

BLANC DE HOTOT



erived from Hotot-en-Auge, geographically nestled in a lush green valley of Normandy near the port of LeHavre in Northern France, an area known for its apple cider and superior dairy products, comes the name and the rabbits we call Blanc de Hotot (White of Hotot).

Madame Eugenie Bernhard, chatelaine du Calvados, who owned a large rabbitry of Geant de Flanders (Flemish Giants) and Geant Papillion Francais (Checkered Giants), has been given total credit in originating the Blanc de Hotot. It should be noted that Bernhard was one of the very few women of the time who created a new breed of rabbit, as it was pretty much a man's thing. Eugenie Bernhard's goal was actually to produce a large white rabbit with black eyes of multi-purpose qualities for meat, fur and show. The actual year which she began her breeding program to produce the Hotot rabbit is rather clouded. However, published dates lead us to believe it was in 1902. She first undertook crossing the Papillions with various white rabbits of the time, including the White Vienna and White Flemish Giants. These crosses did not give her any great results. Bernhard consulted Jeanne I Lemarie, who was the creator of the Large Russian (Large Himalayan), and she explained that she created this new breed strictly through many years of selection using only the Himalayan. Bernhard then resolved herself to work only with the Giant Papillion Francais. Through process of elimination, Bernhard saved only the animals which were lightly marked. A mental picture can easily be drawn of the tremendous goal that the bar-

oness had set for herself and the numerous (500-plus) matings, that would produce the Hotot rabbit we now have today.

The first markings to disappear were the flank spots. The ears and spine markings proved to be extremely difficult, in spite of the various splits in these markings. The last



Dedicated to the late Margaret Henderson of New Mexico, who received the second shipment of Blanc de Hotots to America. Margaret loved her Hotots and maintained them until her health failed and she was forced to give up her rabbits.



Madame Eugenie Bernhard, with what was called the Giant Blanc de Hotot. Photo taken October 14, 1914.

of the markings to fade were the eye circles (bands), being almost impossible to eradicate.

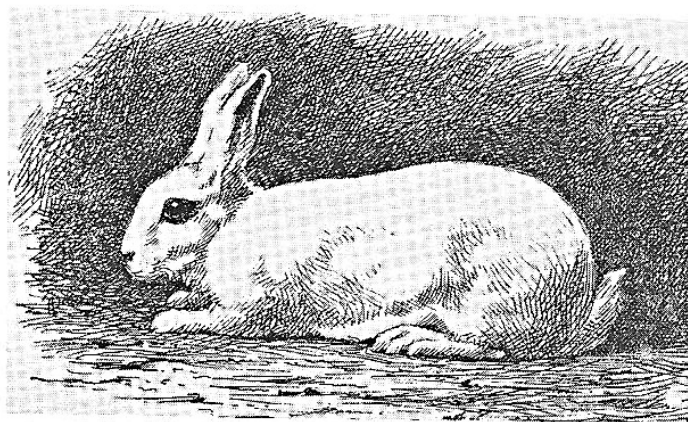
Several years would pass, and Eugenie Bernhard would refuse to sell any of her stock, as litters were still throwing the marked rabbits. Mr. Frederick Joppich, a great German judge and breeder of the Hotot for over 30 years, confirmed this, stating, "The marked rabbit throw-backs were nearly impossible to eliminate, as in the English Spots and Checkered Giants." The Hotot rabbit we now have had the desired characteristics since 1912.

Until World War I, the Blanc de Hotot was not known under an actual name. In his journal, Eugene Meslay talked of a white giant with black eyes of Madame Bernhard. It was not until 1920 that Mrs. Bernhard showed the breed for the first time at the Exposition Internationale d'Aviculture in Paris, calling the breed Geant (Giant) Blanc de Hotot.

The standard established by Bernhard was officially recognized and accepted by the Commission des Standards de Francaise on October 13, 1922. In the original French text, there is no mention of the black bands around the eyes, but of black eyelashes and lower eyelids, more or less colored gray. Entries at the Paris exhibition from 1923 to 1930 comprised about ten animals, with the most being shown in 1927 with a total of fifteen Hotots. During World War II, the breed nearly vanished in France. Switzerland imported the Blanc de Hotot in 1927, and it was here that the breed found the greatest recognition of all. Berne, Switzerland and the surrounding area became known as the "stronghold of the Hotot rabbit," as reported in *Revue Avicole*.

