

**PHEASANT**

# Aviculture

by F. Hermans , Kabricht 18, 3770 Riemst Belgium, February 2000

- 1 - Introduction
- 2 - Aviculture of domestic and exotic pheasants in the world
- 3 - Avicultural methods for pheasants first developed in the west
- 4 - Pheasants in captivity in Asia
- 5 - Pheasants in captivity in the West
- 6 - Aviculture of exotic pheasants before 1984
- 7 - Aviculture of exotic pheasants after 1984

## 1. Introduction

The survival of many exotic pheasant species in their natural habitat is threatened because of the wars, political unrest, deforestation, and developments that have taken place in many Asian countries over the past fifty years. Many of these birds are in serious trouble in their native ranges due to severe destruction of habitat and hunting pressure. As human populations increase, as they have done on southeast Asia since 1945, more virgin ground must be cleared and devoted to food production resulting in further reduction of habitat for these birds. Out of the forty-nine species, not less than forty-three species or subspecies of pheasants are considered internationally to be in danger of immediate extinction or threatened with extinction unless sincere effort is made to preserve them and their native habitats.



As many as 173 species and subspecies of birds have become extinct within historical times. Today, however, about 400 and more species are threatened. Fossil records tell us that it is the law of nature that a particular species, after living its normal span of life on earth (2 million years for birds and 600000 for mammals) will be replaced by newly evolved species. Today, however, the rate of extinction has become 40 to 400 times faster, almost entirely due to the short-sightedness of man, the so-called Supreme creation of God. The rate at which the natural habitats and hence their intrinsic species are disappearing, have been given in the below mentioned Rainforest Map from 1990 till 2011.

### Degradation of the tropical rainforest from 1990 till 2011

Pheasants will vanish at the same speed, as rainforests are destroyed by man ! Almost all the tropical rainforests in Asia are the homes of many endangered pheasants today.



Visit the Tropical Rainforest Site, the home of many endangered pheasants and other wildlife in Asia !

For pheasants, as for the majority of other animals, loss of habitat is the major factor of their present decline in the wild. This can be brought about by the felling of trees, flooding of an area due to the construction of dams, excessive use of insecticides and other poisonous chemicals, drainage of swamps and lakes, too much disturbance due to activities of man, etc... It is in this context that captive breeding and reintroduction (if possible) become so very significant. Captive breeding of exotic

pheasants only contributes to the conservation of these species, when also the places, in which they live in the wild, are protected by all means, for one exterminate an animal or a bird, as successfully by destroying its natural environment as with gun or trap or poison.

Most people, who have studied pheasants for some time in their natural surroundings, are convinced that, given a suitable habitat, most species of pheasants can withstand predation from all kinds of animals, including man. We give you two examples to judge the veracity of this statement. Firstly, the two species of pheasants that are under greatest pressure due to predation from man are the Red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), and the kaleedge pheasant (*Lophura leucomelana*), and yet both have learnt to live with man and are able to survive well. The second example is provided by the large-scale trapping carried out by bird trappers (Wilson, pers. comm. Dr. Suresh Singh, Lucknow India) in the Garhwal Himalayas, India, around 1850. About 1000-1500 skins of male Himalayan monal pheasant (*Lophophorus himalaiensis*) were taken from the wild every year and this for a number of years for the feather industry at the that time. Nobody reported that the species was declining in numbers, leave alone getting to the point of extinction. But habitat destruction, as is taking place for the moment, with the additional pressure of predation by man is usually a fatal combination.

Fortunately, many of the rare species in the wild are now commonly bred in captivity. A summary of the actual status of all pheasants in the wild (IUCN), in trade (CITES) and in captivity has been given in chapter Checklist of this website. Many aviculturists in the world today maintain a limited number of exotic pheasants in their aviaries. This is partly a result of the major interest taken by several conservationists and governments, desiring to protect and restore rare pheasant species in their natural habitat and partly because many people like to work with pheasants in captivity for their beauty and display.

