

# UNDERFOOT COLOR FOR JERSEY GIANTS

By Robert Vaughn

There seems to be confusion regarding foot color for Jersey Giants. It looks simple as stated in the American Poultry Association Standard Of Perfection. For Black, Blue, and White Jersey Giants the requirements are the same - Underpart of feet yellow. Interpreting what this means when examining the bottoms of a live Giants foot is when the questions come up.

A nice solid yellow is the ideal. The intensity of the yellow varies considerably between flocks and also between individual birds within the same flock. This is to be expected and do not be alarmed unless there is a complete absence of yellow pigment. If upon close examination you see even a hint of light yellow on the edges of the toes or the foot pad you can be reasonably certain you have a Giant. However if the yellow is very light it is a weakness to be worked on just the same as any other weakness when setting up breeding pens.

Often Giants with very light underfoot color are accused of being crossed with Australorps. First off, why a Giant breeder would want to do this makes no sense because Australorps at standard weight are 4 to 5 pounds lighter than Giants at maturity. Australorps are a white skinned bird with the bottoms of feet and toes to be pinkish white. If you get a chance, examine the underfeet of some pure Australorps and compare them to your Giant underfeet. Some Giants feet may at first glance appear white, but when looked at closely they will not have the colorless pale or pinkish hue of an Australorp. Unless the underfeet have a completely bleached out look devoid of color, you probably have Giants that need more attention to foot color in your breeding program.

When to check for underfoot color. Not when pullets or hens are laying eggs. Hens of all breeds lose yellow pigment as they are laying eggs. It happens that with Giants the only noticeable yellow pigment is in the underfoot. So you can have a female that has good solid yellow underfoot color but it will all but disappear when she has been laying heavily.

Can you have too much of a good thing? Yes! If yellow becomes very intense or bright covering the entire underfoot, it will often start creeping up the sides of the toes or even onto the tops of the toes and also up the lower shanks. This should be avoided, and is a definite yellow color not to be confused with the allowable willow color on shanks and upper toes.

What about nutrition? I have heard that feeding yellow corn enhances the intensity of yellow not only on the feet but also the skin, and Giants have yellow skin. I have not checked that out extensively myself. However, it seems logical that nutrition may have some effect, though it would not take the place of genetics. I would not worry about a feed formula just to enhance underfoot color.

So you see underfoot color is not as simple as it at first sounds and is a balancing act as are many other issues in breeding. Good underfoot color is important but no more so than many other Jersey Giant characteristics.