

# THE GERMAN PEKIN DUCK

By: Kenneth Broekman

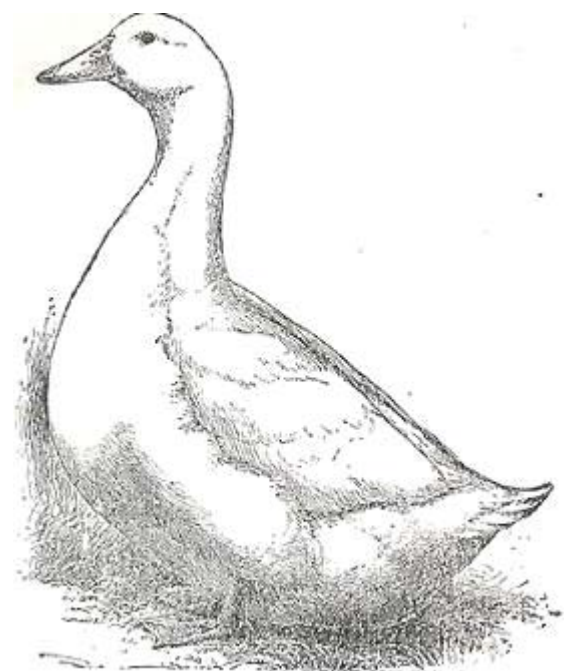


**The Pekin is undoubtedly one of the most gregarious and affectionate of all the domestic ducks. In the USA some breeders call it 'Donald Duck'. This was because Walt Disney developed the qualities of this cartoon character from the German Pekin duck's behaviour when he invented his famous *Donald Duck* stories.**

We must realize that the German Pekin Duck does not actually have a German origin. Our eastern neighbours have a tendency to credit breeds and colours to themselves as typically originated from Germany. But it must be stated that the German breeders have kept the original type to perfection. This upright German Pekin is true to the original – it is a 'thoroughbred' breed.

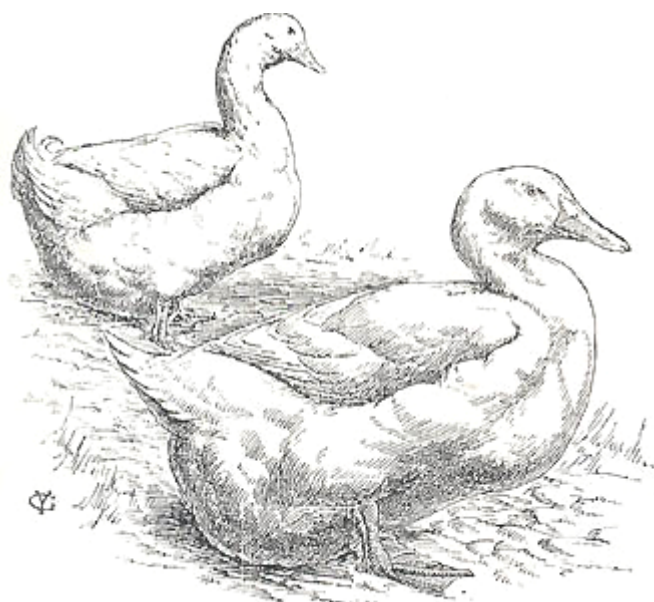
Let's go back in the history of our 'Donalds'. The first tidings of heavy, slightly upright ducks with a lemon yellow tinge to their sleek plumage were in the USA. In 1870 in New York a Chinese student Mr. Chan Laisun lectured concerning livestock in China. He mentioned existing ducks in his country which they called "shi-chin-ya-tze (the 10 pounds ducks): a weight expression.

**Right: The 10 pounds Duck, drawing by Van Gink. Archives Kenneth Broekman.**



The result was that Mr John Palmer in 1873 imported these ducks into the USA. But in 1872 a certain Englishman Mr Walter Steward imported the same breed into the UK.

This was the start of two types of Pekin ducks. The Americans commenced to crossbreed the Pekin with the existing legendary Aylesbury, in order to create a massive table bird. And so the American Pekin was born.



