

AVIORNIS

INTERNATIONAL



June 2023

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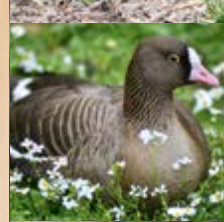
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(BE = breeding experience)

Aviornis International is the magazine of Aviornis International UK. Aviornis International is a not for profit association for everyone who is passionate about keeping Anseriformes (screamers, magpie geese, swans, geese, ducks), Bucerotiformes (hornbills, ground hornbills, hoopoes, wood hoopoes), Cariamiformes (seriemas), Casuariiformes (cassowaries and emus), Charadriiformes (auks, curlews, plovers, sheathbills, crab plovers, coursers and pratincoles, oystercatchers, ibis bills, jacanas, gulls, skimmers and terns, Plains-wanderer, Magellanic plover, Egyptian plover, avocets, painted-snipes, sandpipers and snipes, skuas, seedsnipes, buttonquail), Ciconiiformes (storks), Columbiformes (seed-eating pigeons, fruit-eating pigeons, turtle doves), Coraciiformes (rollers, kingfishers, bee-eaters, todies, motmots, ground rollers), Cuculiformes (cuckoos), Eurypygiformes (Sunbittern, Kagu), Galliformes (chachalacas, guans and curassows, megapodes, guineafowl, New World quail, pheasants, junglefowl, quail, partridges, turkeys, peacocks, ptarmigans, francolins, grouse), Gruiformes (cranes, Limpkin, finfoots, rails, crakes and coots, flufftails, wood rails and forest rails), Musophagiformes (turacos), Opisthocomiformes (Hoatzin), Otidiformes (bustards), Pelecaniformes (pelicans, herons, ibises and spoonbills, Hammerhead, Shoebill), Phoenicopteriformes (flamingos), Piciformes (puffbirds, barbets, jacamars, honeyguides, woodpeckers, toucans), Podicipediformes (grebes), Pteroclidiformes (sandgrouse), Rheiformes (rheas), Strigiformes (owls), Struthioniformes (ostriches), Suliformes (cormorants, darters, frigatebirds, gannets) and Tinamiformes (tinamous).

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EDITORIAL

Dear members,

As most of you will be experiencing at first hand, the breeding season is well underway. Chicks, ducklings, goslings are hatching. At Aviornis, we also have a newly born, our first magazine. This was only possible after a lot of meetings and hard work setting up Aviornis UK.

Getting the website www.aviornis.uk up and running was our first goal, as this is making Aviornis UK visible to breeders not only in the UK but all over the world.

The second goal was to allow members to join Aviornis UK and offer them a high quality magazine with lots of informative articles. We try to offer useful information about a diverse selection of Aviornis birds in each magazine. We would very much like you to contribute to this by sending us an article, with some photos if possible, about your (breeding) experiences with birds in your collection or other bird topics. You can send this to Johan (editor@aviornis.uk). If you think "I can't write an article", we can help you by sending you a questionnaire. Sometimes it's easier to answer a few questions than writing an article yourself. We will then write an article based on these answers.

The next goal is the ringling scheme. This is being set up as we speak, so you will hear from us in due course.

Enjoy the summer and reading the magazine of course.

Kind regards,
Johan Ameel, Editor

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Aviornis UK has officially launched! It has been a long journey not helped by Covid, or Avian flu! A couple of years ago a few of us started talking about the need for an organisation to support, educate, protect and champion aviculture in the UK. We all appreciate that there are several established organisations that have worked tirelessly for their own causes within aviculture, but with times changing and new challenges we all felt there comes a new need!

Aviornis is extremely well represented across much of Europe and indeed the world and has contributed more to aviculture than any other society, or organisation in Aviculture. Its for this very reason we decided to form Aviornis UK. We approached the other Aviornis groups across Europe and it was clear we had their unreserved support.

The last couple of years have been challenging for all of us in all aspects of our lives. Our collective journey from bird loving individuals has been a driving force behind all the committee members hard work in getting this up and running. I am proud and delighted that we have been able to make this happen and look forward to establishing Aviornis UK as one of the best organisations in Aviculture within the UK.

