Proposal to Lighten the Colored Illustration of the Sicilian Buttercup Male

By Benjamin Janicki & the Club Officer Team – 2020

The American Poultry Association has put together a Standard Revision Committee to review and make corrections to the next edition of the American Standard of Perfection in time for the 150th Anniversary of the APA in 2023.

To this end, the club officer team drafted a letter recommending that the color of the illustrated male Buttercup be lightened. This was discussed extensively in the club Facebook group. The officers also called up several experienced old timers who don't have Facebook to ensure the proposal had wide-reaching support.

The Standard Revision Committee plans on implementing our suggestion. See the submitted proposal on the following pages:

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In the recent APA podcast "Standard Committee - Part 1 with Bart Pals", it was mentioned that the Standard Committee is soliciting corrections from members to inform them of any discrepancies between written descriptions and illustrations. Note from 16:30-17:30: http://apaeducationandtraining.org/home/other/apa-conversations/

Based on many years of careful breeding and research, we believe the color on the painted male in the Standard is both darker than described, and darker than what throws good females. This misleads new breeders, because they choose dark males like that of the painting, and then can't get females with clear golden hackles. The standard description specifically calls for "reddish orange" in the neck, back, and saddle. "Orange" is the final, operative word, not red.

The painting in the Standard shows a much darker hackle than saddle, when the description calls for them to be almost the same color: "rich, lustrous, reddish orange" for the hackle, and "lustrous, reddish orange" for the saddle. What difference exactly does the "rich" imply? In nearly every example of actual buttercups, the hackle is lighter than the saddle, not darker. If the hackle were lightened to the color as the current saddle or somewhat lighter, that would bring us much closer to what is called for in the written description as "rich, lustrous, reddish orange".

COLOR -- MALE

COMB, FACE AND WATTLES: Bright red.
BEAK: Light horn.
EYES: Reddish bay.
EAR-LOBES: White.
HEAD: Plumage, rich brilliant reddish orange.
NECK: Rich, lustrous, reddish orange.
BACK: Bright, lustrous, reddish orange.
Cape -- dark buff with distinct black spangles, covered by hackle.
Saddle -- lustrous, reddish orange.
TAIL: Main Tail -- black.
Main Sickles -- lustrous, greenish black.
Lesser Sickles -- greenish black, edged with reddish bay, some showing black markings.
WINGS: Fronts and Bows -- bright, lustrous, reddish orange.
Wing Bars and Wing Bays -- an even shade of reddish bay.
Primaries -- black lower web edged with bay.
Secondaries -- lower web, bay with black markings; upper web, black with bay markings.
Small feathers on underside of wing having black markings.
BREAST: Reddish bay.
BODY AND FLUFF: Body -- light bay.
Fluff -- rich bay shading to light bay on stern, some feathers on rear body marked with distinct black markings.
LEGS AND TOES: Lower thighs -- reddish bay.
Shanks and Toes -- willow-green; bottoms of feet, yellow.
UNDERCOLOR OF ALL SECTIONS: Slaty blue, gradually changing to light grayish buff at base; quill, buff, becoming lighter at base.

Figures 1 & 2: The color illustration and written description in the current Standard.

In the 1929 article by a judge and past president of the American Buttercup Club, "Judging Buttercups", the author refers to the hackles, back, and saddle as orange as well. He says it should be "a shade darker and richer than most of the buff breeds". He then goes on to say that he had seen some fairly dark Buff Plymouth Rocks at a show that had his ideal color of Buttercup male hackle. He is not describing red here, he is describing a reddish buff color – in other words, orange. Here is the article:
https://www.americanbuttercupclub.org/judging-buttercups.html