**Left: First crossings Pekin duck x Aylesbury. USA, 1896-1897. Drawing by Van Gink. Archives Kenneth Broekman.**

And how was the German Pekin Duck created? This was thanks to the commercial spirit of the Dutch Seafarers.

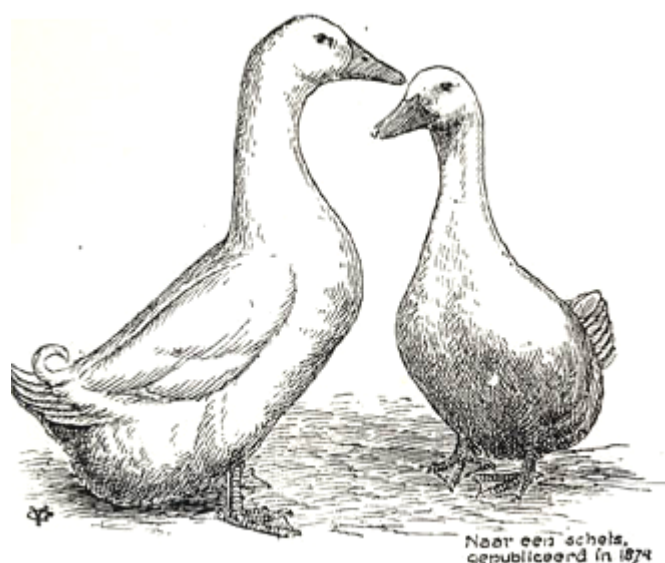
The Dutch East India shipping company was the only company permitted to trade and to enter Japanese harbours. As a result, the 'Penguin' or 'Japanese duck' set foot in Europe. It is in type an upright bird.

K 195 TWEE PEKING-EENDEN-TYPES UIT DE JAREN 1896 EN 1897

**Right: Japanese Ducks in 1874, drawing by Van Gink, from the archives of Kenneth Broekman.**

German fanciers then started to crossbreed the Penguin/Japanese with the existing Pekin duck: the Shi-chin-ya-tze from China. It must be stated that the German fanciers did a great job to perfect the breed now called German Pekin duck.

I will not bother you with precise details concerning type or plumage: there is sufficient literature available. We will pinpoint certain subjects which are important for you.



A requirement for the German Pekin is that it be an upright breed, alert and always active, always on the move. This costs the bird a lot of energy. So you will notice that the ducks will take a regular nap during the day. It's beautiful to observe them taking a peaceful rest.

One of the typical aspects of our Donalds is the comparison between her trunk and a short broad neck. This has the result that, when the bird is asleep, she is not able not place her head on her back between the wings. They sleep with their head down at their side or out in front of them, like a dead duck. You can watch this typical way of sleeping in the Donald Duck movies.

Some new fanciers, seeing this kind of sleeping attitude, got worried: "Ohh, my bird is sick!"



**Left: The duck in the middle is resting with her neck in the typical 'sleep position'.**

**Photo: Dirk de Jong.**

This special way of resting has a disadvantage. Due to the abundant thick plumage development on the head and the deep-set eyes, the chances are that dust and dirt can stick around their eyes. This causes the eyes to weep. This appears mainly in drakes.