My vision for aviculture is clear. We must ensure we maintain and enhance captive bird populations in a conservation lead direction. We are all aware of the issues that potentially might cause issues to Aviculture and together Aviornis is here to represent Aviculture at the highest level. Accountability and traceability is key to the survival of aviculture, as scrutinization from government and welfare groups will set out new rules and agendas. We need to robustly defend our position by joining forces with Aviornis EU we can create a membership of over 7,500 members.

I would like to thank you for your support and hope that you enjoy being part of this journey. I welcome all members input and discussion of what you want to see from the organisation. Our objective is to reach out to the Avicultural community throughout the next year to build a strong membership that will support and make Aviculture sustainable, enjoyable and resilient against all the potential challenges we face in the future.

Aviornis
Stronger • Together • for Aviculture

I hope you have an enjoyable and successful breeding season.

Regards,

Alaistaire Brice
Chairman Aviornis International UK

Meet the team

Alaistaire Brice

Chairman

My passion for birds spans over 40 years. I have followed in my grandad's and father's footsteps in keeping and breeding all types of birds over the years. Having kept just about most things, I soon found my true passion was wildfowl, waders, cranes, pheasants and pigeons. Like my children, I don't have favourites, but each has their own unique characteristic and behaviour which makes my bird collection so personal to me. Because of the ongoing natural events that are occurring in the world at this moment in time, our role as bird keepers becomes more and more important. We have become conservationists without realising.



Scarlet Ibises (inset: Hawaiian Geese)

Photos: Edward Brice



American White Ibises



Grey Crowned Cranes



Java Green Peafowl



Shalows Turaco



Harlequin Ducks

I am a first-generation farmer with cattle and sheep. The largest part of my business is producing and wholesaling eggs, so in pleasure and work it all revolves around birds. I wear two hats when it comes to legislation, welfare, disease and reforms. I see it from all angles when it comes to ensuring compliance for the future. We face so many challenges today from so many different aspects, we need a strong Aviornis in the UK to inform and protect.

My oldest son who is 19 years old has a very strong interest in aviculture too. Inspiring the next generation is one of the biggest challenges we face. Opportunities for young people to become engaged and interested are much more limited today. Aviornis EU is such a great organisation and I have seen first-hand the passion and commitment that is shown by breeders of all ages to exchange genetics and ensure viability of captive stock. This combined with the educational aspect and unique respect they have at maintaining the highest standards of welfare ensures the future for new and existing bird keepers to develop and grow.

There are many challenges we face. Some we can control and shape and others we can do nothing about. My desire to form Aviornis really came about from frustration. We are now totally isolated without the ability to exchange birds with Europe due to Brexit. The pool of genetics we have in the UK in many species is so small it remains hard to see their long-term survival. The formation of Aviornis UK is to align ourselves to create opportunities in the future to enable genetic exchange between the UK and mainland Europe. This does not just affect the aviculturist. The zoological establishments are also suffering from the same issues. We all need to work together to ensure that our captive populations remain viable and sustainable.

Alaistaire



Photos: Edward Brice

Freckled Ducks

Meet the team

Johan Ameel

Editor

Ever since I was a little boy, I have been interested in everything that has to do with nature, but especially birds. When my parents noticed this, they encouraged it by giving me binoculars, buying me books about nature etc.

I must have been 13 years old when one of my older sisters came into contact with the chairman of the editing committee of *Aviornis* Flanders/Netherlands through her work. She then designed the magazine for ten years, at the time still using stencils and actually cutting and pasting, and later on the computer.

Meanwhile, I kept small tropical finches and budgies in two large cages in our garage. Not to breed with them. Back then, more than 40 years ago, many birds were sold just for pleasure. There was not much conservation done at that time.



Edwards's Pheasant





Baikal Teal (photo: Johan Ameel)

When my sister became too busy with her family, I took over the design of the *Aviornis* magazine from her in 1990. By then I had graduated and was working as a programmer-analyst. This meant more work on the computer after my day job. But it was worth it. The chairman of the editing committee was a forerunner in breeding waterfowl and even came to the UK to buy species that were difficult to breed at the time, such as Smew and Bufflehead. While designing the magazine I learned a lot by reading all those interesting articles. A few years later I thought the time was right to fully transform our not too large garden for the breeding of

waterfowl and a few ornamental chickens. I started

with Mandarin Ducks, Carolina Ducks, Versicolor Teal and Chiloé Wigeons. Because of setbacks due to bad weather, I switched from natural to artificial rearing. After a few years, the collection was supplemented with European Shovelers, Common Teal, European Tufted Ducks and mallard colour Call Ducks.

