

Peafowl in the Aviary

by Nancy Vigran
with Bernie Teunissen
and Peter Frank

Notorious for their freedom to roam zoos, bird parks and arboretums, Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* are often allowed the same privileges in villages of their native India and Sri Lanka. Considered sacred in much of their native habitat, they are protected and roam in small groups of one cock with two to five hens and their offspring. But in other areas they are hunted for their iridescent, elongated tail plumes as well as for food and there they have developed an aversion for civilization.

Peafowl rarely take a flight, but often choose to run from danger. The courting dance of peacocks to their hens is commonly recognized. The cock raises his upper tail coverts into a quivering fan, framing himself. The 14-inch tail otherwise trails behind him, much like a bride's train. The brown-mottled-colored hens are rather plain compared to their sparkling blue and green clad mates, but both sexes have a delicate, erectile crest. Hens are relatively small, 35-40 inches in length, compared to the cocks which measure 78-90 inches in

length including the train.

In captivity, peafowl are usually kept in pairs or one cock to two or three hens. The larger the pens the better, 12 ft. by 60 ft. is recommended, although they can be kept in smaller areas, 24 ft. by 30 ft. Peafowls can be kept with other avian species, but should be introduced at the same time and kept in a large enough flight to allow for individual territories, nesting sites and feeding areas. Some breeders allow their peafowl to run freely on their property. Peafowl normally won't wander too far from food and water, but can be a nuisance to neighbors if they fly over the fence.

The peafowl group should be established at a fairly young age, prior to sexual maturity of two to three years of age and introduced to a pen together. It is difficult to add more birds to the group later, although offspring are accepted into the group.

Hens may pick anywhere in the pen to lay their five to seven, cream-colored eggs. If the eggs are removed for artificial incubation, the hen may lay a second clutch, but otherwise she will raise

only one brood per year. The hen may not utilize a prepared straw nest and eggs are often scattered around the pen so that only a few may actually be properly incubated. Chicks hatch in approximately 28 days, young start developing crests at one month of age and will take on plumage resembling their mother when a few months old. Males obtain color after their first year and will develop their full trains by three years of age.

Indian Peafowl do have a distinctive call, used when alarmed and during the courtship ritual. During the breeding season the call can be troublesome to neighbors and should be a consideration before purchasing breeding stock. Peafowl are not welcome, mainly for this reason, in most urban areas, and are better kept in rural environments.

Peafowl do not require an elaborate diet. Some caretakers simply feed all-purpose poultry pellets. Breeders may add turkey-grow pellets or trout chow; greens and fruit add a relished variety to their diet. Some breeders have found that young left with their mothers have a faster growth rate than those raised in artificial brooders, although when fed equivalent diets they seem to manage to develop to the same maturity.

India Peafowl are bred in many mutations including the black-shouldered, albinos, peds, cameos and lavenders. Most peafowl mutations are recessive, but the cameo is the one confirmed sex-linked mutation. Strikingly different from the original peafowl in coloration, the cameo is a chocolate-milk brown.

Java Peafowl *Pavo m. muticus* are larger, stouter birds, and are much more rare in captivity. Native to Java, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and the Malay peninsula, they are also shier birds and

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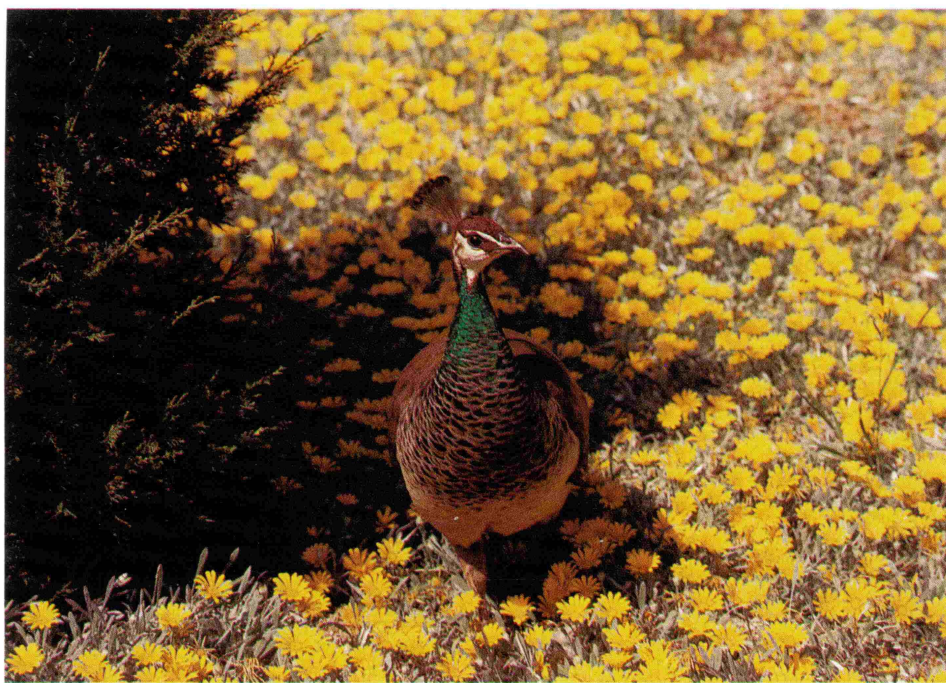
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Peabens need to be well camouflaged when nesting.

not protected and therefore hunted for food in much of their region.


Javas, often referred to as Java Greens, are a more metallic green with

bronze edging to the feathering and blue centered feathering on the mantle, neck and breast. The train is much like that of the Indian Peacocks, but has a more golden sheen. Although the hen more closely resembles the cock in this species, she is still duller in color and of course lacks the tail train. The calls of the Java Peafowl are not as harsh or ear-piercing as that of the Indian.

Breeding habits are virtually the same for the Javas as Indian Peafowl and the two have been hybridized in captivity, most often to pass along genetic mutations. However, there is a great desire in the avicultural community to keep the lines pure and the two species separate.

Through a desire to exchange information on peafowl combined with a flare for writing, Marion Smith started *The Peacock Journal* in October 1993. The magazine is reader-friendly with many articles written by fellow interested readers.

Subject matter includes various, in-depth, how-to articles on breeding, mutations and genetics, housing requirements, fostering, artificial incubation and rearing of young as well as a few articles on other types of fowl. With more than 1,000 subscribers the journal covers information of interest to beginners and experienced breeders and carries a classified section on fowl.

For more information on *The Peacock Journal* write: *The Peacock Journal*, Route 2, Box 435, Alto, GA 30150 or call (800) 399-1561. 



Young peafowl show the beginnings of the crest found on the adults.



Peafowl belong to the pheasant family with the adult males being brilliantly colored.



The male peacock uses his six-foot train or tail during courtship. When spread, it appears as a shimmering fan with iridescent "eye" markings.

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