Chickens – Bantams

Bantam means, “Small and miniature,” which is truly what these small fowl are often times around ¼ the size of the large fowl and a fraction of the weight. This makes them an excellent pet as many can easily be tamed; in addition their small size easily makes their living cost cheaper.

# Characteristics

Bantams are very small and mostly less than 2 pounds with Serama (the smallest chicken breed) hens weighing 11 ounces. Bantams as chicks are very small and may be trampled by the larger chicks which may lead to death, this may carry on to when they are adults where excess space may be needed to prevent fighting and give everyone some room. As bantams age they will gain weight thus when breeding, careful management is needed to manage the proper weights for the breeds. Bantams usually feather out in 6 to 9 months depending on whether or not they are hard or loose-feathered. In addition the true coloration may take a couple of months to become apparent.

Bantams often lay small eggs, 15-20 ounces per dozen which will gradually increase in size as the bird continues to lay. Broodiness is also rather frequent in feather-legged breeds such as Cochins and Silkies in particular, the bantams that lay white eggs are rarely broody. Bantams have a fine meat texture and flavor yet older birds may need to be cooked longer, slowly and, with plenty of moisture.

# Raising and Caring for Bantams

When starting to raise any fowl obtain good vigorous stock from an established breeder and keep good records as well as some offspring from all pairings to note quality and to help prevent inbreeding. A young rooster can usually take care of 2 through 8 hens where an older cock can take care of 1 to 5 hens. Artificial Insemination is also noted however general good breeding practices can help improve the quality of your birds. In addition, make sure your birds have plenty of room for your “pets”; a minimum of 1 square foot is recommended although having more space is better.

Eggs are generally incubated for 21 days at 99.5 to 100 degrees F with plenty of humidity provided by either a broody hen in a dark private area with 8-11 eggs depending on the size. The eggs are turned multiple times daily by the hen, where in an incubator you may need to turn the eggs by yourself (preferably an odd number) unless the incubator itself turns them. At the 18th day the eggs should no longer be turned and by the 21st the eggs should hatch.

Bantams are smaller then other chicks and can live for 72 hours off of their yolks however the sooner they are started of food and water the better. Brooders manage the temperature and keep the temperature at 95 degrees temperature which is dropped by 5 degrees each week until 70 degrees or until fully feathered. A mother hen takes care of the chicks and weans them, providing heat much like a brooder or heat lamp would.

Water is an essential nutrient which should be continually provided to birds. Grit should be provided if the birds are eating large grains and grass. Calcium helps with eggshell structure. Bantams require a smaller amount of food as long as it fills the nutritional needs.

* Day 1 to 8 weeks; Starter Mash that is 18 to 20% protein in crumbles
* 8 weeks to 16 weeks; Starter mash and chick scratch mixed gradually until the chick scratch represents half of the food at 10+ weeks grower mash can be substituted.
* Mature Birds; ½ scratch and ½ hen scratch for birds not in production; for birds in production, egg mash with grain, and oyster shells.
* Breeding Birds; A breeder mash should provide extra nutrients which can help with healthy chicks.

Housing should protect birds from the weather and predators and must be draft free. Adequate space should be provided with 3 square feet for a trio or 1 square foot per bird. Ventilation and light should also be provided with easy access to food and water.

# Diseases and Parasites

Bantams are fairly resistance to disease and feeding a coccidiostat will help prevent Coccodious (ruffled feathers and blood in the droppings). Bronchitis is a rapidly spreading respiratory disease with a vaccine available. Pullorum is a horizontally transmitted disease identified through a blood test.

Parasites are both internal and external and good management can help prevent parasites, worming for the internal parasites is recommended at 12, 16 and 20 months. Dusts are also available for de-lousing.

# Classes

Bantams have six classes based off of physical characteristics. All standard breeds generally have a smaller counterpart in addition there are a few True Bantams, bantams with no accepted counterparts.

**Game Classes** include Modern, Old English and American Games.

**Single Comb Clean Legged Other then Game Bantams Class** includes all single combed breeds including the small Dutch Bantams and Japanese Bantams.

The **Rose Comb Clean Legged Bantams Class** includes all rose combed varieties of large fowl breeds including Belgian Bearded d'Anvers, Rosecombs and Sebrights.

**All Other Combs Clean Legged Bantams** include those with pea, cushion, strawberry, buttercup and V-shaped combs.

**Feather Legged Bantams** welcomes the addition of Booted, Belgian Bearded d’Uccles and Silkies.