

# PEACOCK PHEASANTS

by Francis Billie  
San Marino, California

See front cover photo

Peacock Pheasants constitute a group of exquisitely beautiful little birds, related to the Argus Pheasants, but Argus are much larger and have tremendous wings and tails, and form the connecting link between the Peacock Pheasants and Peacocks.

Peacock Pheasants are distributed from the Himalayas to Sumatra, east to Borneo and to the Palawan Islands. There are six species and six subspecies, two of which are rare and endangered in the wild.

Peacock Pheasants have small slender bodies, short decidedly rounded wings with the feathers of the upper coverts much prolonged; tails are long and composed of twelve feathers, broad at the extremity and slightly graduated. The feathers on the upper coverts resemble those beneath and form the same color markings. The long thin legs are armed with from two to six spurs; the toes are short with small claws; moderate size bill slightly curved towards the tip and covered with feathers at the base. The plumage of the males are covered with numerous eyes or ocelli upon the tail and occasionally on the mantle and wing covers. Some males also possess a erectile crest and can also raise the plumage of the lower neck and upper mantle, during a courtship display. Most males acquire their adult plumage at their second year.

Female pheasants are dainty little things and much duller and smaller than the males, with traces of eyes or ocelli on their wings and tails. This is a camouflage as the female does all of the incubating of the eggs and blends into the dense vegetation of the natural lands.

The courtship display of the Peacock Pheasants is one of the most beautiful of all the pheasants. The first sign of the male starting to display is the repeated raising and lowering of his head or crest, and the bringing of his crest forward until it partially conceals the beak. If the female comes closer, you may notice a parted spreading of both wings and tail, and if the hen comes over to him, the male will pick up a meal worm or morsel of food and with several shakes of his head, drop the food to the ground. At this stage the male freezes in a crouching position with his breast on the ground,

and his head turned sideways to show off his crest and neck. His wings and tail spread so that they form a complete half circle fanning out to within an inch or two of the ground, their eyes or ocelli and even the shorter feathers showing clearly outside those of the secondaries and wing coverts.

The first of the six species and probably my favorite is the Palawan Peacock Pheasant (*Polyplectron emphanum*). The first specimens were collected in 1877 on the island of Palawan off the north coast of Borneo. Two distinct color phases live on the island with a fine line dividing them. In both of the color phases the males have very striking plumage. One color phase has stripes and the other has a white spot. The males in both color phases have bright green crests, mantle and wings rich blue bordered with green, the back and tail black mottled rufous buffs, the longest tail feathers have green ocelli framed in black, the throat is gray, breast and under parts black, and legs gray generally with spurs on each leg.

My first Palawan's were obtained in the 1940's as imported birds. After about a year, the hens started to lay and the eggs were fertile. Once the baby Palawans are started there is no need to worry, they will take care of themselves and get their fair share of food.

Young Palawans have a peculiar trait of hiding under a hen's tail and they come forward only when called by the hen.

Palawans lay only two eggs per clutch. If using bantams for setting the eggs, I add four other eggs of the same size. The six eggs help to distribute the hen's weight evenly and prevent breakage.

When the chicks begin breaking out of the shells just leave them alone as nature has provided enough nourishment to last the chicks twenty-four hours. It also pays to leave the empty shells in the nest as they off-set the weight of the hen and help keep the young from being smashed.

After the chicks are twelve hours old I feed the hen all the grain she can eat and also feed her meal worms and hard boiled eggs. At this time the hen should be more likely to call the young chicks out to feed. After the chicks start to eat you are on your way to having young

Palawans.

I always check the coops the last thing in the evenings to make sure that all of the baby birds are under the hens. If they are not I put them under by hand. Over the past 25 to 30 years I have raised a number of Palawans. I now incubate all of the eggs by taking 6 to 8 eggs from a pair, leaving the last two for the hen to raise. I have found that the Palawan hens make very good mothers and I normally raise two chicks from them each year.

