

MEET THE FANCY'S PIONEERS

3: THOMAS LEAVER



Thos Leaver came into prominence in the rabbit fancy when the new fur breeds were introduced to this country after the first world war ended in 1918. He imported some of the earliest Chinchillas and produced his own strain of Sables. He also created the Chifox and the Opposum Rex.

Along with E C Richardson and others he helped to create the fur board; he was also a key figure in the British Fur Rabbit Society the forerunner, along with the Beveren Club, of the National Rabbit Council and later of the BRC, serving as President, Life President and Chairman of the Council.

Leaver played an active part in the formation of the F&F ring scheme in the 1930's, but it was as a judge, administrator and Fur & Feather writer that he made his greatest contribution to the smallstock world.



THE CHINCHILLA AND ITS DERIVATIVES

by Thomas Leaver

Written in 1930 for the British Fur Rabbit Society

With the coming of the Chinchilla rabbit those of us who saw it at once realised that it possessed attributes so unique as to promise something in the way of a revolution in rabbit culture.

The idea of rearing rabbits for their pelts, so long neglected, had just begun to arouse attention, and the shortage of wild furs hastened the growing conviction that it was to the domestic rabbit that we must increasingly look to make good this deficiency.

The almost priceless Chinchilla of Peru and Chile was rapidly approaching extinction, and now for the first time a rabbit had been produced with coat properties that might fill the demand for a natural grey fur that wild life could not longer supply.

Great interest was attracted to the new variety, and in the space of two or three years it had become one of the most widely kept rabbits in these islands.

Yet within the Chinchilla there lay dormant potentialities none of us could possibly foresee or even dream of, and it is with these that I propose to deal particularly in this short article.

Much discussion and argument had arisen as to how the Chinchilla originated. Was it a mutation of Dame Nature, or was it the result of chance crossing or scientific selection?

The answer has not yet been satisfactorily given, but just as we are able to identify a tree by its fruit, so, it seems to me, we may, with a fair degree of safety, determine the blending or mixing of colours that have gone to the building up of the modern Chinchilla.

We were told by M. Dybowski, from whom English breeders obtained so large a proportion of their foundation stock, that the Chinchilla – claimed by him as his own creation – came

into being as the result of the crossing of a white, a blue, and a wild grey rabbit, and that subsequently for some reason of his own – more or less obscure – he introduced black and tan.

The results of my own breeding experiments certainly bear out to a very great extent the truth of M. Dybowski's assertions.

At one time we were presented with a so-called "Chinchilla muddle", British breeders were accused at having mongrelised the new breed by promiscuous out-crossing, and there was a degree of truth in the charges levelled against some of them.

Novices were urged to discard all stock that could not furnish an unimpeachable birth certificate.

Yet, after all the bother had died down and the stormy surface had once more reverted to the normal, there still remained the outstanding fact that the alleged Simon-pure was far from innocent of guile.

Even in stocks that had been rigorously guarded against possible contamination there soon began to appear quite an assortment of peculiar odds and ends.

Not to speak of simple albinos, which crop up at time in all varieties of animals and birds, there were self black and agoutis – blue and brown – blacks with tan markings and ticked with white, yellow shaded Chinchillas, and youngsters, blue-fawn in colour in the nest coat, that afterwards moulted out brown.

Most of these early arrivals shared an untimely fate, but, fortunately for mankind in general, some folk are inherently curious, and so here and there specimens of these little freaks were allowed to survive, and from them we have been able to amplify the variety of our fur breeds in a very remarkable manner.

One of the first to become established was the Sable, now one of the most popular of the newer breeds. In its general make-up it bears evidence of Black-and-Tan ancestry, though it sprang directly from the Chinchilla.

Occasionally we hear claims made by one individual or another to be the original breeder of the Sable. Suffice it to reply that any such contention cannot be substantiated, for the simple reason that the Sable, like Topsy, just "grewed" and came, shall we say, as a mutation in Chinchilla litters with entirely orthodox "babies" to keep it company.

It came in both Marten and Siamese form, and in dark and light shades. Now, after several years selective breeding, it still pays tribute at times to its grey parentage, although it is rapidly being stabilised, and promises to be a most valuable asset from the pelt producers' point of view.

Closely akin to the Sable are the Chinchillated blacks, since adopted and standardised by the British Fur Rabbit Society, and dignified by the imposing if somewhat inaccurate title of Silver Fox.

These blacks have always been very frequent visitors in Chinchilla litters, and if kept together are found to be quite true breeding, and as they carry a very useful pelt, and are possessed of considerable charm and beauty, are quickly coming to the front. The blue is similar to the black in pattern, and an attractive alternative colour.

