



PEACOCK

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Peafowl is a common name for three bird species in the genera Pavo and Afropavo within the tribe Pavonini of the family Phasianidae, the pheasants and their allies. Male peafowl are referred to as peacocks, and female peafowl are referred to as peahens, even though peafowl of either sex are often referred to colloquially as "peacocks".

The two Asiatic species are the blue or Indian peafowl originally of the Indian subcontinent, and the green peafowl of Southeast Asia; the one African species is the Congo peafowl, native only to the Congo Basin. Male peafowl are known for their piercing calls and their extravagant plumage. The latter is especially prominent in the Asiatic species, which have an eye-spotted "tail" or "train" of covert feathers, which they display as part of a courtship ritual.



The functions of the elaborate iridescent colouration and large "train" of peacocks have been the subject of extensive scientific debate. Charles Darwin suggested that they served to attract females, and the showy features of the males had evolved by sexual selection. More recently, Amotz Zahavi proposed in his handicap theory that these features acted as honest signals of the males' fitness, since less-fit males would be disadvantaged by the difficulty of surviving with such large and conspicuous structures.

Peafowl are forest birds that nest on the ground, but roost in trees. They are terrestrial feeders. All species of peafowl are believed to be polygamous. In common with other members of the Galliformes, the males possess metatarsal spurs or "thorns" on their legs used during intraspecific territorial fights with some other members of their kind.

In courtship, vocalisation stands to be a primary way for peacocks to attract peahens. Some studies suggest that the intricacy of the "song" produced by displaying peacocks proved to be

impressive to peafowl. Singing in peacocks usually occurs just before, just after, or sometimes during copulation.

DIET

Peafowl are omnivores and mostly eat plants, flower petals, seed heads, insects and other arthropods, reptiles, and amphibians. Wild peafowl look for their food scratching around in leaf litter either early in the morning or at dusk. They retreat to the shade and security of the woods for the hottest portion of the day. These birds are not picky and will eat almost anything they can fit in their beak and digest. They actively hunt insects like ants, crickets and termites; millipedes; and other arthropods and small mammals. Indian peafowl also eat small snakes.

Domesticated peafowl may also eat bread and cracked grain such as oats and corn, cheese, cooked rice and sometimes cat food. It has been noticed by keepers that peafowl enjoy protein-rich food including larvae that infest granaries, different kinds of meat and fruit, as well as vegetables including dark leafy greens, broccoli, carrots, beans, beets, and peas.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Indian peafowl

The peafowl is native to India and significant in its culture. In Hinduism, the Indian peacock is the mount of the god of war, Lord Kartikeya, and the warrior goddess Kaumari, and is also depicted around the goddess Santoshi. During a war with Asuras, Kartikeya split the demon king Surapadman in half. Out of respect for his adversary's prowess in battle, the god converted the two halves into an integral part of himself. One half became a peacock serving as his mount, and the other a rooster adorning his flag. The peacock displays the divine shape of Omkara when it spreads its magnificent plumes into a full-blown circular form. Peacock feathers also adorn the crest of Lord Krishna, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, one of the trimurti.

Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire, was born an orphan and raised by a family farming peacocks. According to the Buddhist tradition, the ancestors of the Maurya kings had settled in a region where peacocks (mora in Pali) were abundant. Therefore, they came to be known as "Moriyas", literally, "belonging to the place of peacocks". According to another Buddhist account, these ancestors built a city called Moriya-nagara ("Moriya-city"), which was so called, because it was built with the "bricks coloured like peacocks' necks". After conquering the Nanda Empire and defeating the Seleucid Empire, the Chandragupta dynasty reigned uncontested during its time. Its royal emblem remained the peacock until Emperor Ashoka changed it to a lion, as seen in the Lion Capital of Ashoka, as well in his edicts. The peacock continued to represent elegance and royalty in India during medieval times; for instance, the Mughal seat of power was called the Peacock Throne.

The peacock is represented in both the Burmese and Sinhalese zodiacs. To the Sinhalese people, the peacock is the third animal of the zodiac of Sri Lanka.

Peacocks (often a symbol of pride and vanity) were believed to deliberately consume poisonous substances in order to become immune to them, as well as to make the colours of their

resplendent plumage all the more vibrant – seeing as so many poisonous flora and fauna are so colourful due to aposematism, this idea appears to have merit. The Buddhist deity Mahamayuri is depicted seated on a peacock. Peacocks are seen supporting the throne of Amitabha, the ruby red sunset coloured archetypal Buddha of Infinite Light. India adopted the peacock as its national bird in 1963 and it is one of the national symbols of India.

COLOUR AND PATTERN VARIATIONS

Hybrids between Indian peafowl and Green peafowl are called Spaldings, after the first person to successfully hybridise them, Mrs. Keith Spalding. Unlike many hybrids, spaldings are fertile and generally benefit from hybrid vigour; spaldings with a high-green phenotype do much better in cold temperatures than the cold-intolerant green peafowl while still looking like their green parents. Plumage varies between individual spaldings, with some looking far more like green peafowl and some looking far more like blue peafowl, though most visually carry traits of both.

In addition to the wild-type "blue" colouration, several hundred variations in colour and pattern are recognised as separate morphs of the Indian Blue among peafowl breeders. Pattern variations include solid-wing/black shoulder (the black and brown stripes on the wing are instead one solid colour), pied, white-eye (the ocelli in a male's eye feathers have white spots instead of black), and silver pied (a mostly white bird with small patches of colour). Colour variations include white, purple, Buford bronze, opal, midnight, charcoal, jade, and taupe, as well as the sex-linked colours purple, cameo, peach, and Sonja's Violeta. Additional colour and pattern variations are first approved by the United Peafowl Association to become officially recognised as a morph among breeders. Alternately-coloured peafowl are born differently coloured than wild-type peafowl, and though each colour is recognisable at hatch, their peachick plumage does not necessarily match their adult plumage.

Occasionally, peafowl appear with white plumage. Although albino peafowl do exist,[citation needed] this is quite rare, and almost all white peafowl are not albinos; they have a genetic condition called leucism, which causes pigment cells to fail to migrate from the neural crest during development. Leucistic peafowl can produce pigment but not deposit the pigment to their feathers, resulting in their blue-grey eye colour and the complete lack of colouration in their plumage. Pied peafowl are affected by partial leucism, where only some pigment cells fail to migrate, resulting in birds that have colour but also have patches absent of all colour; they, too, have blue-grey eyes. By contrast, true albino peafowl would have a complete lack of melanin, resulting in irises that look red or pink. Leucistic peachicks are born yellow and become fully white as they mature.