

My trip to the Holderread Waterfowl Farm and Preservation Centre:

By Kyan Sansom

From a young age I have been fascinated by all things feathered. What started as a passion for native birds has now led me to the wonderful world of waterfowl. After attending and exhibiting at various shows I can honestly say I'm addicted or should I say a-duck-ted. I'm particularly intrigued by the colour genetics of waterfowl and any challenge to create a new colour or breed for that matter is taken up with enthusiasm.

I currently breed Indian Runners and am always on the look out for new opportunities to improve my knowledge and understanding of these feathered creatures and develop my breeding efforts to better the quality of waterfowl here in Australia.

Recently, I was privileged enough to visit and work at the Holderread Waterfowl Farm and Preservation Centre located in Oregon, USA. Dave Holderread and his wife Millie Holderread, owners of HWF&PC, manage one of the worlds largest genetic stocks of waterfowl. For those of you unfamiliar with Dave Holderread, he is probably one of the most influential waterfowl breeders out there, with over 50 years of experience Dave has bred every recognised breed of domestic Waterfowl and taught applied poultry science in Puerto Rico. He has also developed many of his own breeds including Golden Cascade ducks and Oregon mini geese and created new colour types in already existing breeds. With an extraordinary knowledge of waterfowl breeding and genetics, Dave is highly regarded as breeding the best quality waterfowl in North America and the world.

Dave and Millie have also written a number of books over the years and their most recent one, "A Storeys Guide to Raising Ducks" was how I first came to learn about Dave Holderread.

The book had me hooked and inspired me to breed my ducks to the best quality I could.

The thought of meeting Dave Holderread and working on his farm was often a fantasy of mine. But it all became possible early this year when my dad announced that he was going to be attending the world organic seed conference in Oregon, USA.

Almost like it was meant to be, the town where my dad would be attending the conference was the same town as the HWF&PC. So without hesitation, I sent an email to Dave and Millie Holderread explaining how I would love to work on their farm, wishing only to gain some experience and knowledge which may help me with my goals as a breeder and preservationist. A few weeks went by and my chances of meeting Dave began to look bleak, when out of the blue I had a reply to my email stating that they would be delighted to have me come and stay with them and help out on the farm.

I honestly can't remember being more ecstatic. This would be the dream trip for any duck enthusiast. I booked my flight and before I knew it I was touching down in the picturesque city of Portland. With it being the middle of a snowy winter in America, and a scorching hot summer back home, I had to quickly adjust to the change in temperature. I soon found that the ducks and geese were handling the cold better than I was when I arrived for my first day at the Holderreads' Farm.

Millie showed me inside and brought me out a pair of thick coveralls, gumboots and gloves. She explained that Dave would be coming along shortly. Eager to explore the farm, I quickly suited up in my winter gear. Sure enough, before long there was a knock at the door and in came Dave Holderread, a relatively tall man with a brilliant smile and an Amish style beard. We shook hands and before I knew it we were outside in the chilly air. As Dave showed me around, I stood in awe as Dutch hook bills, Silkie ducks, Calls, Appleyards and Saxony's of brilliant quality waddled past. We came down to one of Daves ponds, upon which swam hundreds of rare breeds of ducks and geese most of which I had never seen before.

For the duration of the week I spent at the Holderreads I continued to help out with daily chores, whatever they maybe; all the while talking and learning from Dave. It was not uncommon for us to stay up past midnight discussing the genetics of different colours and strategies for creating new breeds from our relatively limited gene pool in Australia.

I explained how it is near impossible to import birds into Australia. Yet Dave assured that while we will have to do without Hook bills and Silkie ducks for now, there are a few breeds and varieties, that with the right sort of breeding, could be developed in Australia. Dave was also intrigued by the Elizabeth and Watervale ducks. Not having bred them, he was curious to what their genetic makeup was comprised of.

In just one week at the Holderreads farm I learnt more about waterfowl than I think I may ever learn. Daves knowledge of waterfowl is incredible, but as he often said to me, he doesn't claim to know everything and is still learning. He would often say, "even when you think you know everything about a subject, whatever it may be, there will always be someone out there that knows something you don't". Daves dedication to preserving rare breeds alone, is something to aspire too.

Unfortunately Dave and Millie have had to cut back on some of their breeds, many of which they have been diligently working with for 25 to 50 years. Dave and Millie admit they are not as young as they used to be and simply do not have the energy to keep up with the arduous tasks involved in keeping so many breeds and lines.

When asked what breed is his favourite Dave simply replied "I love them all", and whilst he is sad to see his birds go, they hope that other preservationist breeders will continue to perpetuate their high quality strains. Dave and Millie are continuing to breed some of their rarer ducks, which include Dutch hook bill, Silkie, Appleyard, Harlequin, Saxony and Call ducks, many in varieties that were unknown to me. Also, they will continue with their strains of Toulouse, Embden, Sebastapol, Buff African, Shetland, American and Oregon mini geese.

