

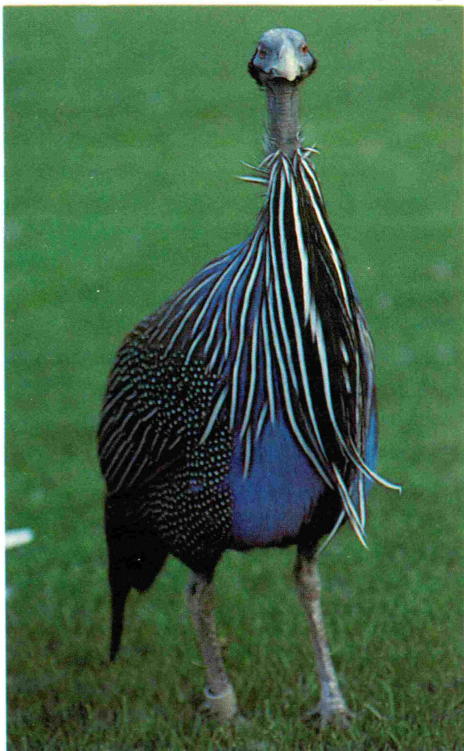


The Vulturine Guineafowl, *Acryllium vulturinum*, is slimmer and taller than the other guinea fowl species. It has a small, naked head with a hook-tipped beak which gives it a vulture-like appearance.

## Vulturine Guineafowl at Tracy Aviary

by D. Grenville Roles, Curator  
Salt Lake City, Utah

The most nearly beautiful member of a family of bizarre, though strikingly plumaged birds, Vulturines are the largest member of the group,



The Vulturine Guineafowl is from tropical East Africa, often seen in groups of 20 to 60 individuals. Considered the most beautiful of the guinea fowl, it is noted for its long, pointed feathers that descend below its neck. These backles are black in color with deep cobalt-blue edges and white center shafts.

which are distributed over most of Africa south of the Sahara, with a small, possibly introduced, population of Helmeted Guineafowl (*Numeida meleagris sabyi*) in Morocco.

Certainly the Vulturine is the most handsomely plumaged guinea fowl with cobalt-blue, black and white striped, elongated neck feathers, lilac wing stripe and with a naked, powder-blue head skimpily adorned with a small naped patch of deep maroon stubble. The voice is usually a quiet, murmuring conversation of "cheeps" but, once in a while, the birds will call with a shrill, interrogative or complaining series of screeches. The eggs are pale ivory mottled with fine speckled brown spots. Incubation takes approximately 24 days and birds attain their adult plumage at about six months. They are sexually mature at two years.

Relatively simple to maintain on an ordinary gamebird diet, most successful breeders almost invariably supplement their feed with high protein items such as meat, eggs or nuts. These birds are hardy but are very susceptible to intestinal parasites. It will behoove the breeder to perform periodic fecal analysis and treat when necessary.

We have a young trio at the aviary

who have yet to breed for us, even though the male goes through his high-stepping courtship routine quite frequently.

The most successful breeders I've worked with were a pair we had at "Bright Meadows" in Sebastopol, California. There, our pair had quite a large pen about 25 feet square, initially well grassed and planted (eventually the birds ate everything edible within reach). We had a magnificent male and a hen you would not give 10 cents for (although we paid almost \$300). We purchased her sight unseen and felt we'd been taken for a ride when we got her out of her box. Toenails were missing, she had ruffled plumage and was lethargic; we'd have sent her back if we thought she would have survived the journey.

However, survive she did and, although she always looked wretched, she gave us 54 chicks in the first year. She went on to lay in every month of the year, sometimes laying as many as three eggs in 48 hours, and produced over 100 eggs within 12 months. She eventually started eating her own eggs and it became quite a challenge to rescue them before she got to them. Luckily, she usually laid early in the evening and would call incessantly for a short while before she produced.

Her nest was in a clump of New Zealand Flax (*Phormium tenax*) and I could clearly see her from the pathway. The trick was to get into the aviary and snatch the egg away in the three or four seconds it took her to recover from laying (the "thank God that's over" phase), before she could turn around and have a really fresh dinner. Not being stupid, she got wise to me and would parade around her nest for an hour or more sometimes, in the hope that I would leave and she could eat. If I tried to fool her and move any distance at all, she could pop that egg out in seconds flat and scramble it before I could get back.

The diet of this pair was supplemented with raw hamburger, hard-boiled egg, sunflower seed and peanuts — small items fed at intervals throughout the day. Feeding the "good stuff" in this way also ensured that the birds became tame very quickly and could be checked with ease. Remarkable and distinctive, these birds can really be recommended to the experienced aviculturist who is looking for something quite different. ●



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