Frederick Joppich, was probably the greatest supporter of the Blanc de Hotot, having begun raising them in 1930 and maintained a large rabbitry of them, appreciating their fertility and fine meat-producing qualities. It was unfortunate that Joppich would become trapped into eastern sector of

German when the country was divided, and would die just mere days before the "Wall" came tumbling down in November of 1989. Although the breed was pretty much locked up in East Germany, credit must be given to Doctor Kissner, who started in 1960 to spread the breed



Earliest known illustration of the Blanc de Hotot, France, 1920.

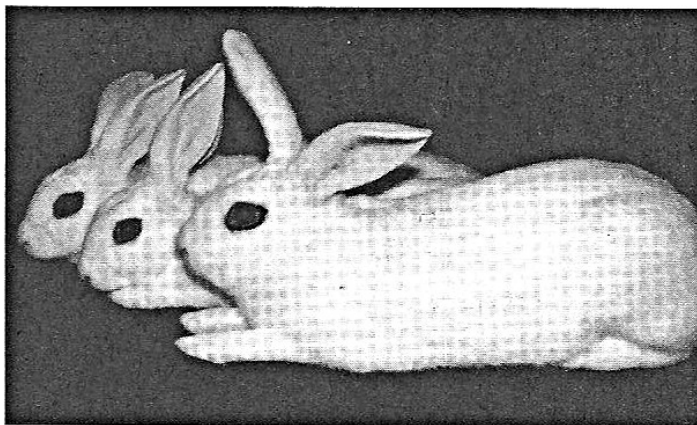
throughout the Federal German Republic. At the big Stuttgart show in 1970, there would be 62 Blanc de Hotots entered. In Holland, a well-known rabbit fancier, in the person of L. Hamaker de Haarlem, recreated the Hotot by crossing the Lorrains and Charlie English Spots. His work was published in the Dutch review *"The Rabbit Stockbreeder"* on May 31, 1955, which confirmed the same process that Mrs. Bernhard used at the turn of the century.

The early French Standard makes no mention of the glasses or eye band, as Bernhard actually worked very hard to eliminate them completely and was successful in some cases. When the Swiss took up the breed, they seemed to appreciate the unique markings of glasses, and bred for the qualities, which give us the Hotot of today.

While living in Saudi Arabia, this author went to Paris with a friend to bring back a Burman cat, but while there I visited the French Federation of Cuniculiculture and secured addresses of Hotot breeders. Upon returning to Arabia, I contacted these breeders and arranged two shipments to be sent to the states. The first shipment of two pair, with the does mated up, arrived in Houston, Texas at 2:45 p.m. on June 25, 1978. This shipment came from Mr. Fernande Eberti of Saint Louis, France. The second shipment I had sent to my dear late friend, Mrs. Margaret Henderson, of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The three does and one buck arrived on July 2, 1978, and came from Mrs. Silvea Amen of Castres, France.

The first litter of Hotots kindled in the U.S. came on July 24, 1978, and consisted of eight: six Hotots, one Boxer (a Charlie with just one eye band) and one Silver Piebald (similar to a mismarked Dutch, yet the black sections would silver out as in our Silver Fox). These mismarked animals were never used in the breeding program.

American's first public viewing of the Blanc de Hotot was at the New Mexico State Fair when Henderson and I exhibited two 6/8 does. These rabbits were judged per the translated French standard on September 17, 1978, by Judge Jack Munhenk.



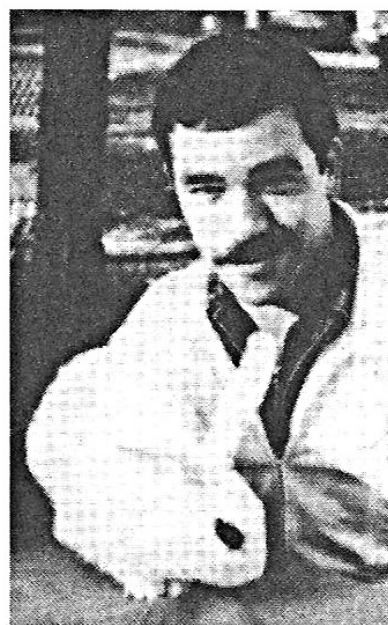
Three of the original Blanc de Hotots brought to America, June 25, 1978.

