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## BALKAN LONGCROWING CHICKEN BREEDS

**Text and photos:  
Hristo Lukanov  
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**Left: Black Sanjak longcrower.  
Photo: Hristo Lukanov<sup>©</sup>**

*The article is an extended part of the  
book "Exhibition and decorative poultry"  
Volume 1, written by Hristo Lukanov*

**More than one thousand chicken breeds are nowadays known worldwide, belonging to larger or smaller groups (egg-laying, meat-type, dual purpose, fighting, true bantams, miniature breeds etc.). One of the smallest groups is that of 'longcrowing' chicken breeds.**

The name comes from the ability of roosters to prolong a crow for an exceptionally long time, which distinguishes them from all other domestic and wild chicken breeds. Within the group, breeds differ with respect to the timbre, crow duration and power. Usually, the crowing itself lasts from 10 to 20 seconds, while in some Denizli and Kosovo Longcrowing roosters – up to 60 s and more.

It is believed that this mutation in chickens emerged in Asia, approximately 2000 years ago. The first reports on longcrowing roosters are from Ancient China, and several centuries later – in Japan (*Komiyama et al.*, 2004). Most probably, longcrowing chicken breeds have spread from Asia northwestward, towards Russia and eastward: to Asia minor and Europe. Another possibility, although less probable, is the independent occurrence of the mutation in different locations in Asia and Europe. The Denizli breed is created on the lands of modern Turkey, probably during the XII-XIII century (*Scrivener*, 2006; *Schmidt and Proll*, 2014). Denizli chickens or their predecessors are the most probable ancestors of longcrowing European breeds – Bergische Kraeher, Kosovo Longcrowing, Bosnian Longcrowing, Sanjak Longcrowing (Sandjak Kraeher), Berat and Yurlov Longcrowing. It is suggested that Bergische Crowing were imported in Bergisches Land from the Near East during the medieval crusades (XII century vek) (*Six*, 2015). Genetic studies have confirmed the relationship between Bergische Crowing, crested chicken breeds and those with barred plumage (*Six*, 2003). The first information about Balkan crowing visually similar to modern Kosovo Longcrowing can be traced back to the XVI-XVII century (*Lukanov*, 2012).

Fig. 1 is a picture of Jacopo Ligozzi illustrating a Turk with a rooster resembling a Kosovo Longcrower. An even earlier connection between Balkan Longcrows and those from the Bergisches land is possible.

Six (2015) presents a picture of a stuffed Bergische rooster from the end of the XIX century exposed in the Leipzig museum. This bird resembles both Bergische Crows and Kosovo Longcrows (Fig. 2) and suggests an association between West European Bergische Kraeher and Balkan Longcrower breeds. Later, during the XIX century, Yurlov Crows appeared in Russia (Penionzhkevich, 1939). They are crosses of local chickens with heavy Asian breeds and probably, were used for fighting (Moiseeva et al., 2009). The long songs of Yurlov roosters resulted most probably from the introduction of Denizli blood (Sevastyanova and Alexandrov, 2003).



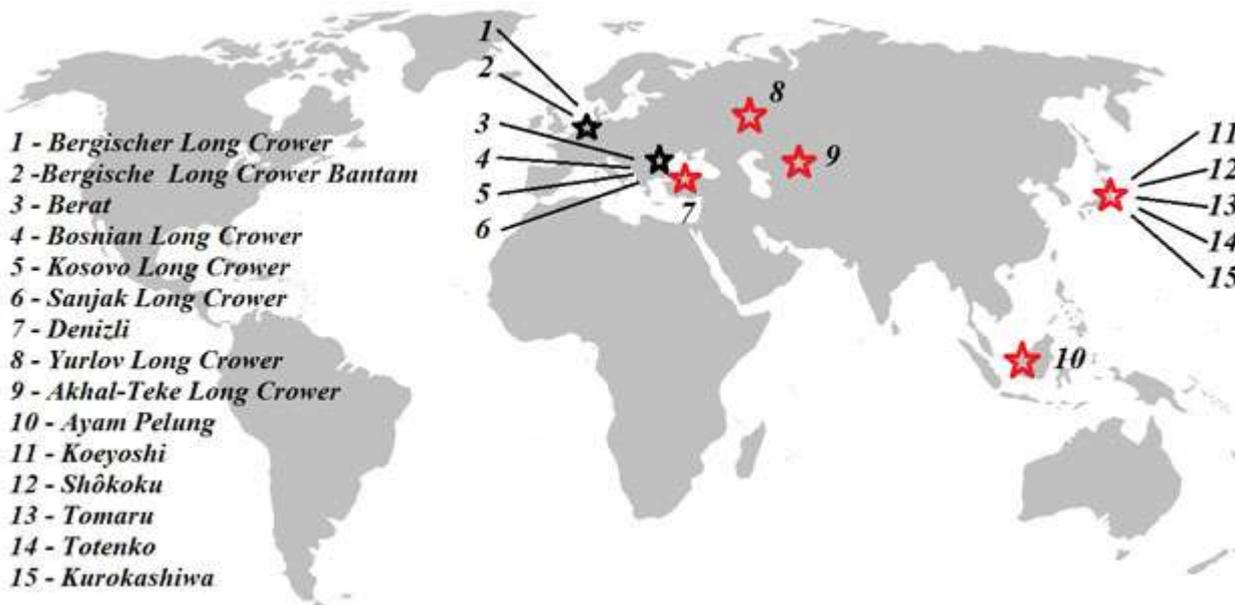
**Above, right, Figure 1. Jacopo Ligozzi's painting (1547-1627) presenting a Turk with a rooster.**



