

Good Ground Dwellers for Cage and Aviary

by D. Grenville Roles
Tracy Aviary, Salt Lake City, Utah

I would like to take a moment to tell you a little about Tracy Aviary in Salt Lake City.

Covering some sixteen and a half acres, well wooded and with a meandering series of ponds along its northern border, Tracy Aviary occupies the southwest corner of Liberty Park in downtown Salt Lake City, Utah.

Founded April 14, 1938, we are believed to be the oldest, purely avian, publicly owned zoological collection in the world and with a population of 900 birds of 210 species, we are currently the fifth largest zoological bird collection in the country.

We have a very diverse collection, being particularly strong in Gallinaeous species and waterfowl and have 23 species of endangered birds represented, most of which are breeding.

We have a very active and successful education department, which last year saw over 100,000 persons at the various programs conducted by aviary staff. We also support a free flying bird show which is actually one of the best in the country.

Founded by a donation of privately owned birds and mammals over 50 years ago, Tracy Aviary is funded and owned by Salt Lake City Corporation.

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This article is directed to those people who prefer to keep their birds in naturalistic surroundings and who enjoy observing their birds behaving as they would in the wild.

Some of you may immediately perceive a contradiction with the title of this article in that "how can you keep a ground-dweller in a cage, naturally?" Obviously, size is the factor, and tiny terrestrials can be kept well in cages.

I propose to list a variety of extraordinary and exotic ground-dwellers in the hope of expanding interest in these different and very diverse groups, which can be compatibly accommodated with many other groups of birds.

I personally always feel that unoccupied floor space is wasted space and could be put to good use aviculturally.

It may come as a surprise to some that there are terrestrial representatives in many families which are known primarily for their arboreal members. Thus there are ground parrots, ground thrushes, ground cuckoos, ground doves, ground jays, ground creepers and even ground rollers.

Additionally, there are other groups of birds which have developed characteristics which make them resemble predominantly terrestrial families. Thus we have pheasant pigeons, quail thrushes, partridge pigeons and quail finches.

Just to confuse the picture, we also have members of predominantly terrestrial families which have aberrant arboreal or other habits, giving us tree partridge and tree ducks and finally the doubly misnamed Bustard Quail (*Pedionomus torquatus*) which is neither bustard nor quail.

I shall cover briefly the natural history of each group and their captive requirements.

For the most part, the following birds can be kept on a standard gamebird diet supplemented with mealworms and chopped fruit and greens. There are some exceptions, but these should be obvious.

Emu. *Dromaius novaehollandiae*. Australia.

Male grunts, female booms, common and abundant in the wild. An extremely rare white mutation is kept at Fleays Fauna Reserve in Queensland.

Tinamou. A family of 9 genera, 48 species. Primitive ground birds superficially resembling quail and inhabiting a wide range of habitats. Feed on seeds, berries and insects. Nest on the ground. Eggs 8 to 12 in clear, vivid colors with a hard porcelain gloss. Incubation is by the male only with an incubation period of about 21 days. Young are highly precocious. Species range from southern Mexico to Patagonia. Some of the species are: **Highland Tinamou**, *Nothocercus bonapartei*. Aqua-blue eggs.

Grey Tinamou, *Tinamus tao*. Greenish-blue eggs.

Great Tinamou, *T. major*. Turquoise eggs.

Brown Tinamou, *Crypturellus obsoletus*. Chocolate brown eggs.

Undulated Tinamou, *C. undulatus*. Vinaceous-pink eggs.

Variiegated Tinamou, *C. variegatus*. Purplish-vinaceous eggs.

Elegant Crested Tinamou, *Eudromia elegans* from Chile and Argentina, is probably the commonest representative of the family in captivity in North America, and is quite an attractive and easily maintained bird which lays avocado-green eggs.

White-faced Tree Ducks, *Dendrocygna viduata*.

One of the least aquatic waterfowl. Distributed over two continents (Africa and South America). Very vocal with a whistling voice. Nests in both hollows and dense vegetation, 8 to 12 eggs, shared incubation, simple diet and easy to maintain.

Brush Turkey, *Alectura lathami*, Australia.

Incubator birds are a family of 6 genera of 11 species. This species has to be the ugliest but is also the most common in captivity. Named for their habit of having their eggs incubated by artificial means, either the sun's heat, fermentation or even volcanic action. The chicks are the most precocial of all birds and hatch able to fly and independent of parental care.