Definitely apart from either of the last mentioned, there is another variety that must not be overlooked. Sometimes called the blue Chinchilla, it is a slate grey rabbit, dark at the base, lighter towards the surface of the coat, and carrying a top ticking of the darker slate, with a white belly similar to the Chinchilla, and slate undercolour.

Owing to a resemblance to the grey squirrel of Siberia, it has had conferred upon it the name of Squirrel, and it differs from the Chinchilla in that it reproduces itself with absolute fidelity. For this reason alone, quite apart from its intrinsic worth as a pelt proposition, it is likely to have a wide vogue.

Occasionally, of late, attention has been drawn in the show pen to a very handsome rabbit, to which the name of Smoke Beige has been attached. Again we must hark back to the same foundation to account for its existence.

Although actually derived by chance matings of Sables, the Smoke Beige certainly bears face evidence of the blue, white and tan influence ascribed to M Dybowski's Chinchillas, and I have in my rabbitry at the present moment a variation of the beige, in which a rich cream replaces the ground colour, and a reddish brown ticking the smoke effect of the latter. Probably there are in existence other by-colours of which more will be seen in the near future.

My story would be incomplete without mention of the Chifox. At the time of the "muddle" controversy referred to earlier in my article, one of the principal charges made against the producers of certain strains of winning Chinchillas, was that Angora had been plentifully introduced, with the consequence that "woollies" and ghosts had become far too prevalent in the subsequent progeny.

The Chifox may be considered to have had its origin as a direct result of this practice. It was found that a proportion of the long coated Chinchillas had fur that was something very different in texture from any other rabbit.



It was distinct from the ordinary Chinchilla in the length of hair, and from the Angora in its absence of woolliness. It derived its composite name from the fact that the first specimens were Chinchilla in colour, with fur not unlike that of the fox, i.e Chin-fox in a more concise form.

But just as have come the various colours in the short-coated descendants of the Chinchilla, so also Chifox have since been obtained without the slightest admixture of other blood, in sable, squirrel, silver, black, white, blue and beige. There are, of course, other colours, but as these have been produced in other ways it is

unnecessary to deal with them here.

In conclusion, mention may also be made of the Chinrex, the Sable Rex and others, in which the rex characteristics have been successfully implanted on the original types, but I think sufficient has been said to illustrate and to emphasize the remarkable part played by the Chinchilla within the short space of ten years in the wonderful development of our leading fur breeds.

To be continued

NATIONAL NETHERLAND DWARF INTERMEDIATE SHOW AT ESSEX

Our first visit to Essex Championship show for our 2018 Intermediate show and Jodie judging her first national show. A good entry, thanks for your support.

However, despite the entry there were, as always, a lot of exhibitors who did not attend. I know National shows can't all be "home" shows on your doorstep, but it would be great to see more of our 300 members showing.

As a National Club, we rotate the intermediate show around the UK to try to give everyone a local show. We are currently looking for nominations for our 2020 Intermediate Show. Next year's show is in the northern area, at Bury and Radcliffe show, we look forward to your support

With three different dwarf judges, the classes were judged in different orders to prevent a queue. Jodie was moving through classes with confidence that defies her limited judging experience and before long winners began to emerge.

Even though the entry was pleasing, it is still disappointing to see so few REWS shown at national shows. It wasn't that long ago that the REW class had over 20 exhibits. The same applies to Agouties and Sables. The quality however is better than ever, the dwarf has evolved into a much bolder exhibit than dwarfs of the past.

Simon was busy taking those superb photos of people and dwarfs that make the National Dwarf so popular throughout the world, I still can't believe

how many people click on the website after a stock show.

As is always the case when there are multiple shows, stewards are always in demand, many thanks to everyone who rolled up their sleeves and donned their white coats – I even had to put on my National Dwarf apron, and help out.

With three great book stewards, the results were coming thick and fast to keep Deb busy. My receipt book was also in full swing, selling from our new range of merchandise, show towels, grooming bags and T shirts all proving popular. It was too warm for the people to wear their National Dwarf hoodies but there were a few T shirts on view. Full details are on our website, order yours today, just let us know the size and you too could be part of the NNDRC team!

Things were drawing to a close on the tables, the winners beginning to emerge. BIS, repeating their success of last year, was Remlap Stud with a very smart black otter,

which Emma also made best in the East Anglian Show. In the Essex Champ show, Nigel went best with a stunning REW, again many congratulations.

We had a really great day at Essex Champ show, many thanks to the Moss family for being our hosts for the weekend, see you all next year in Manchester.

Gary Hodson



NNDRC - Essex
Judge: Jodie Atkinson
Best Junior (see report)
BIS - Remlap Stud