

"TO CHANGE OR NOT TO CHANGE"

Written by Wm Murkley Jr.

It had been 20 years since I first looked serious at the show scene and found myself in a dilemma. Do I want to continue breeding my Baldhead Rollers for show, like always, do I want to introduce something new to change them, or do I just throw in the towel? If I bred them like always and stuck to my views, I would just find myself at the end of the classes and show report. But if I change them, who do I go to? The latter is totally against my character as I am a competitor. Most all of this originally came from premonition on my part. I could sense that a majority of people wanted a change in our standard, which was adopted in 1979. Now you must realize I originally got my line from a Mr. Ted Nieman who had the Baldheads for 50 years and bred them for color and mark, etc. I acquired them in 1972 and had bred basically the same with a few minor changes.

It was now 1990 and time to get behind the 8 ball. At this point I had every bird standing on the perches going into the breeding season with 10/10 flights, clean undercarriage, perfect bibs and the style and type that was in the winning circles at that point and time. I had no Baldhead breeders to go to who could help me out with the attributes I needed. I went to some prominent Show Roller breeder's and started my mission with four new birds.

During the next two years I raised several youngsters and taking the F1s back to my original line. Some pairs I just continued to select in the direction I felt necessary. After viewing my F1 offspring, which I bred back to my old line, I discovered something-it will not work! My genes for color, mark, and type were so solid, that all young would revert back to my original phenotype.

At this time I had written several articles in regard to the change I wanted, but to no avail. I wanted to keep the graceful lines, size, color, and feather the way it had been for so many years. Not only because I liked it, but I spent eighteen years with this line trying to keep it that way. Also, I was afraid they were getting the birds too big, more like a Utility breed.

Soon, the new standard arrived with tremendous change, as expected. It was now 1992, and a few breeders were already on their way. Some were first starting out, and had gone out and selected some birds to work with. Some had a family of Balds, but not real solid in their gene pool, etc. New names began to surface at the top of the show reports. At this point I realized one must really deplete their old gene pool and surface new genes to the new standard. The big question I had to ask myself, "Where do I go for a group of birds to breed into my family?" I knew I must still go to a Show Roller breeder for the extremes I needed, then cross them with my stock to keep some color and mark in line.

After much thought and insight into some Show Rollers, I found myself at the door step of Mr. George Petro of PA. I selected some birds from his family for two different reasons, I liked his family of birds, and he selected his family very much the same as I had, only for different traits. So my mission was now in place and it was now time to put it to work. With the new influx of blood, I began to see a big change in my birds. With the number of mismarks and odd eyes, came a few well-marked birds. Suddenly, I saw an explosion in my birds in 1995! I now witnessed new type, style, and markings in depth.

In 1996, the real test was about to take place. On January 4th, 1997, the ABRC- URC National was to be held at Watertown, Wisconsin. While placing some of my birds to their correct classes, I began to notice we had quite a group of birds (247 to be exact) in the Baldhead classes. Not really

knowing how I would really do in the competition, I was hoping to place very respectively, anyway. Surprisingly, I found in the finals, I had four of the top five young hens, two top five old cocks, two top five young cocks, one of the top five old hens. Now the count down had began and the real test was here. With the best old cock, old hen, young cock, and young hen up front, the judge thoroughly inspected them, turned, and pointed to the Tort Young Hen (#664 belonging to yours truly) and pronounced it **CHAMPION!**

How sweet it was! The ultimate, winning the National. To make things even nicer, were the thoughtful fellow fanciers who congratulated me. A few approached me commenting "I know how hard you worked to change your birds, I am so happy for you." Those were the nicest words one could hear from a fellow fancier and very much appreciated! Along with that, the mother of the champ was picked 3rd Reserve, and another young hen of mine was 4th Reserve,

My goal now will be to stay competitive, and try and help those interested in how I accomplished my mission.

The next step is now up to you in asking yourself, "To change or not to Change!" Good luck to all of you in your future showings.