In this particular species, the male makes a huge nest of scraped up vegetation, whose internal temperature is controlled by the excavation and replacement of the decaying vegetable matter and dirt, of which the nest is built. His entire life is spent in maintenance of the nest, the hens only appearing to deposit their eggs, which can take up to nine weeks to hatch.

Razor-billed Currasow, *Crax mitu*, Amazon Basin. Endangered species.

Great Curassow, *Crax rubra*, Mexico to Ecuador.

Large birds, both arboreal and terrestrial. Nest in trees, clutch two to three. New World only, related to guans and chachalacas of which one species, the **Plain Chachalaca**, *Ortalis vetula*, is native to the U.S.A. (Texas).

Blue Grouse, *Dendragapus obscurus*, Rocky Mountains.

Sage Grouse, *Centrocercus urophasianus*, western North America.

Heavily built gallinaceous birds inhabiting the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. Some species are highly polygamous with elaborate social and courtship behavior. Legs are feathered to the toes (including

the toes in some species). The birds are mostly vegetarian but some insects are taken. Both of these species can be found in Utah. All grouse are challenging to keep well in captivity, typically being kept on wire with a large proportion of rabbit pellets in their diets.

New World quail are generally ground nesting seedeaters which are compatible with most birds, although their habit of perching to roost can be a nuisance at times.

Long-tailed Quail or Partridge, *Dendrortyx macroura*, Central America.

This bird is extremely rare in captivity, being represented by only a single specimen at a collection in Texas.

Mountain Quail, *Oreortyx picta*, Pacific U.S.A., Washington and California.

Valley Quail, *Lophortyx californica*, Midwest U.S.A.

Gambel's Quail, *L. gambelii*, Midwest U.S.A. and lower California.

Benson's Quail, *L. douglasii*, Western Mexico

Bobwhite Quail, *Colinus virginianus*, U.S.A., Mexico, Central America and West Indies.

Colombian Crested Quail, *C. cristatus*, Central America, Venezuela, Colombia and Guyanas.

Mearn's Quail, *Cyrtonyx montezumae*, southwest U.S.A. and Mexico.

Sand Partridge, *Ammoperdix beyi*, Egypt, Israel and southern Arabia.

Birds of the semi-desert, recently brought to this country by San Diego Zoo where they have bred very well. Small and sexually dimorphic, larger than a quail but smaller than a partridge, they are primarily a seed and berry eater.

Himalayan Snowcock, *Tetraogallus himalayensis*, Western Himalayas. Magnificent, large, partridge-like birds. Dig extensively for roots and bulbs, also crop grass and bushes. Can be very territorial and aggressive to both keepers and mate.

Alectoris family. Birds in the main of southern Europe, Asia Minor and north Africa, these extremely handsome, beautifully plumaged birds are often overlooked by aviculturists. These birds are simple to maintain, hardy, easy to breed and with the ability to become quite tame and confiding, they are certainly worth considering.

