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Behaviour of Silver Pheasant (*Lophura-nycthemera*)

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ABSTRACT: Pheasants belong to a family 'Phasianidae', order 'Galliformes.' There are forty-eight different species of Pheasants. Silver pheasant has long been popular with aviculturists, as it is a fine looking bird which is handy and easy to keep under aviary conditions.

The average life expectancy of this species is 15 to 20 years. In fact, the silver pheasant have low survival rate. They are extremely sexual dimorphic. All pheasant start laying at the end of the March and continue until around the end of the May. The average clutch size is of 10-15 eggs. They are omnivorous birds.

KEYWORDS : Aviculturist, life expectancy, dimorphic.

I. INTRODUCTION

Pheasants belong to a family 'Phasianidae', order 'Galliformes' that includes some of the most beautiful birds in the world such as the Golden pheasant, famous in Chinese art, have delighted and benefited man for centuries but sadly many of them are today under threat as a result of his activities. There are forty-eight different species of pheasants. According to the IUCN. Red list of Threatened spp. Silver pheasant (*Lophura-nycthemera*) has long been popular with aviculturists, as it is a fine looking bird which is handy and easy to keep under aviary conditions. There are fourteen recognised subspecies all bearing close similarities.

Jean Delacour (1951) describes 15 subspecies in Pheasants of the world. The true silver pheasant is the largest of the subspecies and is found in southeastern China). The silver pheasant in one of the most well known and popular pheasant species in captivity. They are also well known in ancient Chinese art and poetry. They enjoy dustbathing during the morning time (Vestergaard 1999).

II. DESCRIPTION

It is a beautiful large, up to 125cm, white pheasant with fare red facial skin, black below and red legs. The average life expectancy of this spp. is 15 to 20 years. In fact, the silver pheasant have low survival rate.

Male

Male is adorned with white, long patterned tail and black dropping crest on its crown. At least two years is needed to attain full male plumage. They have red coloured wattle around the eyes. They have large heavy red coloured feet with 3 toes in front and one behind. They have spur on the back side of the tarsus just above the hind toe. Their wings are rounded and curved.



Female

The hen is not attractive as compared to the cock. The female silver pheasant is mainly plain, olive brown overall; finely mottled with dusky lines. The central tail feathers are similarly coloured and the outer tail feathers are black with brown and white lines. The crest is brownish black but differ in size and colour and the throat is brownish white the belly plain brown or lightly streaked with pale grey. Hens have a much smaller and paler face wattle.



Sexual dimorphism

They are extremely sexual dimorphic with male possessing a highly specialized ornamental plumage. The most striking features are as follows :

1. The male is larger in size than the female of the same age.
2. The general body-colour of the male is brighter and more attractive in comparison to the female.
3. The neck and belly of the males are brilliantly bluish black.
4. In female bird tail coverts are not greatly elongated and legs are shorter in comparison to the male.
5. The male has a spur which is absent in female. Vestigial spur was observed in females, but it is very small and curved structure which is a rare phenomenon.
6. Wings of the male bird have black and white linings while the female birds has comparatively less coloured or brown wings.
7. Crest size and face wattles differ between male and female.

Numerous work has been done on pheasants. Such as observations and findings about the Vietnamese pheasant *L. hatinhensis* at the Hanoi Zoological Gardens is described by **Dang Gia Tung and Le Sy Thuc (1996)**. Plumage variation and geographical distribution in pheasant was studied by **McGowan and Panchen (1994); Corden (1996)**.

Aviaries (Housing and Management of Breeding bird)

Aviaries were sited in a sheltered position where they got the benefit of the sun for at least part of the day. Heavy shade was avoided. A dry drought proof hut, or shelter was also necessary. The shelter was a small hut. During present study it was observed that the silver pheasant live in captivity, there is no permanent shape of rest. They are great addition to any aviary and can live with other birds such as chickens and ducks.

Different works has been done by different workers on the Aviary design, their shapes Sherwin (1993); Alvey (1994); Gerrits (1961) Appleby (1990, 1991). Robeatson (1991, 1996) and Persson *et al.* (1999) estimating the resting success and productivity of pheasant.

Diseases of Pheasant

Silver pheasants which were suffering from tuberculosis disease which lead to their death.

Infectious sinusitis : This affects birds of all ages and is caused by the pleuro-pneumonia like organism *Mycoplasma gallinarum*, and the symptoms usually include swollen face due to accumulation of pus under both eyes.

Aspergillosis : It attacks the respiratory system and is caused by a fungus.

Several works have been done on diseases of pheasants and their treatment. **Clapham, (1950, 1957)**, made great study on helminth parasites in pheasants.

Black Head : It is caused by the flagellate protozoan *Histomonas meleagridis*, causing circular depression.

Breeding Behaviour

All pheasants start laying at the end of the March or of beginning of April and continue-until around the end of May.

The adult birds do not reach their peak plumage until their second year. Male starts to dance and parade around the female. They also can be seen to display by spreading and raising their tail feathers vertically.

He approaches her in a sidling manner, then he walks around the hen with his tail spread vertically and producing a loudwhirring noise.

After the foreplay the female sit down on its tarsus and the male moves awkwardly forwards the female who also keeps ready herself by raising her cloaca. The male mounts from behind and from balancing open the wings and brings his cloaca near the female's cloaca to discharge the sperm.

Egg laying : Egg laying starts after the 2nd or 3rd day after the mounting.

Clutch size : The average clutch size was of 10-15 eggs with an incubation period of 26-27 days.

Eggs : The eggs are hard oval in shape. The average weight of egg is 45 to 60 gm.

The hens are great mothers and the males do participate in tending to the young chicks.

The breeding biology of finches was well studied by **Tiwari and Thapliyal (1963)**. Breeding behaviour of silver pheasant was studied by **Saxena, et al. (2003)**. Different works on mate selection of pheasant were observed by different workers like **Dowell et al. (1997)**.

Feeding behaviour

Silver pheasants are omnivorous birds. Silver pheasant needs the proper food and pheasant nutrition necessary to sustain the best growth and development. For the easiest method of feeding pheasants, buy pheasant food that's been commercially mixed and prepared by a poultry feeding company.

The best pheasant food has a mixture of ingredients that provide the right amount of protein, necessary for the various growing stages of a pheasant. I had made food by mixing maize, wheat, soyabean, grain, groundnut cake, rice polishing, meat meal, lettuce, salt, minerals and vitamins.

Maximum feeding was recorded in the month of November and February whereas minimum feeding was observed in June.

It was also observed that bird feed on their own fescues.

The NSW government reports that pheasant chicks ages 0 to 4 weeks should eat a pheasant food with a 28% protein ratio. From ages 4 to 9 weeks. Feed 24% protein ratio. When Feeding pheasants older than this, they should be fed a feed that has a protein ratio of 18%.

The chicks grow very quickly and should be fed a high protein diet.

Almost all pheasants are omnivorous as was observed by number of workers like **Morse (1970), Trivedi and Singh (1996)**.

The feeding behaviour of different species of pheasant was studied by different workers like **Moreby (1993), Ohlsson (2001), Satyanarayan, M.C. (2006)**.

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