Eleven Hotots were presented at the 55th ARBA Convention at Saginaw, Michigan where the ARBA Standards Committee recommended the acceptance of the Blanc de Hotot to the Book of Standards. On March 5, 1979, the ARBA approved the breed into the organization when the standard was published in Domestic Rabbits magazine May-June issue, Vol. 7, No. 3.

Fourteen interested fanciers joined together and founded the Hotot Rabbit Breeders International, with the ARBA approving and accepting application for charter on May 21, 1979.

Tucson, Arizona would be their first official showing at a National Convention in 1979. Oren Reynolds did the honors of judging the breed, with an outstanding entry of 41 animals. By the close of the convention the Club boasted a membership of 64 and steadily growing.

Those early Blanc de Hotots, although good in size, were certainly a rough lot, when dealing with the hindquarters, but the fur was beautiful, uniquely long and the most wonderful frosted white sheen. In order to improve bodies, breeders mated in first White Beverens, so not to lose that fur. Other breeders chose to cross with White New Zealands and White Satins, and though the bodies have

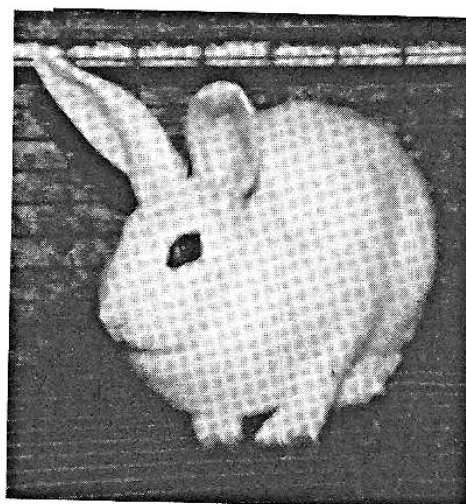


A not-so-gray author in 1978 after the Blanc de Hotot was approved by the ARBA Standards Committee in Saginaw, Michigan.

been greatly improved, that frosted white fur seems to have been lost.

The Blanc de Hotot today, though rare, has a very dedicated following of breeders determined to keep the breed alive in America. Demand for stock is always high, and attempts are currently underway to introduce new blood for the gene pool from Europe.

Now you may be wondering why it is just called Hotot today and not Blanc de Hotot. Well, that is a good question. The breed was accepted as Blanc de Hotot, in the 1981 through 1985 Standard it is listed as Blanc de Hotot. When the ARBA issued their official Guide Book in 1984, the name appeared as just Hotot, with the 1986 through 1990 Standard listing also as just plain Hotot. No one seems to know just how or why the name was changed.



America's first Grand Champion Blanc de Hotot, bred and owned by Walt and Bernadine Hawkins of Salinas, California.

BLANC DE POPIELNO

Poland is the home of the Blanc de Popielno rabbit, and is locally known as the Bialy Popielnianski. It was developed by the Institute of Popielno and recognized as a breed in 1986, with the stud book being maintained by the Central Animal Breeding Office. Blanc de Popielno is a rather unique cross using Polish rabbits (the breed) with Giant Whites, which are probably the Giant Blanc de Bouscat of France. This midget to giant breeding has produced an ideal meat rabbit for Poland in the medium-size class. Rabbits are well developed, with shoulders and rump at the same depth, with no dewlap allowed in either sex. This all-white rabbit with pink eyes weighs in at 4 to 5 kgs. Litter size is typically eight kits.

BLANC DE VENDEE



France is the home of the Blanc de Vendee, and was created by Mrs. Douillard in 1911. The type of the rabbit is said to be a "reversed mandoline," and is an all-white rabbit with pink eyes. In a special rabbit issue of *The Life in Champagne*, on June 15,