

Seeing Red

By Megg Miller

Sergio Bestulic sees red every day; he is developing a flock of Bourbon Red turkeys. Situated on two acres in the Camden area of southwest Sydney, he finds the lifestyle block perfect for a hobbyist wanting to keep a good number of turkeys happy.

'I do most of the work with the birds, but my wife Vicki and kids do get pulled into the day-to-day chores, whether it's providing fresh food or water or penning the turkeys up at night', Sergio said.

Starting Off

Turkeys were not a species high on the list of must-haves for Sergio, it wasn't until he had a snake problem that he became familiar with them. 'My neighbour Michael Peel gave me a Bronze hen and a Bourbon Red gobbler to run around the paddock to help out with snake issues. Several months later they got taken by a fox, and very generously my neighbour gave me a pair of Bourbon Reds. This kick-started my interest in Reds.

'Looking for quality stock to develop a line proved difficult as people either mis-categorised their birds (there is a difference between Bourbon Red and Buff) or they were simply not what I was looking for. In the end I picked up a beautiful hen from Daryl Deutscher (Deutscher's Turkey Farm in Victoria) and haven't looked back', Sergio said.

Goals and Challenges

Sergio became fascinated by the turkeys and says that he set out to learn as much about them as possible. He also wanted to see if he could successfully incubate, hatch and rear a clutch of poults. Being the sort of person who does things by the book, and perfectly at that, he successfully incubated and reared a clutch of 10 poults.

'It was after this I got talked into entering a couple of my turkeys in the Sydney Royal. Being new to it all my only expectation was to gain experience, but to my surprise not only was experience gained but also several awards. Since this initial success my goal has been to produce the best Bourbon Red line of turkeys within the next five years. I've made steady progress over the past three years with



Fritz, Sergio's home-bred Bourbon Red gobbler, an impressive example of this rare variety.

each batch producing better quality birds than those from the previous year', Sergio said.

To date he hasn't been plagued by common turkey problems like disease, infertility or poor hatchability. In fact, he says he has found the species relatively easy to work with, applying the same principles he has used in looking after fowls. This is great news because such an approach doesn't always work with turkeys.

'My main challenge has come from foxes. Securing perimeter fencing and penning birds in secure accommodation at night has helped reduce the losses to foxes. My other challenge has been a less dramatic one – keeping up with pen building. Just when I think I'm set up and have enough pens... another is required!

'I believe turkeys are more susceptible to illness than other birds we've kept, that is, chickens and quail, so I'd encourage

any newcomer to turkeys to familiarise themselves with signs of oncoming illness and to isolate and possibly medicate the bird to ensure its return to health again', Sergio advised.

A Champion Bird

Success has been achieved this year for Sergio with a gobbler he bred and calls Fritz. 'He is unique in that I saw something special in him from a very early age. He just stood out in colour and stature so I tagged him much earlier than I would normally tag a bird and kept a close eye on him.

'He is a beautiful rich red with good tail colouring and a fairly passive temperament. He also constantly displays, it's almost as though he likes the attention.

'Fritz's winning success at the Camden Poultry Show earlier in the year was overwhelming. He took out first in his class, Best Turkey, Champion Land Fowl in

Show and Grand Champion Bird of Show.

'Fritz did very well at this year's Royal Easter Show too, taking out first in his class, Champion Bourbon Red, Reserve Champion Turkey and a special award. He then appeared in a segment on turkeys on the morning *Sunrise* show in Sydney filmed on location at the Royal Easter Show.

'He's going to be taking a well-earned rest in the forthcoming months before being asked to fulfil stud duties. And I certainly plan on showing Fritz again next year, but if all goes well he will be accompanied by his offspring.'

To contact Sergio to talk about turkeys ph: 0405-221-283. ❖



Standard for Red and Buff Turkeys

Bourbon Red

Male

Plumage is rich dark brownish red, feathers edged in black except on the neck, where they are solid colour, the primary and secondary wing feathers, which are solid white, and the tail, the main feathers being white with an indistinct red bar crossing toward the end so a continuous red band is created.

Females

Females display a similar plumage colour to that of the male (in reality it is always considerably lighter), but free of black edging, instead narrow white edging is found on breast feathers.

Undercolour should be red, fading to salmon close to the skin.

Both sexes: Beak is horn colour, eyes medium brown and legs and feet pinkish red, the colour deepening with age.

Buff Male and Female

Plumage on the Buff variety is a deep cinnamon brown (this is a yellowish brown), the colour even over all the body except for the wings, where the primary and secondary feathers are white, free of buff markings.

Note: the *British Poultry Standards* now allows wing feathers to be very pale buff, almost white and the tail to carry a pale band of edging at the tip.

Some Australian breeders believe that Buff and Bourbon Red stock have been mated together in past decades with both varieties being adversely affected. It is rare to see Buff of an even shade with most, especially the females, displaying noticeable cream or pale buff bibs on the top of the breast.

Beak is light horn, eyes dark hazel with a blue-black pupil and legs and feet flesh pink. ❖

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