

A History of the Chinese Owl in America

By James Moyer
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The early existence of the Chinese Owl in America has been very hard to trace. This writer has done extensive research on this breed for many years, trying to find how early the Chinese Owl was being raised and its appearance in the early pigeon shows in this country. In the year 1870 the first poultry paper "The Poultry Bulletin" was printed in America. This paper also included articles on pigeons. In it is found the earliest known show reports.

Pigeons were always included in the poultry shows at this early date. The number of varieties was also small in number. Owls are listed at early date and at this time; African, English and Chinese Owls were combined into one class for showing.

The early Chinese Owl was also called the Whiskered Owl, as noted in our early Standards. In the year of 1879 the first pigeon standard "The International Standard of Excellence for Judging Pigeons" was printed in New York by the American Columbarian Association. This contains the first Standard for the Chinese Owl in America. It is listed as the Whiskered Owl giving a total of ten points for the whiskers. The remaining scale of points was to be the same as the English Owl.

In 1886 two of the finest early articles on fancy pigeons appeared. In the April issue of Harper's Magazine an article titled "Plebeian and Aristocratic Pigeons" the Chinese Owl is called the sacred bird of China. This article has pictured an early Chinese Owl. This writer has never been able to locate any earlier prints. The Century Magazine, May 1886, has a very fine article "The Breeding of Fancy Pigeons" by E.S. Starr. This article also mentions the Chinese Owl along with the African and English Owl, describing the difference between all three breeds.

The American Columbarium Association which was the first pigeon association in America published in 1889 the American Pigeon Standard. In this Standard the Chinese Owl is included, giving it a total of 100 points, mentioning the Whiskers which extend up on each side of the neck toward the back of the head.

The year 1893 was the formation of the American Owl Club, the first Owl Club in America. The three varieties, English, African and Chinese were shown for many years in this organization. In 1895 the Sixth Annual Exhibition of Poultry and Pigeons was held at Madison Square Garden, this being the first major meet for the American Owl Club.

The third standard on pigeons, "The Pigeon Standard" by C. E. Twombly was printed in 1900. It states Frills: "As ample and well developed as possible, extending in ruffle fashion right up to the back of the ear. This is its only difference from the African Owl. There is very little difference in this Standard from the two previous mentioned Standards.

The year 1906 was the formation of the Western Owl and Turbit Club. This organization used the Twombly Standard for judging of Chinese Owls.

The forth National Pigeon Show was held in Mount Clemens, Michigan in 1923. This was the first exhibition of Chinese Owls at this National Show. The early major shows such as, Boston, Madison Square Garden, New York, Chicago and others have Chinese Owls listed in their show reports.

All through the years the Chinese Owl was always bred in connection with the African Owl. In an article found in the American Pigeon Journal, July 1930, there is a very fine article written on Owls by Charles F. Wagner. In describing the three varieties of Owls he states:” The Chinese Owl of today is no more than an African Owl with rosettes and whiskers. In type and size they are the same.” Yes, there is no doubt that Mr. Wagner’s statement was correct. The real Chinese Owl was not being bred in this country. If there were any it was certainly not recognized in the showroom. Many an old time Owl breeder remarked, “Your best Chinese Owl is just a poor African.”

For many years the Chinese Owl stayed the same, never trying to improve. It is a strange situation as many pigeons were imported from Europe in the early 1900’s, where the real Chinese Owl was located. The real Chinese Owl came into its own in the 1940’s when they were being bred by a few earnest breeders. Even then there was an uphill struggle to get them recognized. This was of course due to an entirely different Chinese Owl, one with chest frilling, pantaloons, and the head properties. There was quite a difference between the two.

In 1947 the United Owl Club was organized. This club recognized the true Chinese Owl. A Standard was drawn up allowing for chest and neck frilling, also pantaloons. From this start the real Chinese Owl was taking hold and outstanding progress was in the making. Two early breeders, Ralph Buch Brage, formerly of New Jersey and now of Madrid Spain and William A. Hawkinson, along with other early fanciers played an important role in getting the Chinese Owl to gain popularity. Importations started arriving in the country, some of the earliest from Denmark. Later birds from Germany and Spain provided the necessary stock to work with to develop the Chinese Owl we have today.

The California Chinese Owl Club was formed in 1951 by a group of fanciers from California. It had Don Andrews as President and Mr. Hawkinson its Secretary.

In 1958 the Mid-West Chinese Owl Club was organized in Des Moines, Iowa. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Thomas played the major role in getting the club organized. The first annual meet was held with the Iowa State Pigeon Association in Knoxville, Iowa. A total of 52 birds were entered at this historic meet. Several years later due to increasing popularity of the Chinese Owl, the name was changed to the National Chinese Owl Club, which is our major club today.

In 1961 the Eastern Chinese Owl Club was formed and has been active up to the present time. A Western Chinese Owl Club is also in existence on the West Coast. These three clubs provide the backbone for the Chinese Owl fanciers today. We the Chinese Owl fanciers of today can thank the early Chinese Owl breeders who wanted the real Chinese Owl and not the poor or cross-bred African, also the devoted breeder through the years for the success we are enjoying today.