

EX LIBRIS



by Sheldon Dingle

According to Cortez, there was a Royal Menagerie in the time of Montezuma. The menagerie was divided into two sections. One section was for birds of prey, reptiles, and quadrupeds. The other section was reserved for all birds that did not live by prey. Cortez reported that there were three hundred men employed in taking care of the birds – not counting the skillful persons whom today would be called veterinarians. Of the three hundred attendants, some procured the food; some fed the birds; some watched after nesting and incubation; and finally, some were charged with saving the finest feathers to be used as royal ornaments.

Well, who knows just why Montezuma kept birds? The feathers were a factor, no doubt, but he probably had a number of other reasons, just as we aviculturists have a multitude of reasons. Of all the reasons for keeping birds in captivity, however, one has been constantly gaining in importance. Some birds, not well established in aviculture, will become extinct very soon and be lost forever.

A 1967 study showed that eighty-six known species and sub-species of birds have positively become extinct. Nineteen more species have most probably died out as intensive searches over the years have failed to find any live specimens. Of the forty-eight species of pheasants, at least sixteen are in danger of extinction. The California Game Breeders Association, Inc. (an early member of A.F.A.), holds a particular interest in these birds.

Probably the main reason the various birds are endangered is the destruction of their natural habitats. The human population continues to increase at the rate of 233 births per minute, which totals

190,000 more people each day. This extraordinary increase in population vastly boosts the amount of food and space used by men and greatly multiplies the amount of their waste products. These factors point toward the inevitable extinction of many birds. Unfortunately, all of the pheasants are indigenous to Asia and Eastern Europe, where the population and food supply problems are the worst.

For example, the Brown Eared Pheasant (*Crossoptilon mantchuricum*) lives in northern China and inner Mongolia. Its environment has been extensively destroyed, as China develops her natural resources and becomes a more industrialized nation. In 1864, one male and two female Brown Eareds were brought into Paris. In 1866, two males were sent from Peking to the London Zoo. No other importations have been recorded. All of the captive stock has probably descended from these few birds. The years of inbreeding have resulted in poor fertility among many of the males, but there is no way to get wild caught birds out of Communist China. Six members of the California Game Breeders Association keep this beautiful pheasant in their aviaries.

Another example can be found in the Elliot's Pheasant (*Syrnaticus ellioti*). It, too, is a Chinese bird, but it lives in the mountain forests of the south-east, rather than in the north with the Brown Eared. The Elliot's population is rapidly decreasing before the chain-saws and bulldozers. As the forest disappears around the pheasant, the bird is trapped and eaten by the hungry populace. Hungry people and a hostile government pre-

cludes our bringing any Elliot's out of China and, in fact, it may not be long until there are no Elliot's left in China. A 1972 survey estimated there were only 350 of these birds in captivity. Again, six members of the California Game Breeder's Association keep and raise Elliot's, and it is the captive stock that will preserve this pheasant.

An ironic quirk of fate centers around another endangered Chinese pheasant, the Swinhoe's (*Lophura swinhoiei*). This bird is found only in a small area on the island of Formosa (Taiwan), and is now extremely rare in the wild. As the island is controlled by the anti-communist Nationalist Chinese, many refugees have fled Mainland China and settled on Taiwan. This enormous population explosion has resulted in the steady reduction of the Swinhoe's habitat, and in 1964, the Taiwan government announced that the Swinhoe's Pheasant was in danger of extinction. In 1967 the Pheasant Trust of England made the necessary arrangements, and sent the first consignment of thirty birds to Taiwan. Nine pairs of these birds were kept on Taiwan for captive breeding. The other birds were released in a protected forest area that should prove ideal for their reestablishment. Ten members of our club keep and breed Swinhoe's Pheasants. In this case, a vanishing Chinese bird was probably saved from extinction, by aviculturists of the Western World.

The problems leading towards the extinction of various pheasants are not confined to China. The White Eared Pheasant (*Crossoptilon crossoptilon*) is native to Tibet, living in rugged mountain areas. In the vicinity of the monasteries,

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the bird was protected, becoming quite tame, and its population flourished. Under Communist domination, the monasteries have been severely persecuted. The pheasant population, now on its own, is rapidly dwindling as bird after bird goes into the stew pot. There are very few White Eared Pheasants in captivity, and unfortunately, none of our members have any.

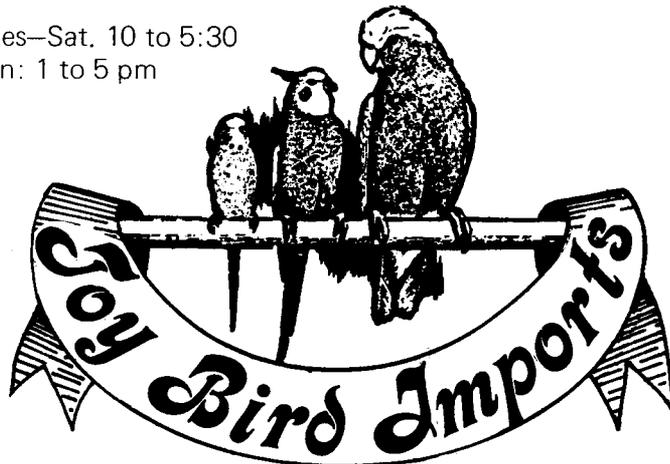
Viet Nam is another troubled area of the world where the pheasants have not had optimum conditions for many years. Troop movements, bomb blasts, destroyed crops, defoliation, ad infinitum, are not conducive to increasing a bird population. As it happens, the Imperial Pheasant (*Lophura imperialis*) lives only in central Viet Nam and part of Laos. Due to the above named conditions it has been thrust onto the endangered species list.

The Edward's Pheasant (*Lophura edwardsi*) shares the Viet Nam habitat and the Imperial's fate.

The widespread famines in India have put intense pressure on the Cheer Pheasant (*Catro wallachi*), and several of the wild jungle fowl in the family *Phasianidae*. In fact, virtually all of the birds of the world are surviving under increasingly difficult circumstances.

We have enumerated here just a few of the birds that are endangered, and share the common future of destruction and death. A small number of species will be saved from extinction because there is a well established population in captivity. If only there were more aviculturists, and they were more concerned about the endangered birds. If just one specie were saved, it would be reason enough to keep and breed birds ■

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