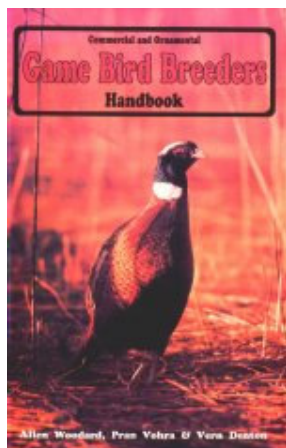
## **2. Aviculture of domestic and exotic pheasants in the world**

The captive status and breeding of rare and endangered pheasants

The aviculture of exotic pheasants has been very popular in continental Europe, UK, north America, and also in some extent in Japan, China and Thailand for at least the last 100 years. In recent years much work has been done on large-scale breeding of game pheasants in western Europe, in north America and in Japan. The species most commonly kept and bred is *Phasianus colchicus torquatus*, though some other subspecies may have been used. Similar attention has been paid to the artificial reproduction of the Soemmerring's copper (*Syrnaticus soemmerringi*) and the green pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*) in Japan. Millions of these birds are harvested in the wild and on private shooting clubs.

### 3. Avicultural methods for pheasants first developed in the west

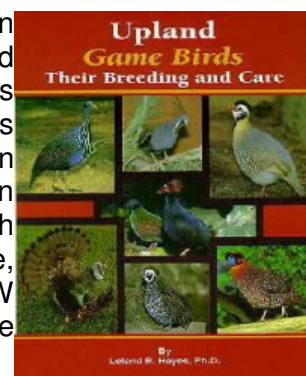
Most of the literature which deals with the knowledge on how to keep and breed pheasants today deals with practices and methods evolved in western Europe, north America and Japan, and only very limited information is available regarding other Asian countries, their native habitats.



One of the best books, dealing with the aviculture of both the domestic and exotic pheasants, has been written by Dr. Allen Woodard, Mr. Pran Vohra, and Mr. Vern Denton was released in 1993 under the title "Commercial and Ornamental Game Bird Breeders Handbook" with ISBN 0-88839-311-3. This book was written for the purpose of updating the most recent methods used to reproduce commercial and exotic species of game birds. The most recent methods of egg handling, incubation, nutrition, housing, lighting, and disease control are described for domestic and exotic species of pheasants, partridges and quail. The authors offer detailed information on genetics, embryo development, artificial insemination techniques, and bird biology that are considered helpful to beginners, experienced game breeders, and bird biologists. This handbook of aviculture is an incredible compendium of knowledge in easily extracted form. It can be ordered

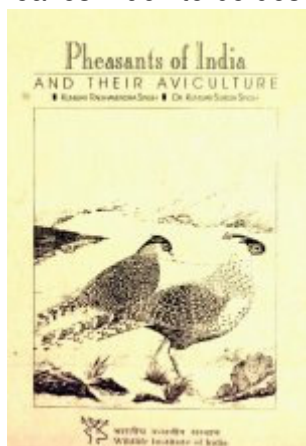
from Hancockhouse Publishers LTD.

An other wealth of avicultural information of gamebirds can be consulted in the famous book "Upland Game Birds - Their Breeding and Care" (second edition), written and published by a good friend of mine Dr. Leland B. Hayes ([www.LelandHayes.com](http://www.LelandHayes.com)) in 1995 with ISBN0-9633196-2-0. This book deals with the authors 45 years experience in working with gallinecious birds in captivity. The book covers the subjects of managing, breeding, and selection of species of upland game birds thoroughly. This book is filled with information that is not only good, solid, practical information for everyday use, but is also useful and valuable as documented references. This is a SHOW and TELL HOW TO book, that gives answers to questions, which will help the reader on his way to aviculture in general.



