



## Lady Amherst's Pheasant

Kingdom: Animalia  
 Phylum: Chordata  
 Subphylum: Vertebrata  
 Class: Aves  
 Order: Galliformes  
 Family: Phasianidae  
 Genus: *Chrysolophus*  
 Species: *amherstiae*



Photo courtesy of Lynne Panebianco

### Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The Lady Amherst's Pheasant is found at higher elevations from 6,000-15,000 feet in scrub bamboo forests and shrub areas of southeastern Tibet, southwestern China, upper Burma, and northern Shan states.
- **Exhibit Location:** Glass enclosed exhibit in courtyard

### Characteristics

- Adult male length: 51-56 inches; Female adult length: 26-27 inches
- Males are very colorful. The crown is metallic green with a crimson crest. The face and throat are black with metallic green spots. The beak, legs, and feet are bluish-gray. They have an extremely long black and white tail with a red and yellow rump. A neck ruff is black and white.
- Females are less colorful. They are tan and brown, striped and penciled with black. They have white dots on the top of the rounded tail feathers. The legs are a grayish-blue.
- Males assume full plumage in the second year. Until that time, they resemble the females.
- This species is slightly larger than the Golden Pheasant.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** about 6-10 years; **In Captivity** about 15 years

### Behaviors

- *Chrysolophus amherstiae* are well able to tolerate the most severe weather conditions, with neither damp nor cold harming them.
- They avoid dense forests.
- The Lady Amherst pheasant is a docile bird and can be housed with other bird species. A male can be housed with more than 1 hen. It is a very secretive pheasant that runs rather than flies.
- They have a variety of vocalizations: advertising, contact, alarm, and contentment.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** live insects, whole fruit and veggies

### Reproduction

- There is a loose relationship between the sexes and during breeding season the more dominant cocks will mate with several hens. After mating, hens leave to lay, incubate, and later rear their chicks entirely alone. The cocks stay to defend their mating ground, fighting furiously with other cocks.
- Although they do not reach their full adult plumage until the second year, they are fertile in their first.
- Breeding season varies with climate, but usually begins in May.
- The mating ritual is among the most elaborate of all the pheasants. It may take place over several hours, with the hen choosing the strongest and most brightly colored cock from the group. The posturing and dance of the male occurs within an area in a clearing on the forest floor. The male spreads a large ruff of feathers on the head like a fan during the courtship display. A small wattle under the eye is expanded to cover the lower part of the cheek.
- Nests are concealed in dense undergrowth where they are difficult to be seen. The clutch usually consists of 5-12 eggs that hatch in about 22 days. During a season, 30-40 eggs in various clutches may be laid.
- They will readily hybridize (crossbreed) with the Golden Pheasant, producing fertile offspring.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** seeds, berries, roots, leaves, flowers, stems, buds, tubers, and insects
- **At the Zoo:** Avi pellets, grain, fruit mix and insects

### Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** LC (Least Concern); **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- They are believed to be uncommon, but not endangered.
- They are subject to direct forms of human exploitation: illegal hunting for food and feathers and shrinking natural habitat.
- All pheasants in China, except the ring-necked pheasant, are protected by law. A permit is required to take them from the wild or to hunt them.
- The WPA, World Pheasant Association, was founded in 1975 to promote the conservation of the world's Galliformes. They promote their survival by doing detailed surveys encouraging local people to engage in sustainable use of the forests.
- Predators: humans

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- This pheasant species was named for Sarah, Countess of Amherst (1762-1838). Her husband, William Pitt Amherst, Governor General of India, was responsible for sending the first birds to London in the early 1800's.
- Early Europeans called them "flower pheasants." They thought they could not be real birds because of their beauty.

### Sources:

- del Hoyo, J., Elliot, A., & Sargatal, J. (1994). *Handbook of the birds of the world, volume 2*. Barcelona, Sp: Lynx Edicions.
- Santa Barbara Zoological Gardens, (n.d.). Lady amhersts pheasant. Retrieved Dec. 03, 2005, from Santa Barbara Zoological Gardens Web site: <http://www.santabarbarazoo.org/animalview.asp?animnum=77>.