocolate buck from J.B. Miller. In an ad in the 1966 APRC guidebook, John Mellozzo of NY is credited with the 1st development of the Blues around 1948. Carlton Gaddis also had Blues showing up in his blacks around 1954. This variety had been around for a number of years. The issue for the APRC membership at this time was the concern with what was happening with the Netherland Dwarfs and their large number of varieties. Members were seeing a lack of quality in these ND varieties and did not want the Polish breed to lose the quality achieved thus far by a continual addition of new varieties. Also there was confusion about the differences between the two breeds by some judges. Members want to insure that the Polish remained distinctly "Polish" and by adding new varieties might jeopardize keeping these two breeds unique. The APRC membership did not approve the variety on the first vote. However the membership continued to discuss the merits of the Blue variety in the APRC newsletter. Breeders of the variety were exhibiting them at the shows so other members could

see the quality of the animals in this new variety. A second vote was requested and the APRC membership approved the Blues as the fifth Polish variety in 1982.

The Broken variety of Polish was approved in 1998. Gail Gibbons of Cedar Lake, MN is credited with starting the development of the Broken in 1985. She used a black Broken Holland Lop with poor ear carriage to introduce the broken pattern into her Polish. She bred him to black and chocolate does. She continued then breeding broken to solids. Judge Larry Bengston initially viewed her efforts. He said they were further along in development than most first showing animals seen at the Convention. The broken's first showing was to have occurred at the 1990 ARBA Convention in Tampa, FL. However, because of a miscommunication between the standards committee with Gail Gibbons, the exhibition did not occur. The black, chocolate and blue broken varieties were needed for the exhibit. She decided not to continue with the certificate of development. Judge Rene Goedderz, MN bought a Gail Gibbons broken stock. She gave Trevor Sypnieski of Brainard, MN a very nice black broken buck. Trevor decided to continue the development of the broken variety. He bred this buck to black, chocolate and blue varieties in his herd. They were first shown to the ARBA standards committee at the 1993 Convention with final approval coming at the 1999 Convention. Trevor started raising Polish as a youth member in 1988.

The lilac variety is now in the process of gaining recognition. Enlow Walker of AK was the initiator of this effort.

Sources used in this article:

1952 and 1957 APRC Guidebook

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Phone conversations with Gail Gibbons and Trevor Sypnieski, 1/2006