**Right: A beautiful German Pekin male, however with a weeping eye.**

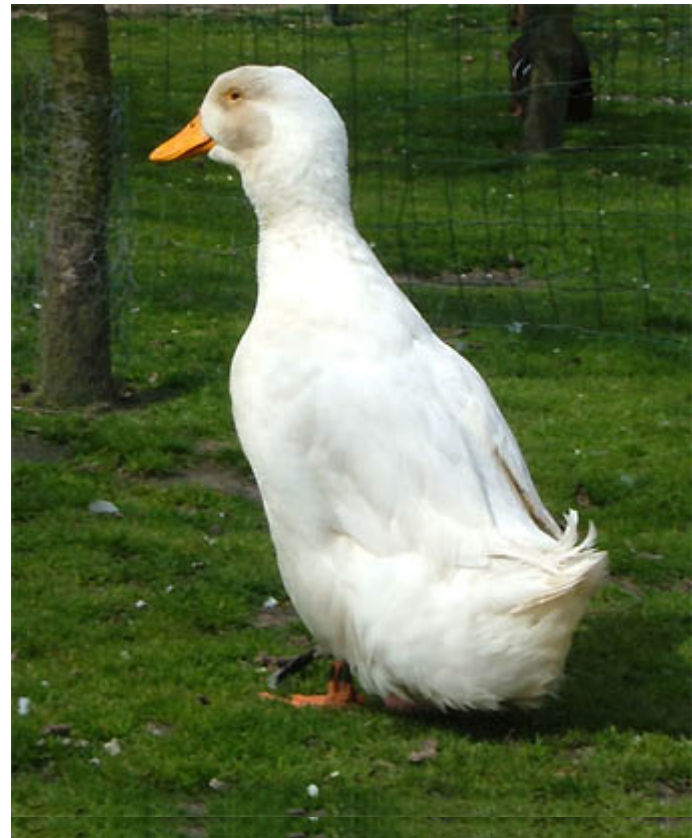
**Photo: Kenneth Broekman.**

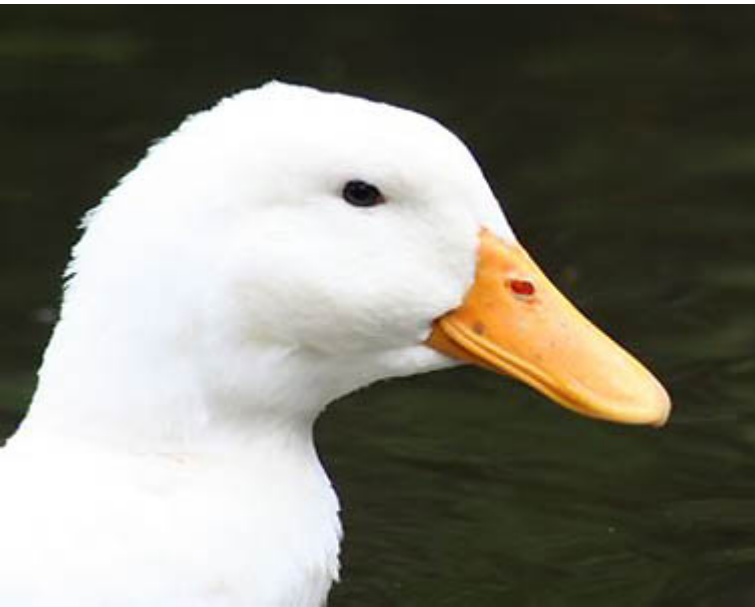
A remedy is to remove some feathers around the eyes and to use antibiotic eye ointment. Also, clean bathing water must be available.

In a good example of the breed, the duck must be of course upright, and have broad shoulders and a wide breast. It's important to keep the breed as it is. Why? You see, for example, that Runner ducks are now bred in such a way that they can hardly keep their balance. Also the Saxony duck is nowadays over-bred. Originally, the breed was slightly upright. So it's regrettable that, from the former East Germany, Saxony ducks were imported which now carry their body nearly horizontal.

Also, some of them have a keel on the breast and

underbody. Judges have a tendency to put up birds which are taller, bigger and more deep-breasted compared to other birds in the class they are judging. This has had the result that in Germany we nowadays rarely see the original Saxony type. So let's not try to make the German Pekin taller: automatically we will create long beaks and thin necks.