The not so large pond was not fed by running water. Especially in summer, it had to be cleaned at least every week and in winter, ice had to be removed by hand. I didn't see a bore hole as an option at our location. After a number of years, after long consideration, the keeping and breeding of waterfowl was discontinued and aviaries for pheasants, partridges, quail, pigeons and doves were built after a rest period of a few years. I felt, after visiting a number of breeders, that these were the bird species that interested me the most. And I didn't need running water!

The aviaries were well planted and imitated as much as possible the natural habitat of the birds that lived in them.

In the meantime I had become a member of the *Aviornis* editing committee and was appointed editor for the small galliformes. I also changed jobs and combined managing the computer network and being a professional graphic designer for a printing office. Little by little I became the link between the editing committees in the countries where *Aviornis* is active: Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), the Netherlands, France, Germany and Ibérica (Spain and Portugal). Cooperation between the different countries has always been very important to me. Even though the legislation is not always the same in all countries, there are many similarities in the threats to our passion. *Aviornis* has become very important over the years in creating buffer populations for the conservation of wild bird species and also participates in or supports in situ and ex situ projects such as the Mauritius Pink Pigeon and the Brazilian Merganser. To ensure that birds are suitable for reintroduction, DNA projects are carried out to guarantee the purity of the birds, for example for the tragopans.

From an early age I was drawn to the UK. It's difficult to explain, but series such as *All Creatures Great and Small* and documentaries on nature made me yearn to live in such a beautiful country with lots of nature, open space and a lot of rural environment. I have visited the UK numerous times over the years and always felt at home. In 2010 I took the big step to move here from Belgium, partly because by then I had met my wife-to-be, who lived in the UK.

We wanted to keep chickens in our new home, but after some insistence from me, we decided to keep waterfowl instead. A fairly large, deep pond was constructed and populated with Fulvous Whistling Ducks, Versicolor Teal and a few other species, all imported from Belgium, hoping to bring new bloodlines to the UK. There was enough space to build a few aviaries, but because we felt we wouldn't live there forever and I thought that the environment was too wet for galliformes and doves, we gave that a miss.

Finally, we have now arrived where we want to live until we can no longer manage it. The garden is large enough for a few aviaries and plans are currently being made for this. They will again be aviaries for galliformes and pigeons, as those are my favourite birds, and maybe slightly more exotic species as well. Because of Brexit, it won't be easy to obtain unrelated pure birds of certain species, but where there's a will, there's a way.

Since living in the UK I had a desire to relaunch *Aviornis* UK as I had heard that it existed before but was discontinued due to circumstances. Realising that this would require a lot of work, and that my professional and family life didn't leave enough free time, it was always postponed. It was only when Alastair Brice contacted me a couple of years ago that it was decided to take this step.

And now we're here. After more than a year of preparations, *Aviornis* UK is resurrected and the first magazine is a fact. The ringing scheme is also in the making. The intention is to unite all breeders of birds so that our voice becomes bigger and we can help each other as much as possible. Our passion is being threatened from many sides and if we don't take action quickly and we teach people about the *Aviornis* values and bird conservation in general, there will soon be no passion left. That great wealth of experience in breeding sometimes very rare species will then have disappeared and will be at the expense of the survival of endangered bird species. Breeding to gain experience and ultimately save species from extinction is a noble cause and will gain even more significance in the future.

Let's all help each other. That's the only way forward.

Johan



Harlequin quail (photo: Johan Ameel)

Fleur Caroline Douetil

1933 – 2023

Fleur died peacefully on 22nd January 2023, one month before her 90th birthday. She was the daughter of Sir Brian Edward Stanley Mountain, 2nd Bt. and Doris Elsie Lamb. On Thursday 18th May, at the invitation of the Douetil family, many friends gathered for a memorial service at St Peter's, Hambledon Church, followed by a gathering at Busbridge. The number present clearly showed the esteem held for such a remarkable lady; the family parish church was full to capacity. Also streamed live all over the world, Dane Douetil (jnr) acknowledged that the service so beautifully planned was indeed at Fleur's instruction. Nothing left to chance!