#### 4. Pheasants in captivity in Asia

Extremely few people in Asia have spent much attention to the aviculture of their native pheasants and whatever captive pheasants are found, are in zoos. Our experience has shown that the science and art of aviculture in Asia are not well developed for they have rarely been practiced in a systematic way. Unfortunately, the situation in many Asian zoos leaves much to be desired and most of the time, if pheasants breed in this part of the world, it



is not because of any special efforts being made but in spite of the benevolent neglect that they receive. Most of the species displayed in Asia are the golden (*Chrysolophus pictus*), Lady Amherst (*Chrysolophus amherstiae*), ring-necked (*Phasianus colchicus*), silver (*Lophura nycthemera*) and the ubiquitous Indian peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*).

One of the most interesting books dealing with the captive breeding and other related aspects of pheasants in Asia has

been written by Dr. Kunwar Suresh Singh and his son Raghavendra Singh : "Pheasants of India, and their aviculture", published by the Wildlife Institute of India in 1995 with ISBN 81-85496-005.

This book differs from all other publications, I have read, in that it deals with the keeping and breeding of most pheasants "under tropical conditions", which makes this book quite unique. This book explains in detail the censusing, feeding, nutrition, diseases and elective breeding of pheasants.

The authors have taken special care to explain why a particular practice has been recommended so that even the beginner can follow the process. The book explains the importance of good and wholesome feed and how to prepare it from the various ingredients. Though the book lays stress on the maintenance and breeding of pheasants in tropical regions, it is equally useful in temperate regions. The publication of this unique pheasant book was made possible by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.



Meanwhile a new group of aviculturists and conservationists, organised in the AVIAN SOCIETY in India, has been initiated, which wants to protect all exotic pheasants, with emphasis on the Indian species. The society aims to providing total consultancy to individual, zoo, resorts and corporate groups who wish to maintain and breed foreign pheasants, birds will be supplied at fixed prices when available. Funds collected will go to the project of captive breeding of Indian

pheasants for release, as the project gets no financial support at present. Since the supply is limited and often uncertain, buyers are advised to place the order in advance. For any further details, consult the website of [AVIAN SOCIETY](#)

## 5. Pheasants in captivity in the West

In western Europe and north America the captive situation looks very different from the one in Asia because many exotic pheasants have become well-established in western captivity in the course of the last 25 years. The introduction of new medicines, of good nutrition and of careful management practices have help to achieve these remarkable results. Prime examples for these are:



1. High and middle-high altitude pheasants : Himalayan monal (*Lophophorus impeianus*), koklass (*Pucrasia macrolopha*), satyr tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*), Temminck's tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*), white eared (*Crossoptilon crossoptilon*), brown eared (*Crossoptilon mantchuricum*), blue eared (*Crossoptilon auritum*) and the cheers (*Catreus wallichi*). Most of these taxa live in the range from the upper timber belt to snow line in Asia. Only the bloodpheasants (genus *Ithaginis*), two taxa of the monals, Sclater's and Chinese, and three taxa of the tragopans, in case, Cabot's, Blyth's and western are not yet well-represented, mainly due to the lack of import of sufficient founders of these species into western captivity in recent years.

2. Low-elevation pheasants, mostly from the jungles or the jungle-savannah and low hills, such as the grey peacock (*Polyplectron bicalcaratum*), Palawan (*Polyplectron emphanum*), Rothschild's (*Polyplectron inopinatum*), Fireback and other Gallopheasants (genus *Lophura*), all Longtaileds (genus *Syrnaticus*), junglefowls, argus and peafowl's. Only those species are not well-represented, from which not enough founders have been imported in the course of the last 25 years. The rarest se-species are the Vietnamese (*Lophura hatinhensis*), imperial

(*Lophura imperialis*), bulwer (*Lophura bulweri*), crested argus (*Rheinartia ocellata*), Bornean peacock pheasant (*Polyplectron schleiermacheri*), and some others too.

