

FUR AND FEATHER



PIONEERS OF THE FANCY

In 1930 the British Fur Rabbit Society introduced the Marking of Rabbits and Dr J N Pickard urges fanciers: "United We Stand, Divided We Fall"

The year 1930 sees for the first time the compulsory marking of all rabbits in competition for championships granted by the British Fur Rabbit Society. We were pioneers in the movement and much opposition was encountered in the early days. Credit is due to those fanciers who saw that it was a step in the right direction, and who first brought forward for discussion the question: Can rabbits be identified by marks that cannot be obliterated? Should they be so marked? How can they best be marked? Can the prejudice against it be overcome?

Some years ago a scheme was launched whereby any member so choosing was assigned certain letters as a sort of Trade Mark. This, along with numbers, was either to be pierced through the ear of a rabbit when quite young, or carried on a ring to be fixed also whilst the animal was under ten or twelve weeks above the joint of the hind leg, the left for preference.

No great enthusiasm was aroused for the scheme, and very little marking of rabbits came to the notice of the writer. The objection was raised by many that to tattoo the ears of the youngsters meant pain, and many refused to adopt it.

Such a method, apart from the pain, was found to be not in favour for other reasons: there was the possibility of infection, the machine had to be sterilised before use, it was costly for breeders to have their own, and the system of loaning and getting back was troublesome and not easy to work, it did not serve as a complete identification, either by accident or design more rabbits than one could bear the same tattoo mark.

As the pioneers of Marking the Society called a conference which was held at our Exhibition in December 1928, in order to obtain the feelings of the various clubs and individuals on the subject. It was then decided to call for the attendance of more delegates at the Summer Exhibition in 1929 at Melton Mowbray.

This was duly held and a big impetus was given to the movement. A committee was formed to take the necessary steps to found some permanent organisation.

This information about a new ringing scheme was written by G W Kiln for the British Fur Rabbit Society's 1930 yearbook. In the same publication Dr J N Pickard (then secretary of the National Rabbit Council) wrote of his desire to see all fanciers linked together through one central organisation (see below and facing page). It was an ambition realised in January 1935 when the BFRS merged with the NRC to form the British Rabbit Council and Dr Pickard was appointed its first secretary, running the BRC from his office at the Institute of Animal Genetics, Edinburgh (pictured right).



After considerable negotiations and discussions, a Company was incorporated on the 23 December 1929, as a Company Limited by Guarantee, not for profit and without shares, to undertake the marking, recording, registering of transfers of marked rabbits, the recording of wins for championships on a National scale, under the style of The National Rabbit Marking Council Limited.

The B.F.R.S. contributed by way of loan a sum of twenty-five pounds towards the initial expenses of forming and starting the Company. The Company will carry out the original intentions of the Society, viz., to popularise and systemise the keeping of records of rabbits marked with its letters M C and certain serial numbers. No two rabbits can receive the same number.

The system is at once so simple and so complete that provision is found for the recording of some MILLIONS of rabbits.

As the Company is really the offspring of the B.F.R.S. it looks for full support from all the members of the Society. The rings will be distributed on application to the secretary; it should be stated for what breed of rabbit they are required, and they should be placed on the animal when it is between six and eight weeks old.

Any surplus after payment of costs will be distributed among the clubs affiliated to the N.R.M.C.

The advert printed in the 1931 BFRS yearbook



How to Strengthen and Co-ordinate the interests of Rabbit Breeders

by J N Pickard

The key to real success is in the sequence: "UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL." If every rabbit keeper of the British Empire was associated with one organisation, its strength would be such that (if the necessity arose) it could bring far greater pressure to bear in official quarters than is possible at the present time.

It is far from my intention even to imply that officials are lacking in sympathy to the rabbit industry, but now, when approached on matters of importance, they are in the difficult position of deciding whether the application is the true wish of the majority of breeders or whether it may have detrimental effects on any section.

If the rabbit breeders of the whole empire were linked together through one central organisation, it would be more than possible that financial assistance from public funds might be obtained for certain activities.

The broad outline of such an organisation as I have in mind would be one which extended its scope to the entire British Empire. It should be composed of private breeders who would join as "Direct", "Independent" or "Individual" members, paying an annual subscription of about 10/- (Editor - approx. £45 in 2018). These members should be entitled to such benefits as competing for valuable prizes on the show bench, the securing of championship certificates, etc., and certain advantages from the industrial point of view. In addition to these, every local club or society including rabbits in its activities should be affiliated with direct representation on the governing Council.

