'They invaded us once by boat and now they're doing it with sperm!' Why hundreds of British women are giving birth to 'Viking babies' conceived with Danish donors

- Danish sperm now makes up a third of the total used in the UK
- Women cite the Danes' blonde good looks and 'dependable' nature
- Famously handsome Danes include Nikolaj Coster-Waldau
- Capital Copenhagen is home to two huge sperm banks
- Sperm is now one of Denmark's top exports along with beer and Lego

By RUTH STYLES
PUBLISHED: 09:03 GMT, 26 June 2014 | UPDATED: 13:19 GMT, 26 June 2014

With their blonde good looks and strapping build, Danish men such as Game of Thrones star Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, 43, have long been considered among the most handsome in Europe.

But women don't just want to date them: They want to have 'Viking babies' too, with Danish sperm now accounting for a third of the total used by British fertility clinics.

And the UK isn't the only place where Danish sperm sales are booming - women from all over the world are choosing to go Scandinavian when they need a sperm donor.
Main attraction: Like Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, the Danes’ blonde good looks have proved popular

In demand: More and more British women are giving birth to 'Viking babies' helped by Danish sperm banks

'I went to a conference where someone from the Nordic Ethics Committee showed a slide,' chuckles Anne Mette Arndal-Lauritzen, who heads the Copenhagen-based European Sperm Bank.
'He said: "These are the main Danish export products - beer, Lego and sperm!"

So why are so many British women going Danish? According to Dr Alan Pacey, a fertility expert at the University of Sheffield, one of the reasons is a shortage of homegrown sperm.

'We don't have enough donors in the UK to meet the national need,' he explains. 'We don't have the clinic infrastructure sufficient to recruit enough donors - even when men want to donate.

'Often there simply isn't the size and scale within small NHS clinics to consider having a donor recruitment programme - plus if you're not confident that sufficient men are going to ring up and become sperm donors, the economics of it simply aren't going to work.

'The NHS is used to treating patients and you get a fee for treating patients. You don't get a fee for screening a donor that you may not ultimately accept.'

Compounding the problem for British clinics is the 2005 law that forces men to waive their anonymity, meaning sperm donors face the prospect of offspring turning up on their doorstep once they reach the age of 18.

Nevertheless, although Danish clinics, among them the world's largest sperm bank, Cryos, cannot sell semen from anonymous donors to British women, business is booming thanks to the huge numbers of local men happy to sign up anyway.

Looking good: Handsome Borgen star Pilou Asbaek, 32, has helped fuel British demand for half-Danish babies

'My parents think its a bit weird,' admits twenty-something donor John, who has waived his anonymity and is responsible for some of the sperm dispatched to UK clinics.
My father has said a few times: "What am I going to do in 20 years when somebody comes knocking on my door and says Grandpa!"

'I've spoken to them and said that it's not likely to happen, and if it does happen, it's not a bad situation. It might be a good thing.'

Like other Danish donors, he is a regular visitor to the European Sperm Bank, which, according to its boss, does well because it focuses purely on semen.

'This is the only thing we do,' explains Arndal-Lauritzen. 'We don't do eggs, we don't do anything else. We just do sperm and sperm donation and that allows us to focus on what we do.'

Although the prospect of cash payments is an incentive for some, other donors say the prospect of helping childless families conceive that brings them to Arndal-Lauritzen's door.

'I haven't got a lot of money and I need it,' explains John. 'But I think I would be 10 times more happy about doing this if I could see some kind of reaction, some kind of pay-off in the happiness of these people.

'It's a good purpose and it helps people who cannot have children. Instead of donating blood, you could do this instead and make people happy.'

'It would be nice if there were 100, 200 children that are half me,' chuckles fellow donor Adam, a married professional in his late 30s. 'I think it's funny to think about how many children I can make.'

But availability isn't the only reason so many British women want to bear a half-Danish child. For many, the Danes' handsome blue-eyed, blonde looks and 'dependable natures' are just as attractive.

'The blonde hair and the blue eyes appeal,' laughs one mother who conceived with the help of a Danish clinic. 'The cheekbones as well I think!'
Father of hundreds: For sperm donors like John and Adam, their children could number in the hundreds.

Choice: Denmark's sperm banks, among them Cryos, deploy excellent customer service to help boost sales.

Experts such as Laura Witjens, CEO of the National Gamete Donation Trust, say the excellent customer service deployed by Copenhagen's sperm banks has also contributed to the Viking baby.
boom.

'It's much easier for a British clinic to order sperm from Denmark which is Fed-exed the next day than to try and recruit their own donors and all the hassle that goes with them,' says Witjens. 'The Danish model is customer service driven. It knows how to deal well with customers, it has a good website, and that's what we could do in the UK as well - it's not rocket science.'

'Denmark is geographically close to the UK,' adds Dr Pacey. 'I think there's some sort of philosophical and intellectual bond that we have with Denmark.'

Jo, a British woman who became mother to a son, Euan, with her partner Sarah, agrees and says she plans to teach her little boy about his Danish heritage when the time comes.

'For Sarah and I, it will be very important to explain things to Euan, to take him to Denmark and to show him the Viking boats,' she explains.

Hello handsome: Good-looking Danes such as The Killing's Nikolaj Lie Kaas, 41, have helped boost demand

'It's part of who he is so we have to explain to him about that, to educate him about that. I was actually in Denmark a couple of weeks ago and I brought him back a little Viking hat to celebrate his Vikingness. I don't think he was too impressed in the beginning but then he got used to it!'

'It's a bit like the Viking invasion of 800 AD,' adds an amused Dr Pacey. 'They've invaded us once by boat and now they're doing it by sperm!'

Needless to say, the Danish donors and sperm banks behind the influx of Scandinavian semen see it slightly differently.

'I feel quite international,' comments Adam. 'The international father!' But, he adds, 'We're just helping you [British mothers].

'I'm not thinking about the Vikings,' he continues. 'I think [sperm donations] could be a great help for you in the UK and that's very good.'

Hear more about Britain's demand for Danish sperm in The New Viking Invasion tomorrow at 11am on BBC Radio 4