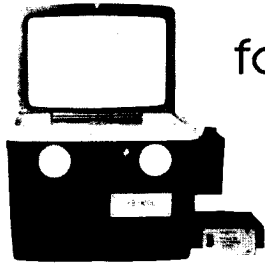


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Ruffed Pheasants

by Francis Billie
Temple City, California

Part I
of a two-part article

Origins of the Ruffed Pheasants

The two species in this genus, the Golden and the Lady Amherst's Pheasants, are among the most beautiful and certainly the most popular of all game birds.

They have no close relatives. Those in captivity will readily cross with species found within *phasianus*, *synnaticus*, and *lophura*. These hybrids are only partly fertile. The Golden and Lady Amherst's Pheasants interbreed freely in captivity. These crosses are completely fertile. Since the birds interbreed so readily, it is extremely doubtful any absolutely pure specimens of either species remain in Europe or North America.

It was fashionable toward the end of the 19th Century, when the original importation of these species took place, to produce exotic hybrids. This historical situation accounts for much of the impurity seen in the two species today.

Wild-Caught Birds

From time to time, wild-caught, male Golden Pheasants from Central China still reach Hong Kong bird markets. However, wild-caught females of the species are hardly ever obtainable. Wild-caught Lady Amherst's are very rarely seen in this bird market.

Description

Male ruffed pheasants have a long, disintegrated crest. A large ruff of wide feathers, starting from the nape, can be spread like a fan across either side of the head and neck. **Tail:** long, pointed and is composed of 18 retrices. **Wings:** short and rounded. **Females:** buff in color with dark brown barring and virtually no crest or ruff. **Immature:** resemble females, but are less heavily barred. Immatures do not attain adult plumage until their second year. **Males:** show some colored feathers on the head, neck and tail after their first molt. **Eggs:** five to 12 plain, whitish eggs are laid

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in a clutch. It takes 22 to 23 days for the eggs to hatch.

Lady Amherst's Pheasant
(*Chrysolophus amherstiae*)

Lord Amherst first introduced this pheasant into Europe in the year 1828, by sending two male birds to London. These birds did not live long. It was not until 1869 that a few specimens were again brought into Europe. After several ups and downs, the number of Amherst's Pheasants in Europe increased steadily, as a result of the arrival of a few more specimens from the wild and by successful breeding in captivity.

The Lady Amherst's Pheasant adapted very quickly to life in an aviary. The species soon proved to be just as easily maintained and reproduced in captivity as the Golden Pheasant. By comparison, the chicks may be a little more sensitive and the adult cocks somewhat more aggressive. By and large, the Lady Amherst's has proved to be an ideal aviary bird. Describing these gorgeous birds so the pheasant fancier can distinguish between the pure and impure birds requires a rather elaborate description of the colors. A comprehensive description of the birds can be found in *The New Pheasant Standard Book*.

Lady Amherst's Male

Head: has bare facial skin and lappet bluish or greenish white. **Ruff:** white, rounded feathers with blue and black border. **Beak:** bluish gray. **Iris:** pale yellow. **Body:** mantle is metallic, bluish green. Feathers rounded, bordered with scintillating green. **Upper and middle back:** black with a green bar and a wide, buffy yellow fringe.

Feathers: broad and square. **Rump:** black with a green bar and vermillion fringe. **Breast:** metallic bluish-green, black border. These feathers, edged with a bright green, are wider and brighter in color than the mantle. **Lower breast:** white, flanks white, tinged with pale yellow. **Abdomen:** white. **Vent:** white barred

with black. **Wings-scapulars:** metallic bluish-green, feathers rounded. **Tail:** central retrices, white, curved, unbroken blue black bars with wavy lines on the interspaces. **Upper tail:** coverts mottled black and white, orange and vermillion tips. **Under-tail:** coverts black and dark green, barred with white. **Tail feathers:** 33-7/8 to 45 inches in length. **Legs, feet, thighs:** mottled, white/black/brown. **Tarsus and feet:** bluish gray. **Size:** 50 to 66-1/2 inches.

Lady Amherst's Female

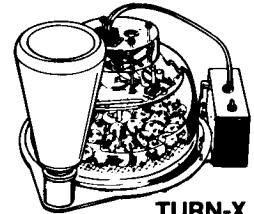
Head: reddish chestnut, blackish barring on sides of head and neck. **Neck:** blackish-brown, spotted with cinnamon buff. Strongly washed with reddish chestnut. Dark black barring with a greenish sheen. **Face:** buff, strongly tinted with reddish chestnut. **Upper throat:** buff, tinted with reddish chestnut. **Lores, cheeks, ear coverts:** silvery gray, spotted with black. **Orbital skin:** light slaty blue. **Beak:** bluish gray. **Iris:** brown, sometimes pale yellow or grayish in older hens. **Body mantle - upper breast:** rufous buff, washed with reddish chestnut. **Back:** chestnut, vermiculated with black. **Flankers:** buff - dark blackish barring. **Breast:** buff, dark blackish brown barring accented by a green sheen. **Abdomen:** pale buff, sometimes white. **Wings:** wing coverts, tertiaries and secondaries, rufous buff washed with reddish chestnut, the barring is black with a green sheen. The bars closer together than in the mantle. **Tail:** rufous, brown. **Feathers:** rounded, not pointed at the tips and strongly marked with broad, irregular bars of black, buff, and pale gray, vermiculated with black. **Length:** 12-1/8 to 14-1/2 inches. **Legs, feet and thighs:** buff, mottled brown and black, while the legs and feet are a bluish gray.

Size: length is 26 to 26-3/4 inches. Larger than the Golden hens.

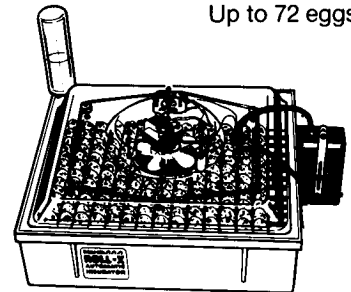
The next issue of Watchbird (Aug/Sept '90) will run Part II of this article discussing the Golden Pheasant. ●

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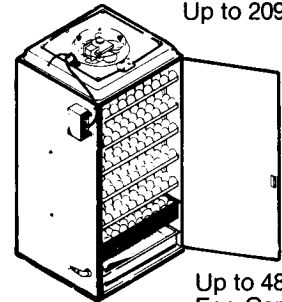
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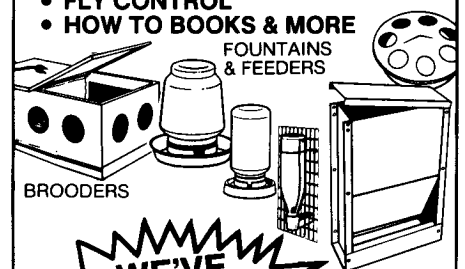
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