Prize winning Steel-Grey Dutch, 1894

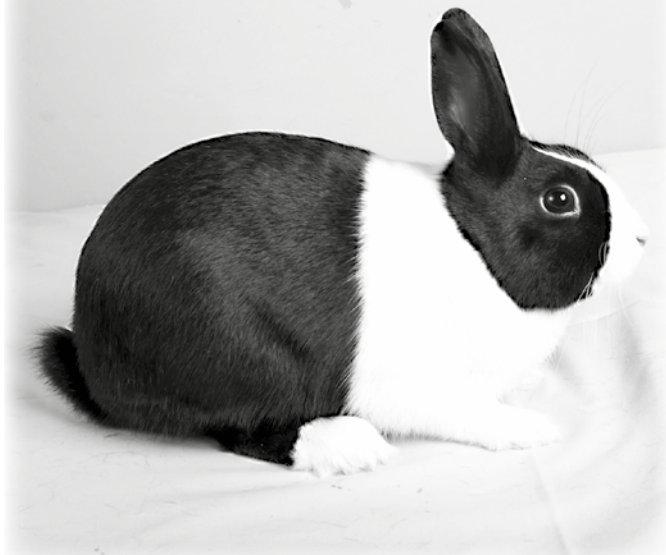


Steel-Grey Dutch Doe, Champion "Sunbeam."

Winner of First, and Special for the best adult Dutch, at the Sheffield Dutch Show, First at the Crystal Palace, and over sixty other First and Special Prizes at all the leading Shows.

THE PROPERTY OF MR. JAS. BOLTON, HOGHTON, NEAR PRESTON.

Prize winning Black Dutch, 2016



Evolution in your shed!

Paul Keen writes:

The question of the encouragement and advancement of the various breeds as opposed to the rabbit world as a whole, is a more difficult problem. My personal view is that, if and when, such a central organisation comes into being, the formation of breed committees would be the wisest course.

This, I know, is a dream of the far distant future, and the best step at the present time would be the formation of one specialist club for each variety, which in turn should be affiliated with the central body.

These specialist clubs should be allowed complete freedom for independent action in so far as their own breeds are concerned. There should, however, be some mutual agreement between them and the central organisation regarding support in actions against offenders to the well-being of the rabbit world.

The existence of one main organisation only in the rabbit world would mean the accumulation of funds; the elimination of much duplication of work and – by far the most important – the unification of the interests of the rabbit world in general.

To achieve this the personnel of the governing committee or council would have to be most carefully considered so that each brand should be fairly represented. Fur, Wool, Fancy and Flesh are all of equal importance in the rabbit world, and each is closely linked to at least two of the other sections.

The leading officers should be men or women with good business experience and organising ability and if possible they should be "all round" persons, who are associated with more than one side of rabbit keeping. In my opinion all offices should be honorary, but a sufficient grant should be made annually for clerical assistance over routine work.

Such then, is a brief outline of my ideal – one great organisation as a guardian parent to all rabbit breeders of the British Empire. May the time not be far distant when my dream will actually become a fact.

J N PICKARD, Ph.D., MA (1930)

"We in the rabbit fancy watch the process of evolution live every day – it happens in front of our eyes."

The theory of evolution was discovered by Charles Darwin (1809 to 1882) following work by a French man Jean-Baptiste (1744-1829) a soldier who carried out practical work in the laboratory.

Fast forward to the work and the joint discovery of DNA by British scientists in 1953. See (below) these Wikipedia quotes on how they contributed:

1. "**Charles Robert Darwin**, FRS FRGS FLS FZS was an English naturalist, geologist and biologist, best known for his contributions to the science of evolution. He established that all species of life have descended over time from common ancestors and, in a joint publication with Alfred Russel Wallace, introduced his scientific theory that this branching pattern of evolution resulted from a process that he called natural selection, in which the struggle for existence has a similar effect to the artificial selection involved in selective breeding."
2. "**Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck**, often known simply as Lamarck, was a French naturalist. As a soldier, biologist and academic, he was an early proponent of the idea that biological evolution occurred and proceeded in accordance with natural laws."
3. "**Francis Harry Compton Crick** OM FRS was a British molecular biologist, biophysicist, and neuroscientist, most noted for being a co-discoverer with James Watson of the structure of the DNA molecule in 1953, work

which was based partly on fundamental studies carried out by Rosalind Franklin. Together with Watson and Wilkins, he was jointly awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 'for their discoveries concerning the molecular structure of nucleic acids and its significance for information transfer in living material.'"

Improvement is in our hands

We fanciers, whether we know it or not, are practising evolution with every mating – it is all about setting goals for yourself. The trick is sticking to it and seeing a change in real time.

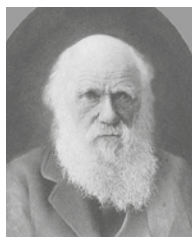
Take my own breed, Dutch. In the late 1800's the Dutch rabbit was so very different from those bred today, but the standard has not changed, with breeders dedicated to move ever nearer to type and colour.

Looking at these early pictures (see above) the adult Dutch rabbit had long ears, long head, and two links too many in the middle; coat length was long and varied. Now fast forward and compare the standard to the modern Dutch rabbit: that is Evolution!

So set your goals and score them; have in your mind where you want to be and set about to produce the stock to get you there.

I enjoy the challenge every year, setting my goals and trying to achieve them. Think and plan and set up your next move – it will perhaps be the biggest game of chess ever!

Paul



Charles Darwin



Francis Crick



James D. Watson



Maurice Wilkins



Lamarck