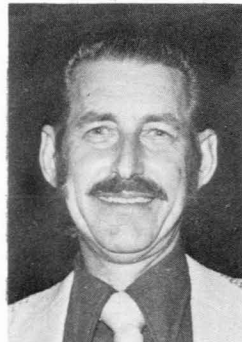


# Crested Fireback Pheasants

(*Lophura diardi*)

by Francis Billie

See Colored Photo of Crested Fireback Pheasant on back cover.



Francis Billie

In captivity these birds soon become tame. I have never seen a cock which would not soon come up to me and take mealworms from my hand. Siamese Firebacks are very strong, and with their spurs are able to do great damage to other birds. If allowed to run with poultry or other pheasants, they will engage every cock in combat, and no matter how skillful or strong a game cock may be, it has no chance against this active Fireback of the Siamese wilderness.

My first Siamese Fireback was a male that I had purchased from Mrs. Coin at the Florence Avenue Bird Exchange in Bell, California about 1939 or 1940. This was a disaster as this male killed all of the females that I was able to put with him. After a time I was able to get a pair in 1940 or 1941 which was young and didn't breed until they were three years old. They were very good breeders and raised from 12 to 20 young each year and lived for 27 years raising one young on the 26th year.

Siamese hens will lay a few eggs during the month of April, but heavy production can be expected in the first to the middle of May. The hen will usually average from

20 to 30 eggs during the laying period. Early and mid-season eggs have the highest fertility and produce the stronger chicks.

You should not disturb pheasants any more than possible when feeding or gathering eggs. Some breeders whistle while working around their pens, also wear the same type and color of clothes, and are careful to avoid any sudden movement.

Eggs should be collected once a day and stored in a cool room with the small end down in a tray of sand or egg box. Temperature should be about 50 or 60 degrees.

Correct food in the proper quantity and of suitable quality, together with regularity in feeding is an all-important factor in keeping pheasants in good condition. A good game bird feed, mealworms, hard boiled egg, romain lettuce, and squash is recommended. I also feed peanut hearts and whole raw peanuts, but not all at one time, but spread throughout the week. I generally alternate the above but feed game bird chow and grain every day.

Fireback eggs hatch in about 24 to 25

days either under a hen or in an incubator. It may seem that your help is needed in getting some of the chicks out of the eggs, but it isn't if you have the proper temperature and moisture. Time after time I have proven that when the chick is too weak to struggle out of the shell he is not worth bothering with. They need that exercise to start the blood circulating properly and get their new muscles into working order. This is called pipping and is the first breaking of the shell by the embryo chick when he is ready to burst his way out into the world. The little fellow works his way around inside the egg until the top of the shell comes up like a lid and the chick hatches from his tiny prison. Just before hatching, a certain amount of food substance is absorbed, therefore the pheasants do not require feeding until they are 24 to 48 hours old.

They should have water or they will dehydrate. Young pheasants should be fed 3 or 4 times a day with a good game-bird starter, hard boiled eggs, and mealworms. Be sure they are actually eating, this is most important. After about three weeks put them on a good grower feed and you should have success in sight.

Firebacks, along with other pheasants, have been used for centuries to enhance the beauty of estates and parks. Beautiful birds, with no other reason for popularity, have been in demand because of their graceful symmetry and their surprisingly gorgeous plumage. They add immeasurable attractiveness in a cage of a well landscaped yard, supplying living color, vivid and thrilling, which cannot be attained by the landscape architect.

Such birds are purely luxuries. The demand for them increases with the prosperity of the nation, and the shortage of imported birds. As men and women become more wealthy their thoughts turn to larger homes or estates where life offers so much more pleasure than can be obtained from an existence in a city apartment. The home is designed, grounds are laid out, and then comes the feeling that even yet some item is lacking to make the spot perfect. That lack is some beautiful birds, of which the Crested Fireback pheasant is one of the most beautiful. ■