

THE BLUE LEGBAR PROJECT

Patrick Reindel



Do you love blue eggs and blue patterned birds as much as I do? Well, the "Blue" Legbar may be the variety for you!

I began the Blue Legbar project began in 2016. At that time, I was relatively new to Legbars as a breed. I had always coveted the "blue egg" but, all on my efforts to get them, up until that point, had yielded only green layers. That's when I got my first "Cream Legbars" (which were actually Golden Crele and Splits from the A/B and C imports) and I got my first legitimate blue egg layers! I immediately fell in love the breed and began my journey in learning everything I could about them.

I've been raising various poultry, pheasants and ratites for over 40 year. Blue feathered chickens have always been my favorite; I just really like the aesthetic of the blue feather. As I learned more about Legbars I thought "I'd really love if these birds came in blue!" And, since they weren't out there, I set out to do it myself!

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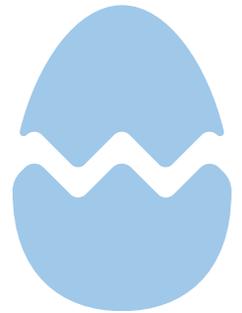
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The F1 pullets were bred back to Cream, Crele and Split males once again, different males.



In the summer of 2016 I acquired 4 Legbar males, 1 Golden Crele and 3 Cream, as well as 4 hatchery type Blue Andalusian hens. I set them up in single mating pens and began hatching away (photo on right).

The F1 generation produced as expected, producing what some hatcheries call “Cuckoo Bluebars”, about 50% black and 50% blue barred offspring. All hens laid nice blue eggs. These F1 females grew out to be nicely blue laced with light gold leakage in their napes. The F1 pullets were bred back to Cream, Crele and Split males once again, different males this time.

My intent from the beginning was to maintain 4 separate breeding lines. However, as the project progressed, they slowly combined to one line. To be honest it had been so long since I had done much in the way of poultry genetics study (and I had not educated myself on the breed as much than as I have now) I wasn't terribly sure what the results would be. The BC1 chicks hatched approximately ½ blue or black and ½ chipmunk patterned. I noticed about ½ of the BC1 chipmunk clearly visible on the chipmunk patterned offspring. The blue chipmunk pullets were kept and bred back to Cream and Crele males again for the BC2, 3rd generation.

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As I had expected at that point, the BC2 generation was fully chipmunk patterned and fully autosexing, producing clearly marked double barred males and clearly marked single barred females (pic. to left BC2 Legbar pullets. Notice the blue hue vs. the standard brownish down). The BC2 generation allowed me to check the box for autosexing as “complete” for the project. The pattern was also stabilized as the duckwing wild type patterned chicks had a blueish hue to them. I was pleased to see the blue was pattern in both males and females however, it was in need of a bit of refining.

The blue egg was the biggest issue to be dealt with. I knew, as I was repeatedly back crossing to Legbar males, my females would be blue egg layers. However, I did not know if they were OO (two copies of the blue egg gene) or Oo (one copy of the blue egg gene). This could only be found through test breeding. However, I wanted to refine the birds a bit more. I continued to select the best blue wild type patterned females of the best Legbar type and breed back to Legbar males. In my Cream Legbar pens I had bred a very nice Cream male who's only true weakness was a thin crest. The following season I bred a son from him of equal stature who was a bit heavier of body. Those two males became the foundation males for the central steps of the Blue Legbar project. For generations BC3 (4th generation) through BC5 (6th generation), the best examples of females were bred back to those males. By BC5, with the exception of crest size variation, I was producing cookie cutter pullets.

At that time I decided to test mate for the OO vs Oo blue egg gene. The winter the BC5 generation was growing out was a rough winter for me with aerial predators. I went into the Fall with 16 pullets and 5 cockerels growing out and entered the Spring with 1 Blue Gold pullet and 1 Blue Gold split for Blue Cream Cockerel (that predator issue has since been resolved). Both the male and female were test mated, the male to Bielefelder hens and the female to a Black Copper Marans male. I kept several pullets from each mating, about 10 each and gave away another 74 between the two mating, split roughly 50-50.

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Every pullet from the test matings produced a green or olive egg, leaving me confident that both birds were homozygous OO for the blue egg gene. That checked the final box. I just needed to produce some numbers!

A bit of a side bar...

In the Summer of 2019 I acquired a handful of Legbar chicks from Christine Simpson. They were the last of her line of Legbar imports from Canada. She was looking for a breeder to continue with them and I stepped up to the job. Christine's import (CS import) is a line unrelated to other Legbars brought into the US by GFF. They were brought to Canada via private ownership when their owner emigrated from the UK to Canada. Christine, who lives just over the US/Canadian border from the breeder, was able to bring back some hatching eggs and begin her flock. Beautiful Golden Crele, blue egg laying birds! I grew out the chicks and ended up with 1 Golden Crele pullet and 2 Golden Crele cockerels.

As I went through the various steps of the Blue Legbars creation, I often had Creams and Gold based birds. While the blue seemed of a consistent nature regardless of whether on a Cream or Gold base, I found the contrast between the blue and the gold to be more appealing, to me, than the contrast between the blue and cream (it would be easy enough for one who preferred Cream to transition to that color from the Gold base).



BC6 Blue Cream Legbar Pullets 15 weeks



BC 6 Blue Gold Legbar Pullet 21 weeks

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At that time I merged the CS Import with the Blue Legbar project. The 1 BC5 Blue Gold Pullet was bred to the best CS Import male (the Split) and the 1 Blue Split male was bred to the 1 CS Import pullet. From those two mating, I kept females only, as I was happy with the quality of the 2 CS Import males moving forward. I grew out 15 pullets. 2 were culled for excessive melanization and 2 were culled due to being cream colored. That left me with 11 BC6 (7th generation) Blue Gold Pullets to work with.

The BC6 Blue Gold pullets are also $\frac{1}{2}$ CS Import. They are now reaching point of lay and have been paired with the 2 CS Import males. The plan is to essentially introduce the blue feather pattern to the CS Import. All future generations will be Blue Gold females bred back to the two remaining CS Import males until the males are infertile or deceased. Thereby sustaining both the new color pattern and the new import.



Newest BC6 layers eggs on right, typical variation color on the image above.

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The creation of this new variety has been a labor of love. There have been ups and downs. Days when I've thought to scrap it all and days where I fought to save what remained. Up to this point, with the exception of some older breeding stock sold as layers, pets and stewing hens locally, the Blue Legbars haven't been made publicly available. However, I am now confident they are ready for release into the world to see if other will love them as much as I do. They will be made available in the 2021 breeding season.

All the goals set at the start of the project have been met...

Blue egg layer, Check!

Autosexing, Check!

True to type, Check!

Breeds true to BBS, Check!

And finally, clearly a Legbar, CHECK!

If you would like to learn more about the Blue Legbars please visit and join the Blue Legbars group on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/343093173401151>

You can also see learn more about the Blue Legbars and my other Legbar projects (Rosecomb, Frizzled, Naked Neck and Silkied) on my farm page at: <https://www.facebook.com/thebigRranch>

