

## **Securing a Poultry Breed with the help of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust**

### *Introduction.*

We all love and admire 'our' breed. It's a breed that was put together for a special purpose in a special culture - and in its time it 'worked'; and for that reason alone it is worth preserving.

What RBST alerted us to is the fact that its survival all depends on healthy genetics. Any breed – cattle, sheep, goats – or poultry – with less than 300 breeding females is genetically 'an endangered breed'. And that means Andalusians and all of the 'targeted breeds' are ENDANGERED. What follows is an outline of the programme the Andalusian Network followed over three years with the guidance of the RBST, and for us it worked.

1. First you need to carry out an accurate, simple survey to find out how many cocks and hens there are in the UK and where they are located. At this stage you are not interested in show quality specimens, just numbers.

Send a survey form with a Stamped Addressed Envelope to each known breeder; and if they don't reply within a fortnight, chase them, and if all else fails, ring them up.

Spread the net wider. Investigate Facebook and the websites, delve into e-bay, write letters to poultry and smallholders' magazines. It's surprising what comes out of the woodwork.

2. Next, from the resulting list, you need to identify up to four 'volunteers' to form a 'Breed Project Group'. These breeders must agree to set up 1-2 or even 3 separate pens of your breed with separate cockerels and separate groups of hens. These pens should be maintained over a three year trial period. During the three years there should be no 'exchange' between the separate flocks. (In effect you are establishing four separate genetic blood-lines).

This is a big ask. So the chosen breeders have to be fired up to recognise what a challenge this is, how privileged they are to be chosen, and to believe that this really will bring home the bacon.

Which implies that there must be at least one person – the driver – who believes passionately in what you are doing.

3. Having set up your pens and hatched your chicks, you now need to mark them in some way – rings, tags, some other – so that in two years' time, you, the

RBST, the RPS, DEFRA and any prospective purchaser, will know who is related genetically to who.

4. Having ‘marked’ your chicks you need to feed the information – tag number, when hatched, sire, dam – into the RBST database (Cloud-Lines), who will then process the information so that by the end of the three years’ trial, each bird will have a pedigree, like the one for a pure-bred dog from the Kennel Club. (The RBST will hold your hand and advise you on how exactly to feed information into the database).
5. The Project Group will work best if you can set up two ‘meetings’ a year via phone or Zoom or face-to-face at the National to help to keep it all ticking over smoothly.
6. At the end of the three years you will need to carry out another stock survey to assess how things have changed and to help you think about ‘Where do we now go from here?’
7. That’s the basic. But if you can bring on board a breeder who is computer-enthusiastic, you might – like the Spanish Group – be able to launch your own breed website and produce an occasional breed newsletter.  
And you might even feel strong enough to write it all up for one of the magazines that are crying out for positive forward-thinking material: Smallholder Magazine, RBST magazine, RPS magazine, Poultry Club of GB Year Book – even something like Country Life.

*To sum up.*

I hope this doesn’t sound so complicated that it puts you off. You are all very busy people. But the RBST stresses that the key thing is for you just to decide to do what you can do – what’s possible – and then DO IT. Whatever you do will be an achievement and will move things on.

If we don’t do anything ‘our breed’ will surely dwindle and die out – and that would be a tragedy.

Andrew Bowden – October 2020