

## Indian Peafowl

*Pavo cristatus*

### Can You See Me Now?

Like many bird species, male and female peafowl look very different. While males are brilliantly colored, even gaudy, the females are drab with body feathers in muted browns, a white belly and greenish neck feathers. For these ground dwelling birds, the female's drab coloration is a form of camouflage that helps protect her.

### Distinctive Calls

Indian peafowl have 11 different calls, but it is the males that are the loudest. They have a call that sounds like "may-awe, may-awe," which carries for a long distance. It is usually heard in the early morning and late evening, and almost all day during the breeding season. This alarm is often used to warn other peafowl and other animals in the ecosystem when a predator, like a tiger, is lurking around!

### Classification

Male peafowl are commonly known as peacocks.

Class: Aves

Order: Galliformes

Family: Phasianidae

Genus: *Pavo*

Species: *cristatus*

### Distribution

Indian peafowl range through eastern Pakistan through India, and south from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka.

### Habitat

Peafowl inhabit tropical and open forests, and riparian areas.

### Physical Description

- Male peafowl are up to 46 inches (117 cm) tall from bill to tail; females are up to 38 inches (96 cm) tall.
- Males weigh nine to 13 pounds (4-6 kg); females weigh six to nine pounds (2.75-4 kg).
- Males have a long train of feathers four-and-a-half to five feet (1.4-1.6 m) long – 60% of their total body length.
- Their wingspan is about four and a half feet (1.4 m).
- Males have metallic blue heads; neck and upper breast are blue with green and purple shades; tail feathers are metallic green with lilac or purple and dark eyespots.
- Females are muted brown and beige colors with white underneath and greenish neck feathers.
- Both males and females have a prominent crest on top of the head.

### Diet

What Does It Eat?

*In the wild:* Seeds, grains, berries, insects, small reptiles, small mammals and cultivated crops.

*At the zoo:* Free-ranging peafowl forage on zoo grounds.

What Eats It?

With such a large train and bright feathers the male peafowl is an easy target for predators such as mongoose, jungle cats, stray dogs, leopards, and tigers. .

### Social Organization

Peafowl live most of the year in small groups with others of their own sex or small family groups. During breeding season, males become solitary and establish breeding territories called "leks".

### Life Cycle

During breeding season male Indian peafowl display their magnificent trains and use loud calls to attract a harem of three to five females. The females most often mate with the males who have the most eyespots on their fans and the largest displays. After mating, the female makes a nest by scraping out a hollow in the ground in a concealed area of vegetation, and will lay three to six white eggs in the nest. The female alone incubates the eggs, which hatch in 28-30 days. Males have no part in incubating or raising the chicks. When the precocial chicks hatch, they are well developed and able to leave the nest within a few hours to follow the female, and are able to feed themselves from birth. By four weeks the chicks begin to grow their crests and by two months they resemble the females but are about half their size. Peafowl are mature at two to three years of age. Males develop their brilliant plumage and magnificent trains by the age of three but younger males will practice fan spreading and courtship displays. Lifespan for Indian peafowl is about 20 years in the wild and up to 30 years in captivity.

## **Adaptations**

### **The Eyes Have It**

Peacocks are brilliantly colored with an impressive train up to five feet (1.6 m) long. Each of the 100-150 feathers in the train has a dark "eyespot." During courtship when he is displaying for females, the peacock raises the train into a spectacular fan. The courtship ritual involves the male facing away from approaching females while he rhythmically moves his wings up and down. Females run around in front of the male who then shivers the fan making a rustling sound. If the female is suitably impressed mating occurs. Females are attracted to, and more often mate with males that have the most eyespots on their fans. The number of eyespots is a symbol of fitness in peacocks (similar to the antlers on male deer) and helps the peahens select mates whose offspring will inherit genes for impressive trains! These feathers will also pull out easily if a predator catches this slower moving bird.

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## **Conservation Connection**

*IUCN Status: Least Concern*

Although peafowl have been hunted for food and for the male's beautiful feathers, their great beauty and popularity has given them protection throughout history. Indian peafowl are not currently threatened or endangered.

## **Fun Facts**

- At the Denver Zoo, the peafowl roam freely around the grounds during the day and roost in the trees at night; you can most frequently find them near the Giraffe house.
- Male peafowl are called peacocks, females are peahens and the young are peachicks.
- The male's fan is composed of upper tail coverts supported by tail feathers.
- Each fan feather has an eyespot called an "ocellus".
- The peacock is the national bird of India.
- With its long feathers, the male peafowl is one of the largest flying birds in the world.