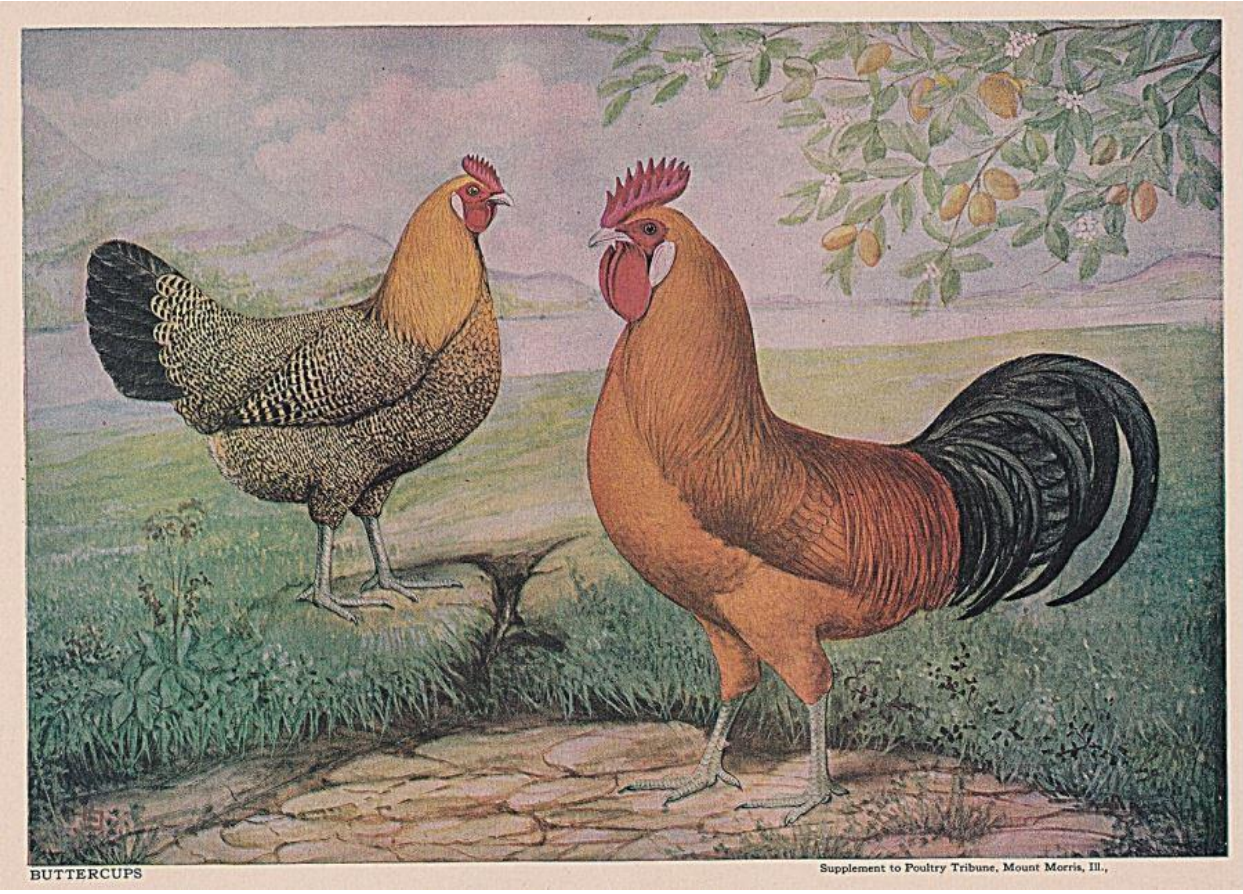


Figure 3: A painting of Buttercups that appeared on the cover of the 1928 Poultry Tribune.

Above is pictured a painting of a pair of buttercups that was featured on the front cover of the February 1928 issue of the Poultry Tribune. This was one year before the above referenced article was written, and only ten years after the Sicilian Buttercup was admitted to the Standard.

Note how much more orange the male is overall than the male that is currently pictured in the Standard. This is an orange bird, not a dark red one. And from this painting one can see how the author of the above article might compare a buttercup male to a fairly dark buff Plymouth Rock.

Also note how much lighter the breast and body color are in this painting. The Standard calls for a "reddish bay" breast and body color, and the above article calls for "reddish brown", but neither specify the exact shade. We discuss this in more detail on the following pages, but we believe the breast color on the male in the current Standard is also much too dark.

In an article by the late Carl Fosbrink in 2011, he refers to the buttercup male hackle color as a "butter color", which certainly doesn't describe a dark red. He bred buttercups for many decades. https://www.americanbuttercupclub.org/getting-started-with-buttercups.html

Figure 4: Carl Fosbrink with a large fowl Sicilian Buttercup cockerel.

The only places we could find orange as a color in the descriptions in the entire standard is under several breeds that have the varieties "red Pyle", "Wheaten", and "blue-breasted red", such as Old English and Modern Game, and in each case, the hackles are referred to as "light orange". If you see the illustration for those birds, or have seen them in person, they are a light orange color, and much lighter and more orange than what is shown in the buttercup illustration.

Figures 5 & 6: Large fowl males by Bridget Riddle on left and Barbara Bullock on right. Note the orange hackle color in both birds, and the orange eye color as well.

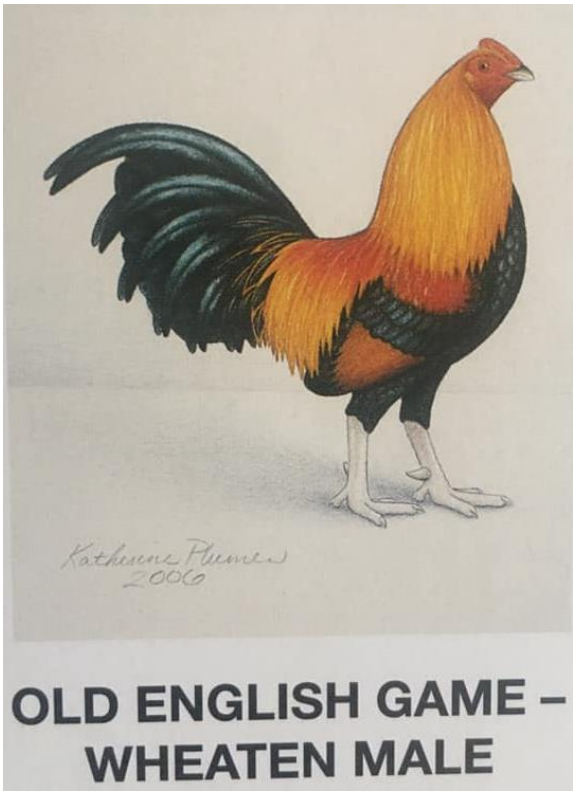
Figure 7: A trio of bantam buttercups by Benjamin Janicki.

