

COMMON (INDIAN) PEACOCK

Phylum: Chordata; Class: Aves; Order: Galliformes; Family Phasianidae
Pavo cristatus

Common, or Indian, peafowl are often referred to as peacocks. "Peacock" actually refers to the males, and "peahen" to the females. The males, with their spectacular tail feathers, are seen (or at least noticed) more often in captivity than the peahens with their more subtle tan to brown coloration.

Size: Male: body length= 3-4 feet; tail length = 4-5 feet

Female: body length = 2½ -3½ feet

Weight: Male: 9-13 lbs. Female: 6-9 lbs.

Native range: The Common peafowl is native to forests of India and Sri Lanka. They have been introduced worldwide as a captive bird, but may live wild or semi-wild in some introduced areas.

Status: The peafowl is revered and protected by law in its native habitat. Peafowl are common as an ornamental bird throughout the world, and appear to be in little danger of extinction.

Diet in the wild: Peafowl will eat nearly anything, but mainly feed on seeds, fruit, insects, worms and occasionally snakes and mice.

Special features:

- The male peafowl (peacock) has a long "train" of green and bronze feathers adorned with blue-green spots that look like eyes. An average peacock train contains more than 200 feathers. The train, when fanned out in a courtship display, is supported by 20 shorter tail feathers.
- Peacock chicks, and even young hens, often try spreading their tail feathers in imitation of the male's train.
- The main function of the peacock's train is for courtship displays. However, the train often provides a defense mechanism, as well; inexperienced predators attempting to catch a peacock "sometimes pounce on the long train rather than the bird's body" (Mountfort 181).
- The export of peacock train feathers from India is now illegal.
- Predators of the common peafowl in their native range include tigers and leopards.

Behavior:

- In the wild, the peafowl lives in small groups in hilly forest areas. It typically roosts in trees at night.
- Even wild peafowl are fairly sociable animals, and often live around human settlements.
- A peafowl keeps the same roost and feeds in the same place everyday. The cock usually displays in a specially chosen place.
- Peafowl have a "screaming alarm cry" that in the wild warns other animals, such as deer of the presence of a predator such as a leopard or tiger.

Breeding:

- Peafowl typically reach sexual maturity at 2-3 years of age.
- Males appear to be territorial during the breeding season. A male will display in his territory by fanning his magnificent train for small groups of females (and juvenile males).
- Peahens lay 4-6 eggs in nests built either on the ground or in a low tree. After 28 days the chicks will hatch.

Peafowl and Humans:

- Peafowl are the national bird of India.
- The peafowl is considered sacred in many villages in its native range. It is a symbol of the goddess of learning and the god of war. It nests and walks freely through these villages.
- The peafowl has been used as an ornamental bird worldwide because of its beauty, adaptability, and hardiness. The feathers of the peacock's train are often sold in India for temple decorations or for making fans (Mountfort 136).

