

The History of Chinese Owl Imports in America

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Through the years the Chinese Owl always carried African Owl blood. This was due to the fact that the fanciers wanted the heads of the African on the Chinese Owl. This breeding took away a lot of the frilling and many times they had little or no pantaloons. This was the bird found in the shows and the real Chinese Owl was ignored. Around the beginning of the 1950's, William Hawkinson Sr. of California, an early breeder, plus other fanciers, formed a club, The Chinese Owl Group, to sponsor the real Chinese Owl. This was a start and helped to promote the breed which was very badly needed.

The breed finally took hold when the Midwest Chinese Owl Club was formed in 1958. A real standard was written and the artist, H.P. Macklin, did the drawing of the Owl. The popularity of the bird increased in the Midwest and the East. Now the fanciers were breeding to improve the real Chinese Owl throughout the whole country. The Owl in those days was a poor specimen compared to what we have today. But, it was a start and the controversy in the show room was something else. Many times you had the two different types of Chinese Owls being shown. Many of the old breeders with the African heads would not approve of the new standard. Within a few years the birds with the African heads were no longer recognized due to the standard and the importations into this country.

In the year 1957, living in my hometown of Hamburg PA, Arlan Yerger, who is no longer a fancier, and myself imported from Spain the Chinese Owls with the Spanish chorrera blood lines. Ralph Buch Brage who was at one time living in New Jersey and had Chinese Owls, moved to Madrid, Spain, where he then crossed the Spanish and European Chinese Owl.

These first imports were a sight to behold. They had the frilling which was lacking in this country. Many had bad tails (forked,) large and long in body and legs. The ingredient was there in the birds. It was like baking a cake; you put it together until you got what you needed to breed toward the standard. A shipment of 50 birds consisted of: Blue Bar, Blue Check, Black, and Red Check, also solid Black and several Lavender colored birds. A year later, 1958, another importation was made and from these two shipments the Chinese Owl got its real start and popularity increased immensely. The formation of the Eastern Chinese Owl Club and later the Western Club increased the promotion of the breed.

Another important factor at this time was to get judges who were familiar with the breed and to judge to the standard. Here in the East, John Jensen and John Seisler, the African Owl breeder, did the judging and knew what we were looking for. Orman Forcht and Art Kehl were two judges that come to mind at this time for the Midwest Club in those first years.

In 1964 I made arrangements with Brage to make another and last shipment. It consisted of 18 birds: Blue Bar, Blue Check and a few mealy Bars. Also included were two pairs of Blue Spanish Owl Pouters that I included in the shipment for Don Andrews of California. They were the first breed in America and I doubt if any have arrived since. They were a very scarce breed in Spain.

John, this is about all of the information that I can come up with at this time. I do want to mention that I had a Blue Bar cock that lived 19 years and a Blue Bar cock in the 1964 shipment that lasted for 18 years and finally passed away in 1979. I know you had seen the last cock bird.

These Spanish importations are the foundation of the Chinese Owl in America with the dedicated breeders over the years making the Chinese Owl what it is today.