Jersey Giant Chicken:  *Gallus gallus domesticus*

**In the Wild**

**Description:**
- Are the largest breed of domestic chickens
- Weight: 11-13 pounds
- Both males and females have red combs perched on top of the head and wattles hanging down from the chin
- Sexual dimorphism: Females tend to have smaller combs and wattles than males
- Coloration: Typically black, white or gray

**Habitat and Range:**
- Domestic breed
  - All domestic chickens are descended from the wild red jungle fowl of Southeast Asia, which still exist in the wild in the jungles of northeastern India
  - Chickens have been domesticated for many thousands of years, with references in ancient China, Persia, India, Greece and other parts of Asia
  - Recent evidence suggests that chickens were domesticated in Vietnam as many as 10,000 years ago
  - European settlers brought basic barnyard chickens with them to North America
  - Jersey Giants were created in the late 1800s in New Jersey as a large table bird that could take the place of a turkey

**Diet:**
- Primarily herbivorous: Eat grains, corn, soybeans, grass, insects and worms

**Adaptations:**
- Males have sharp pointed growths, called spurs, on their legs between the knee and ankle used in combat over females – wild jungle fowl, an ancestor of the domestic chicken, may fight to the death over a female
- Most domestic chickens have lost the ability to fly – although they still have the hollow bones and air sacs that allow other birds to fly, most chickens are too large and heavy to travel very far
- Have 4 toes per foot, which help them scratch the ground for food

**Lifespan:**
- Commonly 5-12 years

**Reproduction:**
- In courtship displays, male jungle fowl – the ancestor of Jersey Giants – droop one wing and tilt their head, mantle, and back toward the hen to display their most colorful parts – domestic roosters behave similarly
- Jersey Giant hens lay large to extra-large brown eggs that are pale cream to dark brown in color – many breeders incubate eggs they want to hatch since the heavy females can easily crush their eggs
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- Chicks tend to mature more slowly than other breeds due to their size
- Jerseys reach their full adult weight between 1.5-2 years

**Activity:**
- Diurnal
- Chickens are social animals that live in groups, with several hens living with one or more roosters

**Other “fun facts”:**
- Jungle fowl were originally domesticated for their fighting ability, not for eggs or meat – the practice still exists today, although cockfighting is against the law in 47 of the 50 United States
- In the United States, eggs were the primary reason for raising chickens up until about 1960 – chicken meat was considered a luxury rather than a staple of the American diet until around 1910
- Since the early 1900s, the poultry business has grown into a large-scale commercial industry – commercial production occurs on egg farms and meat farms, with different breeds of chicken being used for these two different production purposes
- Jersey Giants are not used commercially because they take longer to mature than smaller breeds – are mostly raised for food production but can also make good pets
- With a population of more than 24 billion worldwide, there are more domestic chickens in the world than any other bird
- Jersey Giant roosters have a deeper crow than most other breeds

**Conservation Status and Threats:**
- There are billions of chickens in the world, but the rise of the modern commercial poultry industry has suppressed variety – certain breeds of domestic chicken are becoming increasingly rare
- Red Jungle Fowl, ancestors to the domestic chicken, are considered common throughout their range
  - Their biggest threats are hunting for meat and habitat destruction
  - However, they adapt well to a variety of habitats including cultivated land, limiting the effect of habitat loss
  - Hybridization with domestic chickens, in particular, threatens the purity of the wild Red Jungle Fowl

**At the Zoo**

*Snooki* (male) was born in 2010 and acquired from a private breeder.

**What We Can Do**
- Buying locally grown produce and meat is one way to inhibit large-scale supermarket chains, agribusinesses and factory farms

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- Buying locally benefits local economies and therefore the community – buying directly from family farmers helps them stay in business
- Locally grown food is fresher than anything in the supermarket
- Locally grown food is normally more flavorful and nutritious than supermarket products
- Locally grown food also encourages humane treatment of farm animals

- Local Harvest ([http://www.localharvest.org/](http://www.localharvest.org/)) is a website devoted to helping people find products from family farms, local sources of sustainably grown food, and encourages them to establish direct contact with small farms in their local area

References:
- [http://www.mnzoo.com/animals/animals_chicken.asp#5](http://www.mnzoo.com/animals/animals_chicken.asp#5)
- [http://www.twycrosszoo.org/red-junglefowl.aspx](http://www.twycrosszoo.org/red-junglefowl.aspx)
- [http://www.localharvest.org/](http://www.localharvest.org/)