Fleur's early adult years were as an actress, graduating from the Royal Academy for Dramatic Arts in 1952. It was whilst 'treading the boards' she met her husband-to-be, Dane, known to all as Tubbs. They became soulmates and the best of friends. With a passion for livestock and certainly not strangers to hard work, Fleur and Tubbs moved to Busbridge Lakes in 1966. Expecting their fourth child, the first priority for the home was to install mains water. Over the first few years, they gradually converted hay lofts,

tack and store rooms into a habitable space for the family. Their home had been the old stables, for the original Busbridge Hall, which had been demolished in 1906. The stabling was thought to have been adapted by Lutyens around that time. The name was originally a combination of 'bush' and 'bridge' and was originally used by the same family from 1297 (de Bursebrugge) to 1558 (Bustbrydige).

The gardens date from the 18th century, with many mature specimen trees and shrubs, which formed a magnificent background for the bird collection. The gardens are designated as a Heritage grade 2A, renowned for their follies and grottoes, including a Doric Temple and Gothic Boathouse. There are 40 acres of gardens and wooded hillsides. The lakes themselves had little bird life, but a great number of fish, which were netted up and moved by the local angling society. Fleur was a renowned fisher herself, known for her lifetime casting skills. The first ducks were a gift, but flew away in the first year. Realising how fabulous they were on the pond, fences were erected and more Carolinas set the ball rolling. Fleur took every opportunity to learn from the



Inaugural meeting of Aviornis UK,
Sunday 4th August 1991,
Busbridge Lakes (photo: Barrie Hughes)



Photo: Lindsay Dobson



Photo: Fleur Douetil



Rearing facilities at Busbridge Lakes

great characters of the avian world and she soaked up knowledge like a sponge. She revelled in the challenge of breeding new species and giving them the best habitats for their kind.

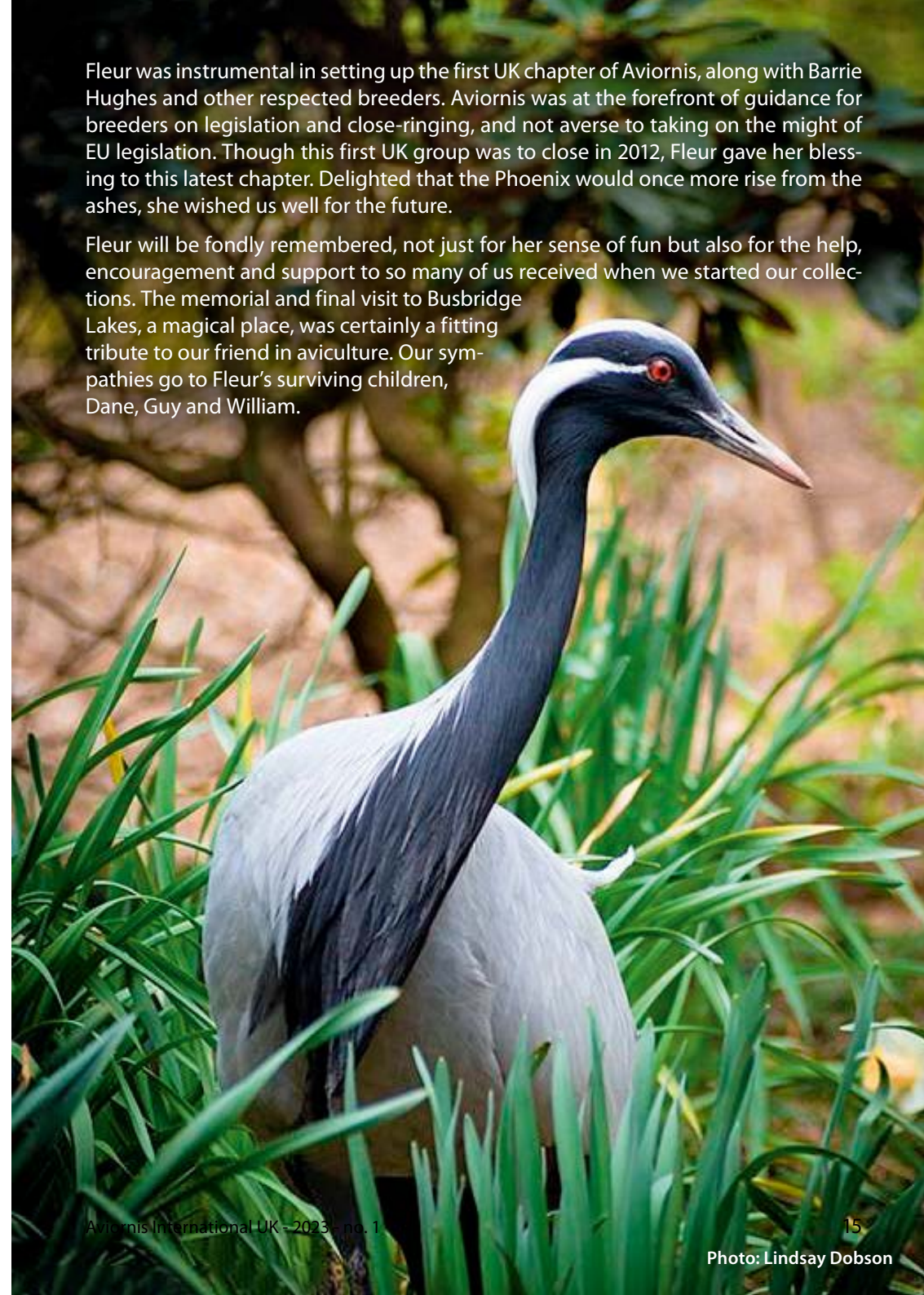
Busbridge Lakes Waterfowl swiftly became recognised as the perfect setting for a grand day out. To view the birds in such tranquil surroundings and enjoy the Douetil hospitality was special. Tales of social events abound, with the common link usually being the bird keepers. Becoming one of the best-respected breeders of her day, Fleur was always generous to new people joining the activity, especially when she saw a spark of serious interest that she had herself.