My next favorite would be the Germain's Peacock Pheasants (*Polyplectron Germaini*), coming from the forests of South Vietnam and Laos. The males are dark grayish brown with the mantle and wings having large round eyes or ocelli of metallic violet blue, encircled in black with a brown border, the tail feathers green ringed with black and pale gray, the facial skin is red, legs and bill are blackish gray. Females are patterned similar differing only by being smaller and duller.

Germain's were very common here in California in the 40's and 50's, and I believe I payed about \$15.00 for my first pair. They lay two eggs and are raised the same as the other Peacock Pheasant groups.

Gray Peacock Pheasants (*Polyplectron Bicalcaratum*), are the most wide spread of all the peacock pheasants, with five subspecies, ranging from the east end of the Himalayas to the Gulf of Tonkin, and south to Malaya and North Vietnam. One species is on the island of Hainon. All five subspecies seem to be similar with the exception of the Hainon, others being a little grayer or a little browner. It is very difficult to tell the difference between the rare pheasants.

The only species that I have is the Gray Peacock Pheasant (*Bricalcortum*). Males are large grayish with white spots, the ocelli on the mantle and wings are light blue-ringed with black and white, tail coverts emerald green shading to purple, ringed with black, cheeks and throat whitish gray, bill and legs gray. The female is much smaller than the male, the plumage being darker and duller. I have had a gray hen lay up to 16 eggs in one season. The Grays are very tame and charming birds with a quiet

temperament, and I highly recommend them for most of your aviaries.

Malay Peacock Pheasants (*Polyplectron malacense*), my only experience with this pheasant was in the 50's. There were two pair imported by Duwe Burdon and Mel Strain, unfortunately the females were lost in shipment and only 2 males arrived, I bought the 1 male from Duwe Burdon and mated it to a gray female, as they are about the same size. The female laid a few eggs but only one was fertile, and it did not hatch.

The male brownish gray with black spots, light brown mantle and wings with blue-green eyes or ocelli, the tail buff barred with blue-green ocellis, crest is of a hair like feather, with purple reflections, bill and legs are gray, the facial skin is light orange, eyes are whitish gray. The female, small in size, with light brown barred in block, buff throat, tail feather have triangular black ocelli, the legs and bill dark gray, eyes brown.

There are two races of Bronze Tailed Peacock Pheasants; the Northern Sumatran (*Polyplectron chalcureum*) and the Southern Sumatran Bronze Tail (*Polyplectron chalcureum*). My only experience with the Southern Sumatran Bronze Tail

Peacock Pheasant was from a pair I bought from Jake Skipper in Monrovia, California, in the late 1950's. I put them in a planted aviary, the hen made a nest in some bush and layed two eggs and hatched two young, unfortunately one young chick got in the next cage and was killed by some adult pheasants. The hen raised the other chick to maturity and it turned out to be a male. Bronze Tailed Peacock Pheasants were not too popular here in California in the 50's and 60's as they are duller than the other species of peacock pheasants. The male has a chestnut brown neck with finely vermiculated with black, head and neck plain brown, throat spotted with white, the under parts dark brown, tail barred with a metallic blue-green solid patch. The eyes are brown and the bill and legs are gray. The hen is similar but smaller and duller. In courtship the male doesn't spread his tail flat, but spreads it vertically and tilts it towards the hen in a lateral display. Rothchilds Peacock Pheasants (*Polyplectron Inopenatum*): This is a very beautiful peacock pheasant that I have never kept. However, I believe there is a male in the Vern Denton Collection in Livermore, California, and he is breeding with a gray

hen, and intends to breed the young back to the father. I hope he will be successful as I believe that is the only one in the U.S.A.