**Left: Figure 2. Bergische Kräher rooster from the end of XIX<sup>th</sup> century in the Natural History Museum in Leipzig (Six, 2015).**

The group of longcrowing chicken breeds comprises 14 standard and one miniature breeds. Their geographic distribution is as follows: 7 breeds in Asia; 6 breeds in Europe and 2 – with a medium position (Denizli and Yurlov Longcrower). The location where each of the breeds has emerged is illustrated below:

**Figure 3. World map of the longcrowing chicken breeds.**



There is an Indonesian chicken breed outlined with a specific staccato crow of roosters - Ayam Ketawa or "laughing chicken". They combine the unusually long crow with a characteristic stuttering of the song. The only miniature longcrowing breed is the miniature Bergische Kraeher, created in Germany in the early 1900s (Schmidt and Proll, 2014).

On the Balkan Peninsula territory, several longcrowing chicken breeds have been created: Kosovo Longcrower, Bosnian Crower, Berat and Sanjak Crower. They appeared during the Ottoman rule. Available information is scarce, the oldest evidence about chickens resembling Kosovo Longcrowers dates back to the end of XVI and the beginning of XVII century (Fig. 1). Western European breed standards do not match the standards accepted in the Eastern Europe and the Balkan, where the variation of traits is relatively broad due to the different selection purposes, in the different breeding locations of Balkan longcrowing breeds. In general, two groups differing in their exterior traits and geographical location could be distinguished. On the one hand, there are the crested Kosovo Longcrower and Sanjak Crower, and on the other, Berat and Bosnian Crower, which are closer to Denizli chickens.

In the land of modern Kosovo and South Serbia, old longcrowing chicken breeds known as Turkish crower or Drenica are preserved. In Albanian, the breed name is Kendingjat (meaning longcrower). After the separation of Kosovo from Serbia, the birds's name was changed to **Kosovo Longcrower** and under this name, recognised by EE. From a political and historical point of view, the breed should be more correctly called Balkan Longcrower with two types: Kosovo and Serbian. The birds reared in Kosovo differ substantially from those reared in Serbia. The Kosovo Longcrower is more widely spread and today, apart in Kosovo, it is encountered in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany and other European countries. The European standard of the breed was prepared on the basis of the Kosovo type. These birds are graceful and lower in stand, with elongated body and a smooth transition between the saddle and the tail. The tail is wide-based and relatively long, the legs are light with greenish tint (Fig. 4 right). The Serbian type of Kosovo Longcrowers resembles a more primitive bird, whose exterior traits are close to the drawing of Ligozzi (Fig. 1). Their body is more compact, with a highly set, medium-width tail, and usually, with dark legs. (Fig. 4 left).



**Figure 4. Kosovo type (right) and Serbian type (left) of the Kosovo longcrower (left – Hristo Lukanov<sup>©</sup>, right - Wikipedia).**

The Kosovo Longcrower has a helmet-type crest, but in both types (Kosovo and Serbian), the ordinary type of crest is also seen, frequently coupled with the absence of a comb. Similarly to other longcrowing breeds with V-shaped comb, the nostrils of Kosovo Longcrowers are of the cavernous type. Kosovo Longcrowers, especially those reared in Kosovo, hold the record for longest crowing. There are records of roosters whose song exceeds 60 seconds. Usually, songs are of 10-25 second duration. Unlike other breeds, the song of Kosovo Longcrowers is spontaneous, hoarse, resembling an annoying rasp.

The body weight of roosters is 2.5-3.0 kg, and that of hens – about 2.0 kg. The standard colour of the breed is black, although blue, black with red-brownish shoulders, white and mottled birds are also seen.