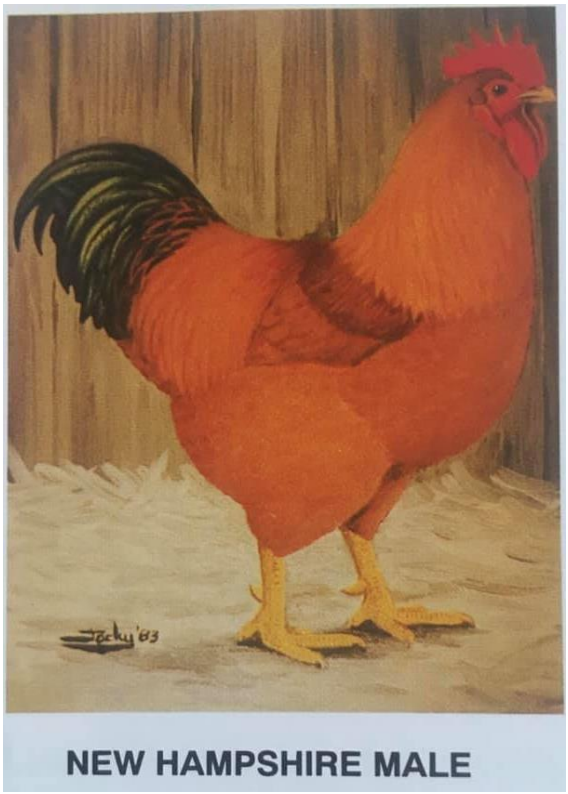
Note the breast and hackle color of the bantam male above and large fowl male below. As far as we know, these bloodlines have not seen intermixing in many decades (possibly since the original creation of the bantam), and yet both have been selected for correct female color, and have resulted in the same light breast and hackle in the male.

Figure 8: A flock of large fowl buttercups by Natascha Wille.

The breast color on the male in the current Standard illustration is certainly much darker than the breast on the males in the attached photographs and the painting from 1928. The standard describes it as “reddish bay”, which is a pretty ambiguous color. “Reddish bay” shows up all over the place in the Standard regarding eye color, including for the buttercup. If you look closely at the attached photos, the eye color on these birds is much closer to orange than red.

We could only find the descriptor “Reddish Bay” in one other place regarding plumage and it was the head plumage of the New Hampshire male, which is a fairly orange bird. Additionally, the spangles in the flank of the buttercup male would be easier to discern from the painting if the base color of the breast and body were lighter. These spangles are called for in the description, and from breeding experience they appear to be critical to throwing females with good patterning. These spangles are in the original black and white illustration of the buttercup male by Schilling, as can just barely be discerned from the color painting.





Figures 9 & 10: The Wheaton Old English male and New Hampshire male.

The Wheaten Old English male calls for a “light orange” hackle, and the New Hampshire male calls for “reddish bay” head plumage. In both cases the colored illustrations display a color much lighter and more orange than that of the buttercup male. We believe the buttercup male should have a hackle much lighter than what is currently pictured, but slightly darker than what is pictured for the wheaten Old English male, since “rich, lustrous, reddish orange” is certainly darker than “light orange”. The breast of the buttercup male should more closely correspond to the head of the New Hampshire male, since both are described as “reddish bay”. In both cases this would bring us to an illustration that more correctly matches the written description, as well as the phenotype of the live birds in the attached photos that are known to throw correct females.

Figure 11: A trio of bantam buttercups by Benjamin Janicki.

Many breeders do not bother to read the description; they just look at the picture - even judges, if the bird in question is an uncommon one. Some of us have seen judges say they preferred a darker male, when we know that the lighter males throw better females, and the written description calls for a much lighter male than what is pictured. If the picture was more accurate, we believe it would help breeders to breed buttercups that are more correct.

We wish to emphasize that we are not at this time requesting any changes to the written description, but only to make the illustration better match the description as already written.

In conclusion, we believe that the hackle and breast of the current illustration of the Sicilian Buttercup male should be lightened for the next edition of the APA Standard of Perfection. The Sicilian Buttercup male is an orange bird, not a dark red one.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely and Respectfully Yours,
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