Males are dark gray on the heat spotted with light gray and white on the throat and face, hind neck forms a ruff, upper part chestnut with small black lines being tipped with small metallic blue ocelli. The tail is black, spotted with buff except for the two central feathers which have large green eyes, under part dark gray spotted with light gray. The thighs brown and legs and bill are gray. The hen is smaller and duller but similar in pattern, except the ocelli of her upper parts and tail are dull and has black spots also tail is much shorter.

The Peacock Pheasants are all beautiful birds that do rather well in captivity if a few basic conditions are met. They can be kept separately in pheasantries or in a mixed collection such as mine which includes cranes, ducks, finches, parrots, soft-billed birds and of course pheasants.

However you keep them, Peacock Pheasants are delightful, beautiful, rare, and truly deserve a prominent place in American aviculture.

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Enhances and beautifies plumage growth, colors, fertility, general appearance and performance of your favorite show bird — large or small. Contains all essential amino acids, vitamins, minerals and electrolytes. All materials used are pure food grade.

For an average 1 pound bird, this package (250 grams) contains 250 days' supply.

#### GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

	per one 250 Gram container	per one teaspoonful (approx. 5 Grams)
Vitamin A	870,000 USP	17,400 USP
Vitamin D	46,900 USP	938 USP
Vitamin B-1	440 mg	8.8 mg
Vitamin B-2	330 mg	6.6 mg
Vitamin B-6	330 mg	6.6 mg
Vitamin B-12	3,580 mcg	71.6 mcg
Vitamin E	2,885 IU	57.7 IU
Vitamin K	13 mg	0.26 mg
Niacin	2,200 mg	44.0 mg
d-pantothenic acid	220 mg	4.4 mg
Folic acid	10 mg	0.2 mg
Rutin	10 mg	0.2 mg
Biotin	240 mcg	4.8 mcg
Calcium	8,000 mg	160.0 mg
Phosphorous	6,000 mg	120.0 mg
Iodine	0.0088%	40 mg
Iron	0.79 %	1,980 mg
Zinc	0.08 %	190 mg
Copper	0.028 %	70 mg
Manganese	0.07 %	176 mg
Magnesium		50 mg
Sulfur		8,750 mg
Capsicum		2,500 mg
Alanine		4,500 mg
Arginine		4,750 mg
Aspartic acid		10,350 mg
Cystine		500 mg
Glycine		2,600 mg
Glutamic acid		22,600 mg

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	container	teaspoonful
Histidine	4,000 mg	80.0 mg
Isoleucine	9,300 mg	186.0 mg
Leucine	13,300 mg	266.0 mg
Lysine	10,100 mg	202.0 mg
Methionine	4,400 mg	88.0 mg
Phenylalanine	6,800 mg	136.0 mg
Proline	13,550 mg	271.0 mg
Serine	8,000 mg	160.0 mg
Threonine	6,750 mg	135.0 mg
Tryptophane	7,700 mg	154.0 mg
Tyrosine	8,100 mg	162.0 mg
Valine	2,950 mg	59.0 mg

**DIRECTIONS:** One-tenth of bird's daily food intake. For example, for a bird weighing 1 lb., place ¼ teaspoonful (approx. 1 ½ grams) in the bird's feed. Smaller or larger birds, use proportionately. Beautiful results will be noticed in 30 days!

**INGREDIENTS:** Vitamin A acetate, vitamin D-3, thiamine, riboflavin, pyridoxine, vitamin B12, vitamin E, vitamin K, niacin, choline, inositol, calcium pantothenate, calcium lactate, folic acid, rutin, biotin, calcium phosphate, ferrous sulfate, potassium chloride, magnesium oxide, zinc gluconate, copper oxide, manganese gluconate, sodium chloride, dessicated liver, hesperidin complex, yeast, glutamic acid, apple extract, dates, date seed kernals, yucca, alfalfa, chia, comfrey, dandelion, rolled oats, whole egg solids, milk solids, soya beans, kelp. Product stable for at least two years if kept in dark, dry, cool place. No refrigeration required.

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