Recognising the value of organisations working together, Fleur was always at the forefront of campaigns to promote appreciation of wild species in their natural form. The Heritage Ponds Project, 'Save the Village Pond' scheme, initiated by the British Waterfowl Association in March 1997 was one such, bringing together support from a consortium of 23 organisations. These ranged from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to the Women's Institute. The objective was to restore parish ponds of cultural and historic interest.

Whilst Diana Holloway was president of the BWA, Fleur worked hard bringing many bird organisations together for the Avian 2000 Event at Blackbrook Zoological Park. This brought many leading aviculturists together from around the world – all working as one for aviculture.

Fleur was instrumental in setting up the first UK chapter of Aviornis, along with Barrie Hughes and other respected breeders. Aviornis was at the forefront of guidance for breeders on legislation and close-ringing, and not averse to taking on the might of EU legislation. Though this first UK group was to close in 2012, Fleur gave her blessing to this latest chapter. Delighted that the Phoenix would once more rise from the ashes, she wished us well for the future.

Fleur will be fondly remembered, not just for her sense of fun but also for the help, encouragement and support to so many of us received when we started our collections. The memorial and final visit to Busbridge Lakes, a magical place, was certainly a fitting tribute to our friend in aviculture. Our sympathies go to Fleur's surviving children, Dane, Guy and William.



Elliot's Pheasant

by Aart Deetman (NL)

Systematics

The Elliot's Pheasant belongs to the long-tailed pheasants. This group also includes the Reeve's Pheasant, the Copper Pheasant, the Mrs Hume's Pheasant and the Mikado Pheasant.

Order	: Galliformes
Suborder	: Phasiani (turkeys, grouse, quail, pheasants, partridges, francolins, guineafowl)
Family	: Phasianidae (pheasants, partridges, francolins, Old World quail)
Subfamily	: Phasianinae (pheasants)
Genus	: <i>Syrmaticus</i> (long-tailed pheasants)



Elliot's Pheasant, male (photo: Wang LiQiang - Shutterstock.com)

Scientific	: <i>Syrmaticus ellioti</i> (Swinhoe, 1872)
Dutch	: Elliotfazant
French	: Faisan d'Elliot
German	: Elliotfasan
Spanish	: Faisán de Elliot
Portuguese	: Faisão-de-capuz-cinzento

Distribution and habitat

The Elliot originates from China, from the region south of the Yangtze River. This area has a southern climate. There, the Elliot's Pheasant lives in mountainous areas up to an altitude of 3000

metres in bamboo, spruce and conifer forests. Not much is known about their original habitat. The population in captivity is larger than their number in the wild. They are listed as *Near Threatened* on the IUCN Red List. It is a CITES 1A bird and is listed on Annex X of the European regulation.





