



GANECA

THE BLACK CASTELLANA CHICKENS and GANECA

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The Black Castellana is one of our most famous chicken breeds. This ancient Spanish breed is known not only in Spain but in all Europe, having fanciers in England, Austria and Germany, among others. Last year, in 2010, members of the Black Castellana Friends of Spain (GANECA) travelled to Germany to visit the Special Club of Castellana Breeders, the oldest association for Black Castellana. This association was founded in 1960 and celebrated its 50th anniversary with a special exhibition. GANECA participated in this exhibition and won a prize for the best chicken breed.





Origins of the Black Castellana

This black Spanish chicken is one of the oldest European breeds of chickens.

Christopher Columbus travelled to America with these chickens in the 15th century because they were favoured by Queen Isabel "the Catholic". These chickens also got to Flanders in the time of the Spanish King Charles V. Many of the current black-coloured hens that exist in Europe (Minorca, Spanish) come

from our Black Castellana. This assertion, popular among enthusiasts and breeders, has been confirmed by genetic studies that have been made in recent years.

More recent proof is the definition of its first standard in 1926 by Don Enrique P. Villamil, an important person linked to Spanish poultry. It is therefore one of the first European chickens to have ever got a clearly defined standard.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Castellana was one of the most commonly used chicken breeds in Spain to obtain white eggs. In those years there were selected strains, with an annual production of 220-225 eggs. This breed was forgotten because of the advent of industrial poultry breeding and hybrid chicken breeds, kept in cages. The production of white eggs became a monopoly of the Leghorn. The Black Castellana arrived on the edge of extinction according to FAO data (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

Currently, the Black Castellana is included in the National Program for conservation, improvement and promotion of livestock breeds (Royal Decree 2129/2008), under Annex I, in the Official Catalog Livestock Breeds of Spain. The Black Castellana is listed as endangered.



Our Black Castellana

These chickens are completely black with iridescent blue-green, more pronounced in the cock. It's a lightweight, dynamic, vigorous and proud

breed. The chickens are so light that they can fly up onto branches in trees, to sleep and be safe from predators.



Rooster standard

- Face red with white ear lobes.
- Median comb, smooth and right, with five or six serrations, deep red. The posterior lobe slightly away from the neck.
- Wattles red, long, wide and parallel.
- Beak medium and strong, black and horn coloured.
- Big eyes, with iris from orange to reddish brown.
- Neck long and slightly arched.
- Back long, sloping slightly down towards the tail.
- Breast wide and prominent.
- Tail arched and almost at a 90 degree angle (not closed, the "squirrel tail" is considered a defect).
- Wings large and tight.
- Shanks thick, unfeathered, dark slate with four straight toes. Toe nails can be white or black.
- Ring diameter is 18.
- Weight: around 3 kilos.

The hen is smaller than the rooster. The rear half of the comb falls to one side, but without covering the eye.

Ring diameter for the hen is 16.

To improve the breed we should exclude those birds with any white, red or brown in their plumage. Only pure black specimens will serve in the breeding pen. Do not breed from a female with perfectly straight comb or excessively fall. Feathered shanks are another serious defect. Good selection can remove all these defects.





Above: The comb of the hen falls with a single fold to one side, without covering the eye.

GANECA: association of breeders of the Black Castellana

After years of a large group of people who had years of breeding this breed decided to create an association called "Association of Friends of the Castellana Negra Chickens" GANECA.

The aims and objectives of the association of breeders are:

- Breeding, recovery, improvement and dissemination of the breed.
- Collaboration with public administrations on projects for the conservation of indigenous breeds.
- The promotion of outreach activities and exhibitions to bring citizens a better knowledge and welfare of indigenous breeds.
- The promotion of awareness through cultural events about indigenous breeds with special attention to the schools and juniors.

Right: The chicks are also black, although some yellow down may occur but will disappear later; same as a partly yellowish toe will later become fully slate gray.



The majority of the breeders and members of the club are in Castilla and León, although there are members from other regions such as Madrid, Extremadura and Andalusia. All partners get involved in the **selection** of the breed from two perspectives: the phenotype (its external appearance) and the genotype (its genetics). With this selection we can maintain the rustic traits of the birds and improve egg laying to reach the levels that the breed had in early twentieth century.



Left:
A local market in Spain, selling local and organic products (animals and vegetables) including Castellana chickens.

Thanks to the important work of selection that is being done, Jesus Rabadán, GANECA founding partner, has been honoured with national awards in Spain, three consecutive Mediterranean awards, as well as best results at several European Shows and the **European Show 2010** in Germany.



Left: Members of GANECA and "SV der Züchter der Kastilianer" after having received the prize (Dolberg, Ahlen, Germany)

Inbreeding

In 2010, several members travelled to Germany to find quality breeding males and avoid the problems of inbreeding that are

generated when individuals with kinship are being crossed repeatedly. Thus in GANECA the loss of genetic variability in reared specimens is prevented.

To improve the quality every year, individuals with faults are selected out and we breed with only the best. Thus, Ganeca achieves a good selection, getting **high-quality** chickens that would get a high score at any exhibition.

But GANECA chickens do not only “look prettier.” We know that the viability of the breed, according to the provisions of Royal Decree 2129/2008, is to find the real value. So now we already have two partners who are producing **organic eggs, certified** by the Organic Agriculture Regulatory Council of Castile and Leon. In addition, trials are being used in determining the true potential of the Black Castellana, in what concerns its value as utility breed.

Right: Promoting the Castellana and comparing egg colours of Basque (= light brown), Penedes (=dark brown) and Castellana Negra (=white).



Another objective of GANECA, contained in its statutes, is the dissemination and knowledge of the breed. By means of participating in local and regional exhibitions and fairs, we reveal the Castellana Negra. The older visitors fondly remember their grandparents had this breed of chickens.

For more information, please contact:
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Ganeca is a Spanish national Association of breeders and supporters of the local breed Castellana Negra chickens. We want to share our interest with anyone who wants to learn more about the breed, raise their chickens and promote it in contests and exhibitions.