The standard management and breeding practices for all of these pheasants has been well established in northern America and in western Europe, especially in the Benelux. Climatic conditions in the Benelux are mild, both in the summer as in the winter as well, and do have a significant influence on the reproduction of rare pheasants. Summers do have an average temperature of 18 Celsius degrees whereas temperatures in the winters are around 2 Celsius degrees. There is a light to medium snowfall in the winter. Our climate has proven to be particularly good for high altitude species, such as the monals, eareds, koklass and tragopans. The low-elevation species also do well when they are kept indoors in the winter to protect them from freezing temperatures during cold nights.

We believe that the greatest variety on exotic pheasants in the world nowadays, does exist in the Benelux. Almost all species are being kept and bred with reasonable success in our regions and many descendants are being exported to other countries, which are known not to have such pheasants in captivity. We have been shipping hundreds of exotic pheasants, which have been born and raised in our facilities, in all directions in the world in the course of the last five years.

## **6. Aviculture of exotic pheasants before 1984**

When we first started keeping and breeding pheasants in the early 1970's there were no other restrictions than meeting the Belgian Governments health requirements to transport (import and export) live pheasants and their eggs. Admittedly, many freshly wild-taken pheasants species were taken into the Benelux and other west European countries by local wildlife dealers for trade at that time.

It must be said that the present captive-bred stock in the Benelux originates from those days (1950-1984) when importation of freshly wild-taken stock, from wildlife dealers in Asia (mainly from Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, India) and/or captive-bred stock from private facilities in the United States of America, was taken into our regions. It was thanks to these importations that many species of pheasants became available in captivity. Most of these species have now become well-established and are even self-sustainable in captivity in the West . Much expertise and understanding on how to keep and breed these species in captivity has been collected and has been published in international avicultural magazines and in books.

Simultaneously many species of pheasants and other related fauna have become endangered or threatened with extinction in their native countries mainly due to the depletion of their environment and not so much by their capture for resale during the last twenty five years . As a result many pheasants have now become protected by local legislations in their native countries and by international agreements among countries, concerned for the welfare and well-being of endangered species in the wild.

## **7. Aviculture of exotic pheasants after 1984**

An international association, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), was organized and now includes membership from countries with natural pheasant populations (Asia) and countries with a demand for pheasants (Europe, America, Arabia, Japan, etc...). A series of internationally approved regulations were drawn which cover the exportation and importation of exotic game birds. It was on the 1st of January 1984, when CITES became ratified within the European Community, that the "old-fashioned way" of trade and transport of endangered species (also many pheasants) became regulated within the European Union and as a result the vivid

stream of imports of freshly wild-taken birds and animals, in particular pheasants, became almost stopped.

A table with the current classification of each pheasant species in the appendices of the IUCN and CITES has been given under chapter "Checklist". A distinction has been made between the categorization according to the Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 (A,B,C and/or D) of the European Union and of the other signatories to the Convention of Washington, implementing CITES (1975 and later) (I, II, III).

Since then, more and more aviculturists in the Benelux have become experts in the keeping and breeding of these species, even at such an extend, that now, more and more young pheasants are being kept and bred each year, as there is a demand for them in the Benelux . So export of these new captive-bred specimens has become the logical sequel, reducing the impact of illegally tak en specimens of such species from nature and of selling th ose specimens to the West for foreigner currencies. It is because of these new regulations and because of the devotion and great concern of many Western aviculturists have put into the captive breeding of these species that it is now becoming much eas ier and cheaper to buy "endangered and/or threatened" pheasant species in America and/or Western Europe then for instance in Asia itself. Some men even believe that of some species there are more individuals being kept and bred in the West than there are literally available in the wild. Prime examples for these are maybe, the Reeve's Pheasant, the Edward's Pheasant, Elliot's pheasant, Cheer Pheasant, and maybe some others too...

We have added a list to the table in the Checklist with the "estimated" captive situation in western captivity. These data are being drawn from personal investigations between 1975 and 2000 and should also understood as such. For any further information on these data, contact me on my e-mail address and/or home address.