

Palawan Peacock Pheasant

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



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** Palawan peacock pheasants are endemic to (found only on) the island of Palawan in the Philippines. They inhabit the island's humid, coastal lowland forest and deep forests, which are rapidly diminishing. Several habitat sites are known to exist in the central mountain range, from the limits of disturbed forest up to 2000 feet. Due to deforestation, it is now thought that they are becoming increasingly restricted to the island's mountains.
- **Exhibit Location:** Diversity of Birds

Characteristics

- Length: males average 20 inches, females 16 inches; Weight: males average 21 oz., females 18 oz.
- It is considered to be the most beautiful of the peacock species. The male has a long metallic blue crest with white lines above and below the eye. The rest of the head, underparts, and flight feathers are black. The mantle and wing coverts (covering) are metallic blue with purple reflections. Its back, rump and tail are black with rusty brown spots. The upper tail coverts and broad tail feathers have metallic ocelli (a marking that resembles an eye) bordered by black and gray. It also has two to three spurs on each leg. The male is attractively colored to attract a female. The female is smaller, with no spurs. She is mainly mottled brown, has a crest that is brown, and isn't as visible as the male. The face and throat is whitish and the tail is much shorter than the male's with very faint ocelli on the feathers.
- The bills are black and the feet are brown in both sexes.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** - unknown; **In Captivity** - up to 15 years

Behaviors

- The Palawan peacock pheasant is very shy, but adapts and breeds well in captivity. The male struts and displays to the female with courtship feeding by spreading the feathers of its lower neck and mantle. He bobs his head with a small piece of food in his beak. The male will drop the food in sight of the female and if she takes the food, the male will make a lateral posture that best shows off all the ocelli on the tail and tail coverts. The crest is then erected and pointed forward.
- The male emits a long hissing sound while walking circles around the female. If all goes as planned, his display will so impress the female enough that she will accept him for breeding. If another male challenges him, a fight may ensue, in which the rivals use the spurs on the insides of their legs as weapons.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** live insects, fruit, and seeds

Reproduction

- Although males reach sexual maturity at about 1 year of age, they often do not breed until about 3 years of age, when they attain full adult plumage and can compete successfully for females with other male Palawan peacock pheasants. Females reach sexual maturity and can lay eggs at about 2 years of age.
- Nesting may occur both on and above the ground. The clutch is normally two off-white eggs which are incubated by the hen for 18-20 days. Males take no part in the incubation but will help feed and rear the chicks.

- Newly hatched chicks have downy feathers flecked with brown and cream, which act as camouflage. The chicks are precocial (covered with down and capable of moving around when hatched). They are fed beak-to-beak by their parents. Within a few days the parents will begin to “call” to the chicks, encouraging them to leave the safety of their hidden nest and feed on open ground. At about 10 weeks, the young attain full juvenile plumage and can survive by themselves.
- There is controversy among researchers as to whether they are monogamous.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** seeds, grains, nuts, fruits, leaves, roots, insects, worms and slugs
- **At the Zoo:** seeds, crickets, mealworms and fruit mix

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Endangered; **CITES Appendix:** I
- As with many island species, the Palawan peacock pheasant is endangered because of limited range and declining habitat. It is becoming increasingly restricted to the island’s mountains. The present population is estimated at less than 10,000 and is thought to be declining. Bird trading and hunting for food still continues. It is estimated that there are approximately 1,000 Palawan peacock pheasants in captivity worldwide. As habitat declines, captive propagation should not be viewed as the sole answer for their future survival. Presently, these magnificent birds are protected in the island’s 15 square miles of St. Paul’s Subterranean River National Park.
- A conservation initiative proposed by The World Conservation Union, Birdlife International, and the Species Survival Commission recommends that people should conduct surveys to identify suitable habitat, particularly in the south part of the island. If suitable sites are found, they should be proposed for protection status. Hunting and bird trade should be controlled more effectively. Another way to preserve the species is to carefully manage the captive population to minimize loss of genetic diversity.
- We can help in this cause by joining a conservation organization and recycling forest products.
- **Predators-** humans, birds of prey and snakes

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Males tend to display after they have captured an insect and hold it in their beaks to encourage females to come closer.

Sources:

- Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, (2001). Palawan peacock-pheasant. Retrieved Jun. 27, 2005, from Safe Hands in a Wild World Web site: <http://www.durrellwildlife.org/upload/MainSite/Documents/pdfs/Palawan%20peacock%20pheasant.pdf>
- Palawan peacock pheasant. (n.d.). Retrieved Jun. 24, 2005, from Honolulu Zoo Web site: http://www.honolulu zoo.org/palawan_peacock_pheasant.htm.
- Woodland Park Zoological Society, (2001). Palawan peacock pheasant. Retrieved Jun. 25, 2005, from Woodland Park Zoo Web site: http://www.zoo.org/educate/fact_sheets/peacock/ppp.htm.