

# Roulroul Partridge

This beautiful ground-dwelling species needs special attention from bird keepers in the new millennium

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Photographs and text by Cyril Laubscher

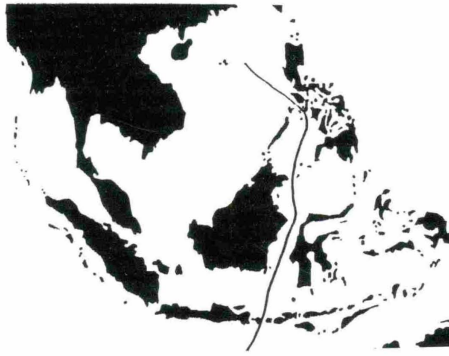


Photo by Cyril Laubscher



The female Roulroul Partridge has her own subtle beauty. Compare with the male on the front cover.

The Roulroul Partridge *Rollulus roulroul* as it is known in aviculture, is more often referred to in ornithological literature as the Crested Wood Partridge – a more apt name because the male has a very attractive maroon crest, offset by the white crown patch. However, neither of the names fully describes the beauty of this species.

More than 20 years ago, I saw my first pair of Roulroul Partridges in a friend's aviary in England. Their small size – only 10 inches – combined with their charming character, docile nature, and the very appealing coloration of either sex, are some of the attributes that immediately spring to mind. The male has a metallic luster to the purplish-blue body, and the red eye ring is another outstanding feature that is

also seen in the female.

The female has a dark grey head. She lacks a crest but does have 2-3 elongated feathers just above the forehead. The chestnut wings offset the olive-green body.

Many of the partridges are fairly nondescript birds that camouflage with the environment, especially in grassland areas. The Roulroul Partridge inhabits lowland forests up to 4000 feet on Sumatra and Borneo. Their distribution extends through to Malaysia and southern Thailand.

Even though they are colorful, they still blend in with the dark, shadowy surroundings as they scratch around for insects in the leaf litter. They are often seen feeding in small parties on fruit dropped by birds and primates feeding in the fruiting trees above. The normal call is a shrill plaintive whistle, but

when disturbed while feeding, a party can react noisily as they scatter.

In aviculture, they build a loosely woven domed nest in mid to late summer using long strips of grass and hay. There is an entrance hole on the ground. The clutch of 8-10 dull, creamy eggs hatch in 18-19 days.

The minimum sized aviary suggested for a pair is 2.4m x 2.4m, [about 8 feet square] but the larger the better. Some bird keepers keep them in greenhouse aviaries, which can look very attractive, but they do not need to be kept warm all the time. As they roost up on a branch, it is best to position this in a frost-proof indoor shelter, from where they can have access to a planted aviary that is boarded part way up. This will prevent any chilling winds from causing them too many problems, as they are susceptible to frost bite, and this must be borne in mind during inclement weather in winter. It is advisable to shut them indoors if frost prevails.

Roulroul Partridges have an omnivorous diet. Ron Oxley now has a number of breeding pairs, and feeds them on an insectivorous food, with small millet mixture, mixed pigeon seed, chopped fruit, hard-boiled egg, and minced meat. This is supplemented with livefood, including mealworms, and any earthworms that they can dig up in the planted aviary.

Many partridges dust-bathe, but Roulrouls appear to prefer bathing by rubbing against the wet leaves of bushes and grass in the aviary, as they would do in their natural surroundings.

When I planned to photograph the Roulroul Partridges, I felt that it was important to try and show them in as natural an environment as possible. The complete set up took a while to achieve, and there was much anticipation as to how good this would eventually look. When the films were developed, the result was everything that could be hoped for after all the effort.

At the start of this millennium, it seems appropriate to mention that while this uncommon partridge is steadily improving its avicultural status, more bird keepers should try their hand at breeding the delightful Roulroul Partridge. They will not be disappointed! 