

photo courtesy of San Diego Zoo

*Indian Blue Peacock (Pavo cristatus) displaying for his hen.*

## Raising Peafowl in a residential area

by Jim Reid

Since the first day I was infected with "bird fever," I had a hankering to own peafowl. I thought it would be rather spectacular having a peacock strut around in my back yard. However, I live in a residential area so before I acquired any peafowl I consulted both my neighbors. Both have huge dogs, one of which, on occasion, will bark all night. Both agreed that I could "try on a temporary basis" to see if it was indeed feasible to keep peafowl in relatively confined environment. I had it all figured out. As soon as I would get my birds, I would have them pinioned thus limiting their flight and avoiding any con-

frontation with either neighbor's dog.

The big day came. I bought two mature hens and a cock. I kept them in an aviary fifteen feet square at the back of my lot for nearly three weeks before my friendly vet could come over and pinion them. As each surgery was completed we released the bird to wander around in the yard at will. Scarcely had we finished when to my horror I saw all three birds on top of the block wall separating my yard from my neighbors.

I soon learned that nothing can stop a peafowl from flying. We managed to catch

all three and clip all the feathers of one wing thinking that this would make the birds lopsided in flight. Wrong! They could still fly to the roof of the house, the top of the fence or any other place they desired. I have since discovered that no amount of altering flight feathers can stop a peafowl from flying.

That first week after the pinioning was a strain in neighborhood relations. Often early in the morning I would get a call from a neighbor who would tell me that one of my birds was on his roof. After several mornings of chasing peafowl from rooftop to rooftop, I have just about decided that the

experiment had failed. Then fate took a hand. On the same morning both peahens went over my fence in different directions. The cock was not the wandering kind. One hen was met by the neighbor's Saint Bernard and was immediately dispatched to bird heaven. The other was met by a Bassett Hound who grabbed the bird's tail about the same time my neighbor grabbed the hen's neck. The ensuing tug of war found the Bassett Hound with a mouth full of feathers and resulted in a much frightened peahen home to stay. Since that day she has never gone over the fence.

We now settled down to a relatively normal routine. It seemed that each evening about an hour before dark, the surviving hen and the cock were content to be herded back into their aviary for safe keeping that night. I kept their food in the flight and put it there just before roundup time each evening. Since they made their Harpo Marx noises only during the daytime, I had no further complaints from the neighbors.

One Spring evening I was sleeping soundly having a Tarzan type dream complete with jungle noises. Suddenly I was awake. The dream was not real but the jungle noise was. Since I had never heard a Saint Bernard or Basset Hound make such a noise I assumed it was my peacock. It

was indeed. Each night for about two weeks I could hear this scream in the middle of the night. The neighbors inquired. I assured them that this was a temporary madness. After all, had I not had these birds for almost a year without this kind of disturbance.

I figured, quite correctly, that it must be breeding season and this was the cock's way of telling the world. I began to watch their behavior. The cock would fan his tail and shake it like a tambourine, do a three step shuffle and bow. The hen in the meantime, like her human counterpart, was acting bored. This went on for nearly a week. Then one day he had her cornered. He fanned his tail, did his dance, took his bow, and voila!

Now, I began to wonder, where will they nest? Can I con them into nesting in their aviary? I had seen them investigating several bushes in the yard and one stand of bamboo. I had been told by a friend that one day the hen just disappears and later returns with a clutch of young. My yard was not that big. I fenced in a corner of their flight with plywood. A pyracantha bush in this shelter made it perfectly private. Now if I could just convince them that that was the place to nest.

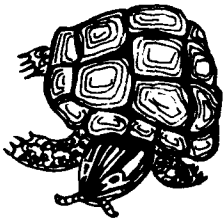
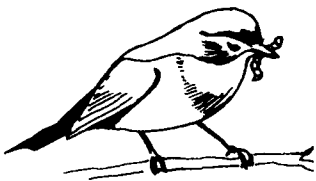
Again in fate took a hand. I had to go out of town for four days. My mother-in-law is

my bird sitter, but it was impractical for her to allow the birds their daily freedom, so for four days they stayed in the flight. When I returned, the hen had already laid two eggs exactly where I had hoped she would. In the following week she laid three more. Each morning she would come out briefly to stretch, survey the yard, honk a few times and return to her nest. Should she try to prolong her break, the cock would remind her of her responsibility and chase her back to nest. Thirty days later I saw the hen with three chicks trailing her as she clucked instruction to them about their new world.

Peahens make spectacular mothers. Today the surviving chick is almost as big as her parents, but the mother hen still clucks instruction to her offspring. The two are inseparable. Ten months of perseverance has now produced three trained peafowl. Any time of day or night that I go into my back yard and clap my hands, all three birds retreat to their aviary where I pen them up for the night. At first they would only respond near sunset, but since I often have to leave long before then, I had to work on conditioning them to respond to my hand clapping at whatever hour. Now if I could teach my scarlet macaw to imitate my hand clapping just before sundown, I would really have it made.

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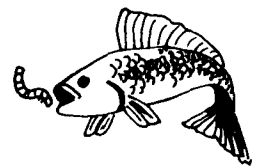
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