My trip to the Holderreads Waterfowl Farm and Preservation Centre was an amazing experience and has inspired me to promote, improve and preserve the quality of waterfowl here in Australia. I am excited for the future of Australian waterfowl, with so many opportunities for the development and improvement of breeds. I cannot thank Dave and Millie enough for their kindness, generosity and the time they spent answering my many questions and helping me on my endeavours. These are truly humble and inspirational people and I feel so privileged to have met and worked alongside them. If I have learnt anything from this experience it is that you should never hesitate to ask, the world is full of possibilities and opportunities that you may never realise unless you put yourself out there.

By Kyan Sansom, age 16
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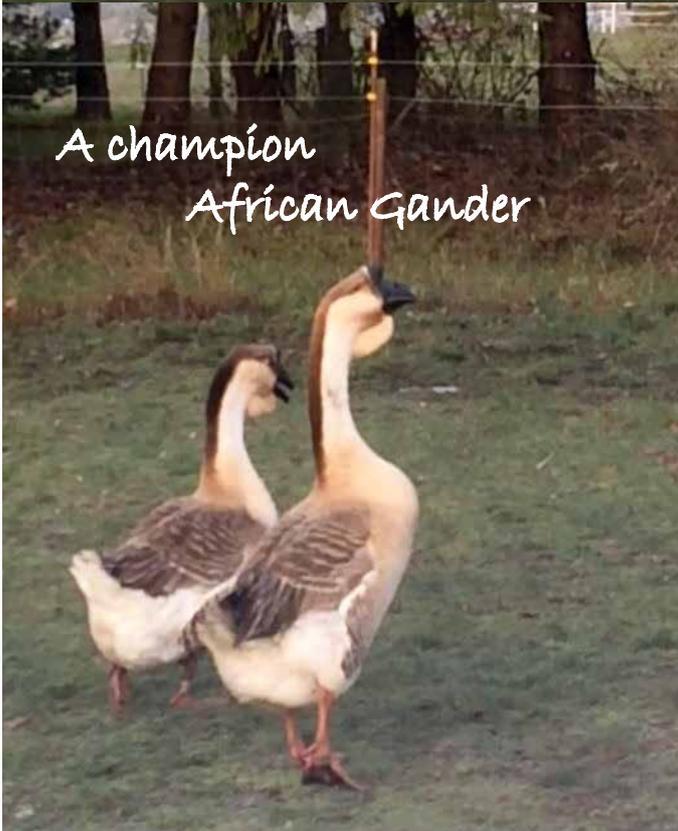


*Dave and I on my last day
at the Holderreads' Farm*

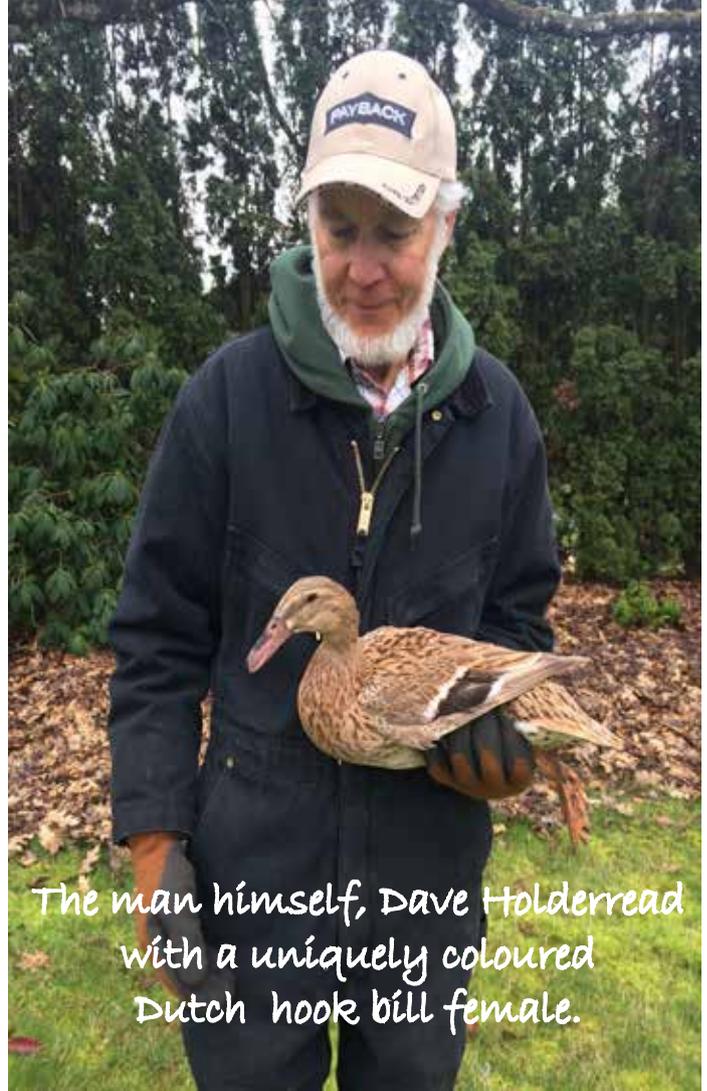
one of the ponds
at the
Holderread Waterfowl Farm
and Preservation Centre



African geese



A champion
African Gander



The man himself, Dave Holderread
with a uniquely coloured
Dutch hook bill female.



In my winter gear
with a rare, dusky Hook bill drake