

Satyr Tragopan

(*Tragopan satyra*)

by Sheldon Dingle
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Tragopans form a well defined, compact genus comprised of five distinct species and one subspecies. Tragopans are often called horned pheasants because of the two fleshy horns and brightly colored bib that the males can display during the breeding season. Most of the year the horns and bib are deflated and hidden among the feathers of the crown and throat. In all species of tragopans the females are somber brown, buff, and black in color and are often difficult to distinguish by species. The males, on the other hand, are rather gaudy in coloration with the various species being easily recognized. Young males resemble hens until their second year when they acquire their adult plumage.

All tragopans are mountain birds. The geographical distribution of the genus ranges from Kashmir in the west, along the Himalayan mountains, through Burma to central China. The satyr tragopan is found in the Himalayas in India and southern Tibet where it prefers dense mountain forests during the winter and the higher, more open woodlands during the summer.

The satyr tragopan is tenuously established in captivity, there being self-sustaining populations in England and America. It is a good aviary bird but climate should be a consideration if it is to do well. Being a high altitude bird, it does not fare well in the hot desert climates of the United States. It should always have adequate shelter and shade to keep it cool. Planted pens are best, indeed, virtually necessary in the warmer areas. Delacour's tragopan pens were 75 to 100 feet long and 25 or more feet wide. In the ordinary pheasant pens (30 feet long and 12 feet wide) the tragopans always seemed to come to a premature end. I know of tragopans kept in smaller pens and they do breed now and then but, as always, bigger pens are better.

In addition to their great beauty, most tragopans are extremely gentle. They usually become tame enough to take food from their keeper's fingers and they lack the wild and violent reactions that many other pheasants often have when approached by man. A pair or trio of satyr tragopans kept under proper circumstances can bring untold joy to the heart of the aviculturist. ●

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