Chukar Partridge, *Alectoris chukar*
Red-legged Partridge, *A. rufa*

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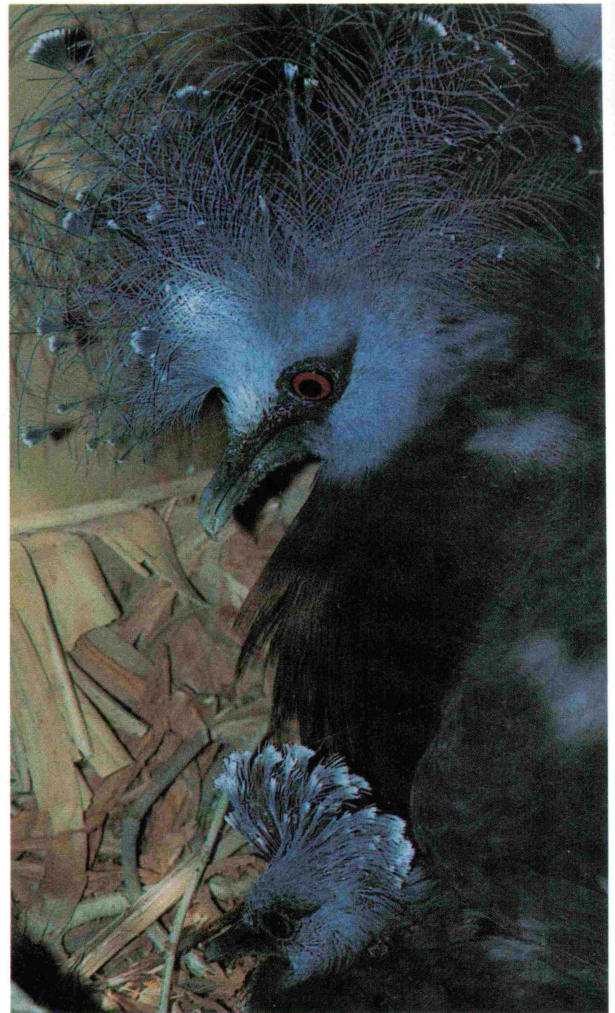
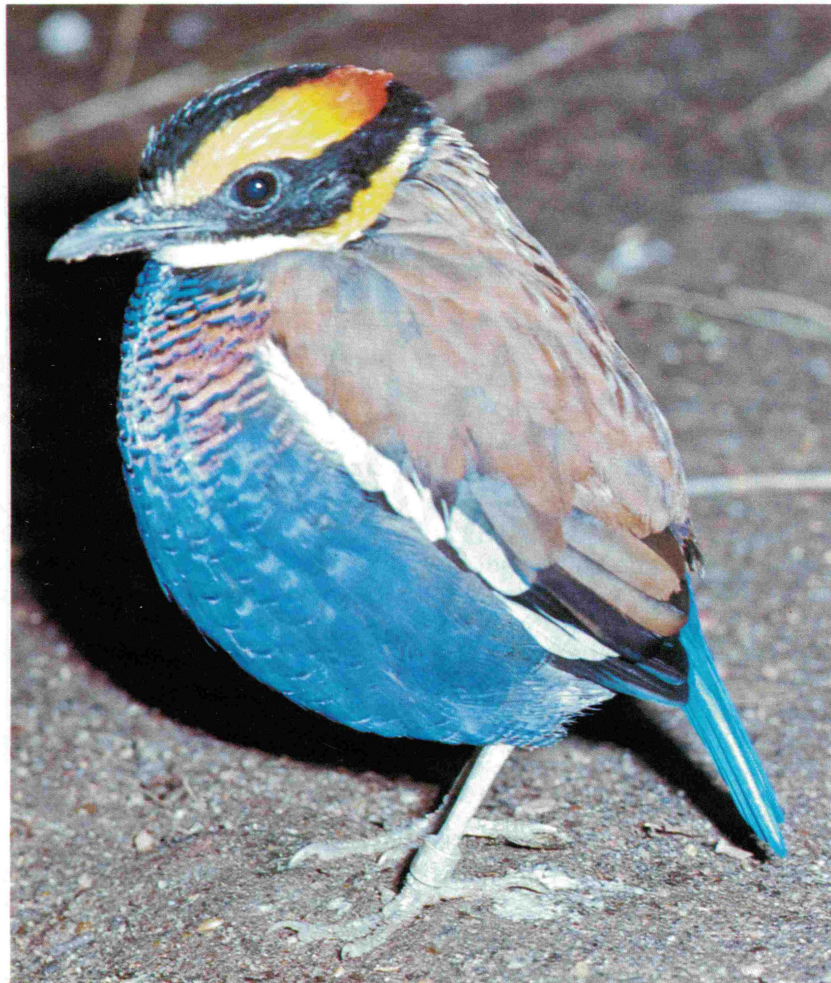
Photos by George D. Dodge & Dale R. Thompson



The Chuckar Partridge is easy to maintain and breed in captivity. Most partridges and quail are worth considering as aviary birds.



The elegant Plumed Dove (above), from Australia, requires thick foliage to provide hiding places as they can be quite aggressive to each other.



The Victorian Blue-crowned Pigeon is a beautiful addition to any aviary. This photo shows an adult with a youngster in their nest.



Little Tinamou (Crypturellus soui) near her eggs.

Although not common, several pittas, including the Giant Pitta (at left) are sometimes available. These beautiful colored birds are sometimes called Jewel Thrushes.