

# The Black Wood Partridge

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Although the Black Wood Partridge *Melanoperdix nigra* was discovered in 1829 by Vigors, it was 1955 before the first living specimens reached Europe (England). The species originates from Malaysia and Sumatra. In 1917 Rothschild described the subspecies *Melanoperdix nigra borneensis* which is found in the southern and western portions of Borneo. The subspecies inhabits primary and secondary forest lowlands up to 600 meters (approx. 2000 ft.).

Other than they are most often observed in pairs, little is known about the habits of this species in the wild.

The male is black with some dark-brown flight-feathers. The bill is black and the eyes are dark brown. The legs are blue-gray in coloration. The female is mainly chestnut-brown with a white-gray chin and some black stripes on the wings. Her belly is white and the bill is black-brown. The length of both sexes is 25-26 centimeter (9.75 - 10.14 in.) with the female appearing slightly larger but the male is actually somewhat heavier.

I personally do not know what happened to the first birds brought into England in 1955 and breeding results, if any, are not known.

In 1981 a small group of the nominate form were brought to Germany and some were obtained by the Berlin Zoo (Reinhardt, 1981). Others came into the hands of private aviculturists and several breeding have taken place.

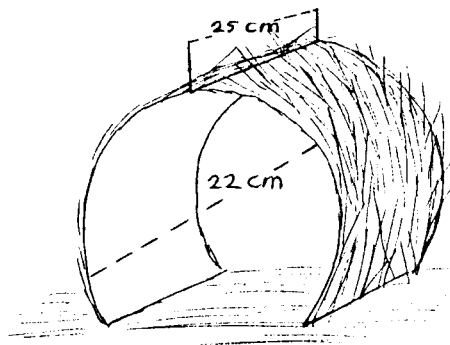
Around the same time, some specimens of the Borneo Black Wood Partridge (*M. n. borneensis*) came to the Netherlands and here a well-known Dutch birdpark (Avifauna) obtained a pair (v/d Sluis, 1987). This pair was housed in a small aviary within a tropical hall. Although the birds seemed happy, it took several years

before the birds showed some breeding behavior. When the male found something to eat, he started to call and the female took it from his bill. Some nest-building attempts were made but the nests were too weak. Then the keepers made a nest from a wire-mesh

cylinder which they covered with reeds and dry grass. Hay was placed inside the structure and here the female produced six eggs at intervals of 3 to 6 days. Because the female made no attempt to incubate, the eggs were removed and put in an incubator. Here four eggs hatched after an incubation period of 18 days. Two young were raised successfully.

In both the Berlin Zoo and at Avifauna, it was discovered that a large water bowl (or even better—a small pool) is very important for this species as these birds love to bath.

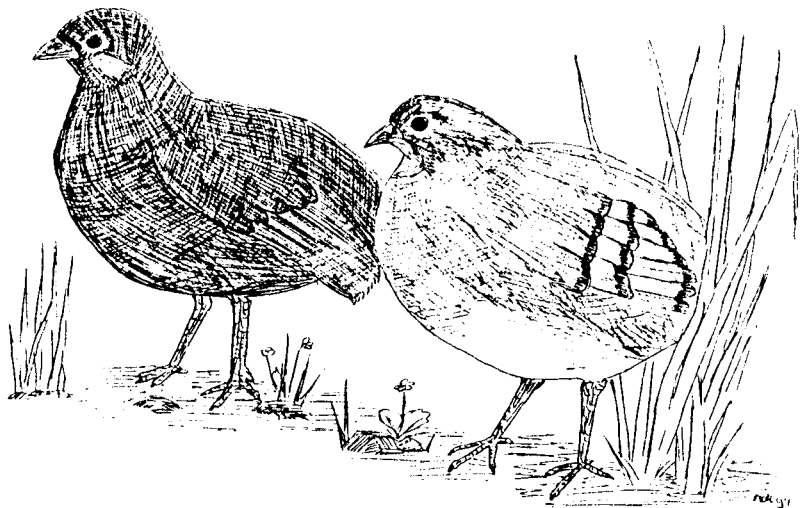
Hopefully, it will be possible to build up a healthy population from the few birds now in captivity and more aviculturists will be able to obtain the Black Wood Partridge and gather experience with this interesting bird.



*The Black Wood Partridges didn't nest well until the keepers fabricated this artificial nest made of wire mesh covered with reeds and dried grass.*

## References

- Reinhardt, R. 1981, Bemerkungen zur Schwarzzachtel *Melanoperdix nigra*, Gefiederte Welt Vol. 105 pp 201-203.  
v/d Sluis, H. 1987, Broedverslag van de Zwarte Bospatrijs, de Harpij Vol. 6 pp 10-11.



*A pair of Black Wood Partridges with the male on the left.*

Drawings by Maarten deRuiter