One breed, closely related to the Kosovo Longcrower, has become familiar to the poultry breeders worldwide only in 2014/2015 due to the efforts of Muhamed Kurtagic from Serbia. Its name is **Sanjak Longcrower** or **Rogaš**, in Albanian „Pulat boshnjake“ which means Bosnian chicken. The crest and comb shapes are similar to those of the Kosovo Longcrower, but body size is considerably larger (Fig. 5). Roosters have a body weight of 4.0-4.5 kg, and hens – 2.5-3 kg. Sometimes, roosters could attain up to 5-6 kg. Rogaš chickens have tall legs, with a medium-sized, wide-base vertical tail. The neck is long, strong and well feathered. These are exceptionally massive birds, the voice of roosters is deep, powerful, the crow lasts for 10-20 s. Colour varieties include black, blue, black with red-brownish shoulders, mottled and white. The breed was created decades ago, most probably in the first half of the XXth century, in the Sanjak region of South Serbia, but is also encountered in East Kosovo (Metohiya). The breed was created with the participation of Kosovo Longcrowers and big long-legged birds resembling Berats. This hypothesis is supported by the region of origin of birds (Sanjak), located at the boundary between Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo. On the other side, exterior features of birds resemble those of the Berat breed while the head traits are specific for Kosovo Longcrowers.



**Figure 5. White Sanjak breeding flock. Photo: Sanjakcrower. (Wikipedia-Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0)**



The **Berat** chicken breed is one of the rarest in the world. It was most probably created centuries ago, in the region of modern Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Denizli-like chickens, brought in these areas by Turks, are its possible ancestors. Today, this breed is reared only in Turkey while it is extinct in its homeland. Bosnian crows are similar to Berats are probably share a common origin. Berat chickens are tall, with long neck, legs and thighs, medium-length vertical set tail, dark legs and eyes, and white feathering. The comb is from the rose type, while the wattles are red. Although the feathers appear uniformly white, a more careful observation could identify small pale striations and roosters could exhibit single dark feathers in the tail. Some of exterior traits of Berats could also vary. The rose comb in the progeny of some heterozygous individuals could be of the single type. Split wings and sometimes feathered legs are commonly encountered.

**Above: Figure 6. Berat cockerel in Bulgaria (Hristo Lukanov<sup>®</sup>).**

The legs are dark, but some birds can exhibit greenish legs. Sometimes, apart white chicks, the progeny of white-feathered parents could have also dark chickens, whose colour pattern resembles that of silver pencilled Friesian hens. The hens lay white-shelled eggs (Lukanov, 2012). The body weight of roosters is 2.5-3.0 kg, and that of hens – about 2 kg.

In Turkey, Berat chickens are used as breeders for obtaining white Denizli chickens (Fig. 7). Unlike Berats, white Denizli chickens have a single comb and orange-red eyes.

**Right: Figure 7. White Bosnian longcrower rooster. Photo: Sanjakcrower. (Wikipedia-Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0).**



The **Bosnian Crower** breed, reared in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, is close to Berat and Denizli chicken breeds. It was imported in Germany in 2005. These chickens are also white, although other feathering colours are also seen. The comb is single (rosecombs are also seen), and the colour of earlobes varies from white, whitish to pure red. The eyes are light, orange-red, the legs and the neck are long, and the tail – relatively highly set.

### **Distribution**

The Kosovo Longcrower is most popular in Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia. Single breeders are known to exist in Bulgaria, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and other European countries. The Sanjak crower is reared in South Serbia and East Kosovo, and since 2015 – in Austria. In 2016, the Rogaš breed was imported in Bulgaria as well. Few birds from the Berat breeds are reared in Turkey, and in 2015/2016 were introduced in Bulgarian and the Netherlands. Bosnian Longcrows are popular in Bosnia and Herzegovina, few birds are reared in Germany as well.

