

# Gamebirds — What Are They?

by Ed Lawrence  
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*"When I use a word,"  
Humpty Dumpty said,  
in rather a scornful tone,  
"it means just what  
I choose it to mean —  
neither more nor less."*

Lewis Carroll  
*"Through the Looking Glass"*

handsome bird called the ring-necked pheasant, which abounded in its new land, and provided a colorful and coveted prize, along with the native turkey, quail, and migratory waterfowl. The definition of gamebird by the turn of this century (which is nearly ended, have you noticed?) had come to mean just about any feathered creature customarily hunted with a shotgun that is precocial at hatching, meaning that it is well-developed at hatching like a duck or a chicken, in contrast to a naked and blind songbird.

There soon developed a worldwide hunt for new species to be introduced for the benefit of the sportsman; and the early aviculturist was naturally attracted to some of these birds, which were spectacular ornamentals, even if they later failed as targets for a shotgun wielder. Today it is hard to imagine anyone shooting a Golden pheasant, or a Lady Amherst, for beauty such as that is to be protected and admired, not used for sighting a double barrel. As the avid aviculturist expanded his interest in precocial birds, his definition of what was a "gamebird" also expanded to fit his interests and his collection.

Today, the term "gamebird," in its most expansive connotation, means just about any precocial bird. The biggest gamebirds would be the ratites, such as emus, cassowaries, ostriches, and rheas. The smallest gamebirds would probably be some form of Button quail. And in between these two extremes in size there abounds a terribly diverse collection of species that include the extremely colorful (Red-breasted geese, Roul Roul partridge, Carolina Wood Duck) to the relatively plain Secretary bird, Hoatzin and Bustard.

Geographically, they vary from arctic waterfowl to jungle pheasants, and desert dwellers such as Sand grouse. They are distributed over all the continents. Their needs are diverse and, for many of the species, their continued survival depends upon the hard work and dedication of aviculturists around the world, people devoted to the preservation of this artwork of nature for future generations. ●

An aviculturist may reasonably ask, "What is a gamebird?" Our not so distant ancestors viewed anything that they could eat, that once had feathers on it, as a gamebird, suitable for the roasting spit or the boiling pot. And it is a pure certainty they were not adverse to stealing eggs out of a songbird's nest or sneaking up on their prey with all the cunning and artifice of a lender's reposessor.

By the middle ages, our feudal forefathers had ritualized the quest for feathered food items, along with making it a social happening. The majesty of the law was employed to make hunting a right of land ownership and the courtly pursuit of game, which became both sport and pagantry, used such high tech weapons as trained falcons and the cross-bow. While songbirds and just about anything with feathers on it continued to be "faire game" for the royal huntsman, because it was an activity restricted to the few, it was looked upon with longing by those who were excluded.

The discovery of the New World brought about revolutionary changes in the conduct of the hunt. Wildlife abounded and was relied upon by the early settlers for food before they could get their first crops in. The kill belonged to whoever could get it. The perfection of the shotgun and the availability of cheap ammunition during the latter half of the last century drastically reduced wildlife numbers; and the rise of social classes in America brought about further changes.

Since the well-to-do no longer needed the product of the hunt, what was a person to hunt to show off his or her prowess with an expensive firearm? They imported from China a

## Western Region

Steve McNabb, regional v.p.  
(602) 992-4483

### ARIZONA

State coordinator:  
Sunny Clarkson (602) 943-0614  
Arizona Avian Breeders Assoc.  
Arizona Aviculture Society  
Arizona Budgerigar Society  
Arizona Seed Crackers Society  
Avicultural Society of Tucson  
L.O.O.N.Y. Central  
Turkey Flats L.O.O.N.Y.

### COLORADO

State coordinator:  
Susan Baker (303) 223-2452  
Colorado Cage Bird Association  
Front Range Avian Society  
Rocky Mountain Society of  
Aviculture, Inc.

### NEVADA

State coordinator:  
Joyce Ferguson (702) 649-8026  
Las Vegas Avicultural Society

### NEW MEXICO

State coordinator:  
\*  
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### UTAH

State coordinator:  
Rex Kennedy (801) 571-6183  
Avicultural Society of Utah  
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### WYOMING

State coordinator:  
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## Northern California Region

Dick Dickinson, regional v.p.  
(408) 248-1641

\* Position open — contact regional vice president if interested

\*\* Indicates 2 year term has been fulfilled. If no new interested party comes forward and indicates a desire to serve, incumbent remains in position.

For information about contacting any of these member clubs,  
please call that club's state coordinator.

## SCHEDULE FOR AFA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Mark these dates and plan to attend!

### June 8, 9, 10, 1990

Spring Regional Meeting  
Palace Station Hotel  
2411 West Sahara Ave.  
Las Vegas, NV 89102

Make early room reservations, 30 days prior recommended.

Local — (702) 367-2411

All others — 1 (800) 544-2411  
or 1 (800) 634-3101

Rooms — single or double — \$45.00

For general meeting info., call AFA office (602) 484-0931

### August 7 - 12, 1990

16th Annual Convention  
Hyatt Regency Crystal City,  
2799 Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, VA 22202.  
Ph: (703) 486-1234

Room rate: \$63 single, double occupancy

Program advertising & exhibit rental, contact:

Mark Sargeant (301) 585-4124

General convention information contact:

Tom Marshall (703) 759-5978

## CALIFORNIA (NORTH)

State coordinator:  
Joanne Abramson  
(707) 964-4380

Aviary Association of Kern  
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Redwood Exotic Bird Society  
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## CALIFORNIA (SOUTHERN) SAN DIEGO AREA:

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Tom Litchfield (619) 749-6706  
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Hookbill Hobbyists of Southern  
California  
North County Aviculturists  
San Diego County Bird Breeders  
Association  
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## CALIFORNIA (SOUTHERN) LOS ANGELES AREA:

State coordinator:  
Bob Bramer (714) 626-4761  
Budgerigar Research Association  
California Game Breeders  
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Bird Club  
Hi Desert Bird Club  
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