**Left: Head study. Photo: Dirk de Jong.**

### **Plumage**

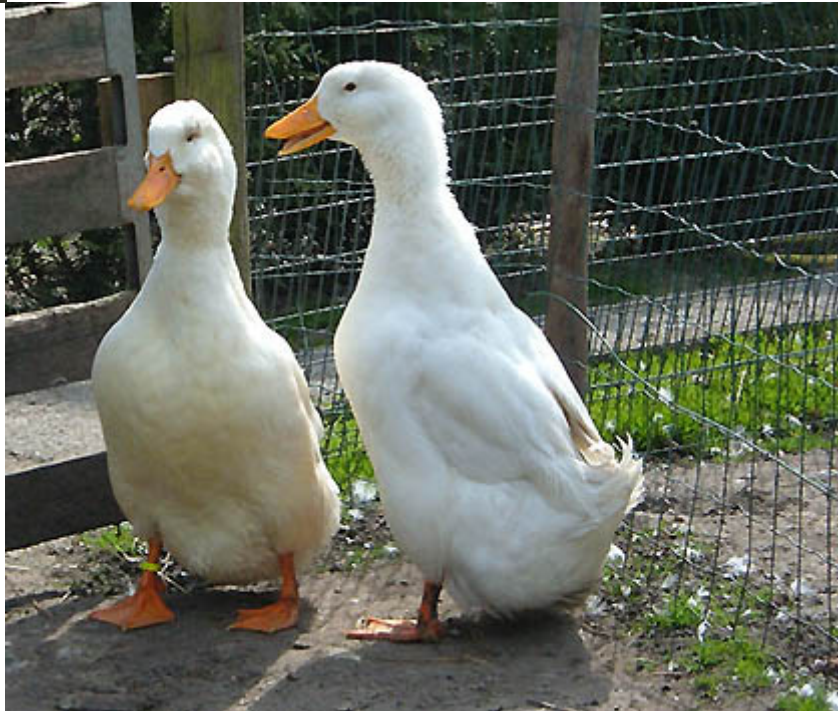
Typical for our German Pekin is that she is moulting throughout the year. A must is the structure of the plumage situated top of her head. The feathers take an opposition direction from what is should be and form a 'mane' of feathers on the back of the head and upper neck.

The colour is of course white. However, the young drakes especially possess a lemon-coloured, silky sheen over the plumage. This is very typical of our 'Donalds'.

**Right: This pair matches all the desired characteristics: Neck not too long, broad shoulders, full forehead, broad cheeks and a not too long beak.**

It's possible to increase the slight yellow reflection by feeding them extra maize.

Some exhibition breeders do go too far. They keep the German Pekin in cages or sheds all the time during the day, so that they will not get any sunlight. Only by night are they allowed to go out, and they feed them only maize. The result is a yellow German Pekin duck, but this is at the cost of animal cruelty.



So it's a compliment to the knowledge of some judges in the Netherlands and Belgium when they note on the judgement card: 'Bird too yellow!!!!'

**Left: Several species of domestic ducks. The two whites in the front are German Pekin ducks. Photo: Dirk de Jong.**

**Right and below: They do need swimming water and really enjoy their swim, happily quacking and splashing and flapping their wings. Photo: Dirk de Jong.**

We all know that the plumage of our domestic ducks is subject to changes in colour and quality in extreme sunlight, especially when they come out of the water. So, to avoid bleaching parts of the plumage, the birds must be able to rest in the deep shade of the trees, especially in a hot summer.

It is not correct to think that domestic birds do not need housing in sheds at night. Because of the loose feathers of the German Pekin, this breed does need overnight housing. With a long spells of persistent rain, the feathers become too wet. Because of the short neck, the bird is not able to preen easily. She cannot easily reach the preen gland and spread waterproofing all over the plumage. So, making the

plumage completely water-resistant is difficult. Overnight housing is a must to enable birds to dry out in wet winter weather.

Also mud is a really enemy. It destroys the feather structure and the birds will suffer from wet feather and always look dirty and damp.

Our German Pekin is not a duck which will sit on eggs: they do not go broody. With good surroundings and quality food they are normally very active and the eggs are mostly fertile. Of course water to swim is a must and they love using it.





Let's be content that ducks do not suffer from as many diseases as chickens. Vaccinations are generally not necessary, but medicine to prevent worms in baby ducks is needed. Pekins just need good, clean conditions and they will repay you with their great character and smiling faces. Our German Pekin ducks get very attached to their caretaker.

**Left and below: Young Pekins about 7 weeks old, at Kenneth Broekman's.  
Photo: Dirk de Jong.**



*Sources:*

Joseph Brown (1930)  
Prof. Oscar Grow USA.  
Chris & Mike Ashton  
(The Domestic Duck)  
Karl Reiling (German Pekin)  
Bill of loading, Dutch  
East India Company.



**Above: German Pekin Ducks at Kenneth Broekman's (NL)**