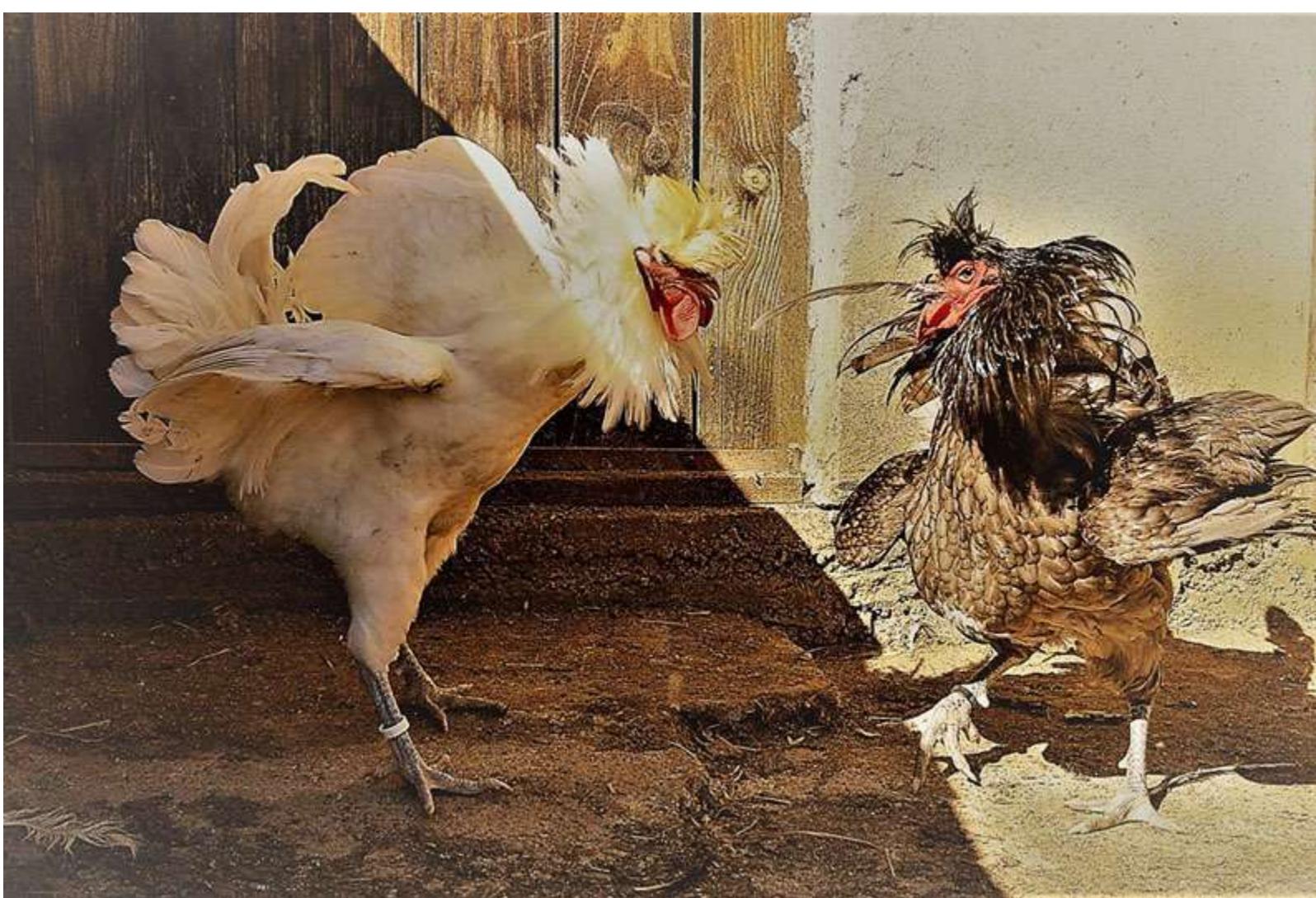


**Above: White Sanjak longcrows. Photo Hristo Lukanov.**

### **Specific features of Balkan longcrowing chicken breeds**

Balkan longcrowing chicken breeds are typical representatives of endemic chickens, they are exceptionally vital and undemanding. They could be easily reared both in aviaries and in free-range systems. Balkan longcrowing chickens mature relatively early, except for Sanjak crows. The egg laying performance, especially in Kosovo and Sanjak crows is satisfactory, hens lay about 150-180 eggs with white to light creamy colour of the shell. The weight of eggs is about 55 g (Kosovo Longcrower) to 60-65 g in Sanjaks. The egg

production of Berat and Bosnian crower chickens is lower, eggs are also white to light creamy, but of similar size (53-60 g). Meat performance is average, slaughter age is about 6-7 months, or later in Sanjaks. The taste and flavour of meat are excellent. The sex ratio is from 1:12 to 1:16, while in Sanjak crows should be narrowed: up to 1:10.



In general, for the purposes of exhibition poultry breeding, these chickens are reared in smaller breeder groups. The roosters are exceptionally aggressive, both to other roosters and men. The young roosters should be preferably separated after 4 months of age, or after 5 months in Sanjak crows. The hens are fearful, with good flying abilities and easily overcome 140-160 cm fences. These breeds are suitable both for decorative purposes, and for egg production in backyards. It should be remembered that they were selected in European regions where exhibition poultry breeds is not as well developed as in Western Europe. Balkan longcrowing chickens are not consolidated to the extent observed in birds bred in Western Europe. There are variations in the colour of feathering, legs, even the type of birds.

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