

Copper Pheasant

by Don Zold

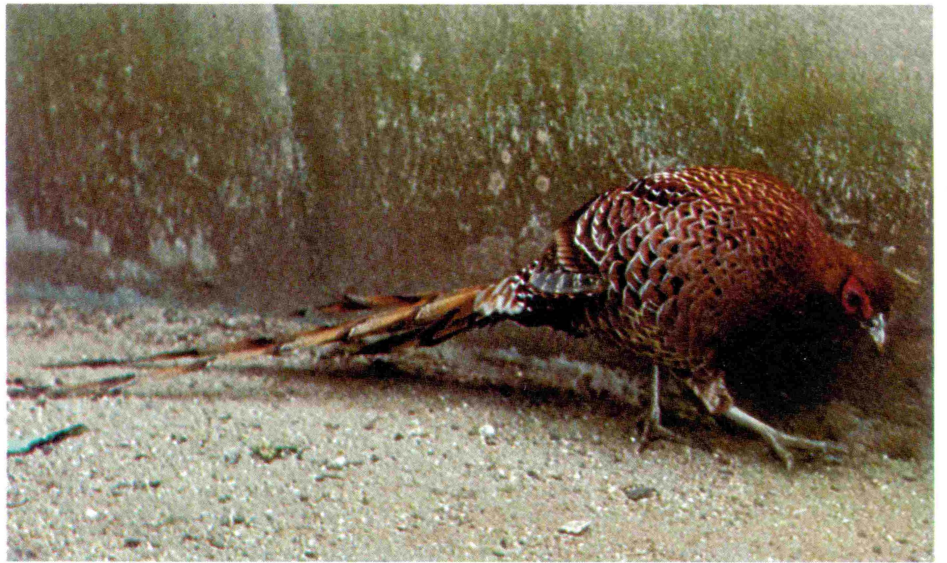


photo courtesy of Didy Grahame/Francis Billie

Copper Pheasant

Symaticus soemmerringi is a single species of the *Symaticus* or long-tail pheasant with five sub-species commonly known as the Scintillating (*Scintillans*), Shikoku (*Intermedius*), Pacific (*Subrufus*), Soemmerring's (*Soemmerringi*) and Ijima (*Ijimae*). Of the species *Soemmerringi* all are geographical races and symbolic to Japan. The changes are gradual throughout its range, with the northern race being the lightest and the southern form the darkest and most richly colored. The males of the northern regions have shorter and narrower tails than the much longer tailed birds of the south. Variations in individual birds are numerous, however, as some overlapping of geographical terrain is apparent.

All the sub-species of the *S. soemmerringi* inhabit country where they are found on sloping ground containing tall trees. When disturbed or surprised, they always run down hill before taking flight to the terrain below.

Coppers are extremely aggressive birds and the cocks will fight one another until the death of the weaker bird. The Copper devote themselves in the wild to laying eggs, incubating and rearing the young. The cock takes on the role of standing guard, incessantly patrolling around the hens.

Mr. Yukio Nakata of Japan stated that the cock is so protective that if a snake should approach a nest, he volunteers to be bitten by it and allows the snake to wind itself around him. Then with all its force, it unfurls both wings. The usual result is that the snake body is cut into two or its back is broken and it dies.

Keeping *Soemmerringi* in captivity requires a little extra care. They are hardy,

withstanding both warm and cool temperatures. During sexual excitement, the cock becomes extremely aggressive. Even after copulation he will continue to drive the hen to exhaustion, even to the point of killing her. The hen must therefore be given protection through heavy natural plantings, high perches and large aviaries. The natural setting provides the female protection, yet allows maximum copulation without having to remove the sometimes over zealous cock from the pen. Both male and female are aggressive and we know of hens attacking other hens when running in trios. As a result, protection of the weaker birds is a prime factor which cannot be overlooked in breeding the *Soemmerringi*.

At the start of the breeding season, late March or April, the males create a loud drumming sound by beating their wings. The hens lay clutches of from seven to ten light brownish eggs, one egg every other day. The incubation period is 24 days.

Given plenty of cover such as a log with overhanging shrub, the females will scrape out a nest hidden from view. An Ijima hen, belonging to the author, layed a clutch of eight eggs, incubated and hatched eight strong chicks. However, confined to a small 8 x 23 aviary, after six days she lost interest in her progeny and left them to fend for themselves.

The *Soemmerringi* hen alone incubates her clutch, the cock bird standing nearby protecting the nest and mate.

Captive bred hens fertility appears to be strong from the first egg through approximately the 25th egg or until mid May when it starts to drop off. This would suggest the male coming into breeding condition prior to the hen's cycle. Twenty-five to thirty-

five eggs may be expected from good strong breeders.

Incubation is accomplished the same as with all *Phasianus* and is too large a subject to be discussed here.

Brooding again follows the normal *Phasianus* procedures. Exercise and proper diet are essential to good healthy chicks. It is felt that young chicks should be required to exercise the tendons in their feet both during daylight hours and when roosting at night. It is felt that the exercise will help eliminate crooked toes that develop from time to time, other than those caused through inbreeding.

The exercise is accomplished by providing the chick with uneven flooring and perches, forcing the young to exercise as they forage for food as they would in the wild. This, along with a good balanced diet and unrelated breeding stock, would be a prime requisite in raising the *Soemmerringi*.

The chick in the wild feeds on insects, shoots of grass, fallen leaves and nuts. In captivity Purina Startina serves as the basic diet supplemented with greens, fruits and a few meal worms. Sunlight and rain should also be made available through an outside run to provide those natural vitamins and minerals so important to the proper growth of both adult and chick alike. Supplemental water soluble vitamins could be able to insure good healthy birds.

With that little extra attention given to the hen with heavy cover and high perches for her to rest on as the cock struts around the floor of the pen completely ingrossed in mesmerized admiration of himself, the Copper is fairly easy to raise and maintain. It is a truly stately bird to have in any collection •