Elliot's Pheasant, male
(photo: Jan Harteman)



Elliot's Pheasant, male
(photo: © Panthera Multimedia)



Elliot's Pheasant, hen
(photo: Stichting Galliformes)

Worth knowing

The Elliot's Pheasant was discovered in 1872 by Robert Swinhoe. The first birds were brought to France in 1874. In 1879 a few more were imported, which gave offspring a year later. Research in 1981 and 1983 indicated that the population in the wild is not very large.

It is not easy to observe the Elliot in the wild. The terrain in which they live is very rough and the animals are so shy that they disappear into the woods and vegetation at the slightest noise.

The Elliot's Pheasant is regularly kept in private collections. They can handle our climate well and have little trouble with cold and heat but are less fond of damp and wind.

Description

Male: length 80cm including a tail length of 40-50cm; wings 23cm. The upper head is brown-grey, slightly lighter at the base of the beak. The naked facial skin around the eyes is orange-red and covered with very fine short black feathers. Above the facial skin slightly grey eyebrows. Behind the eye dark grey ear tufts with light rachis. The beak is rather short, slightly curved and light horn-coloured. The iris is brown, the pupil black.

The collar is pure white, the neck dark grey, becoming lighter towards the throat, with a very fine dark border. The throat is black, with steel blue sheen. From the shoulders the back is maroon with orange-red borders and dark steel-blue spots, towards the tail black with white transverse stripes and white border, showing a steel-blue sheen. The rump is similar to the lower back.

The tail is grey with dark brown transverse bands, preceded by a narrow black line, the feather tips are slightly mottled with white. The undertail feathers are slightly mottled with brown.

The wings are held tight to the body. The primaries are dark grey-brown, the secondaries black-brown, with grey-white pattern on the outer vane. The greater coverts are black with a broad white border, the lesser coverts maroon with a steel blue elongated spot. These steel-blue spots form a V-shape at rest.

The breast is maroon with dark orange-red borders. Before the transition to the belly, the feathers have a black pattern, followed by a white border. The belly is off-white with a black-grey irregular pattern. The sides are not covered by the wings; they are black-brown with a broad white margin.

The legs are rather short, horn-coloured and with well-developed, sharp spurs.

Hen: Length 50cm, of which the tail takes up 20cm; wings 22cm. The head is brownish black at the top, extending into the neck. Around the eye a narrow orangey facial skin, with very fine black feathers. Above the eye a dark buff-coloured stripe, behind the eye a small ear tuft with a dark brown spot above it. The beak is horn-coloured. The iris is brown, the pupil black. The neck is grey buff, becoming lighter towards the



Elliot's Pheasant, hen
(photo: Brendan Ryan - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)



Elliot's Pheasant, hen, Sanming, Fujian
Sheng Province, China (photo: jinze - CC BY-NC 4.0)

throat. The throat is black. The shoulders are brownish black with a light border and a white, pointed mark on the rachis. The rump is black, mottled with ochre. The tail is brownish with black, irregular striping and creamy black-brown mottled bands, creamy at the ends. The undertail coverts are less mottled with a brown and black pattern with a cream/black mottled tip. The primaries and secondaries are black-brown with a light brown pattern and light tips. The greater coverts are black-brown with a buff-grey fringe and narrow off-white border and light rachis. The lesser coverts are black with light brown pattern and buff-coloured rachis. At rest, the wings form a greyish buff-coloured V.

The chest is dark buff with black and off-white pattern, becoming lighter towards the belly with less markings. The belly is like the breast, but lighter with less marking. The sides are buff with black and off-white pattern. The legs are horn-coloured, sometimes with a beginning of spurs.

Reproduction

The mating season begins in early spring, usually early March. The males then start their courtship display and show off their plumage.

The courtship display includes displaying spread tail feathers lateral to the hen, while emitting a shrill, but not loud, call.

The hen lays a clutch of 6 to 9 cream-coloured eggs in the period from late March to mid-June and incubates them for 25 days. If the eggs are removed, a replacement clutch may follow twice.

The chicks are very small, the smallest of all long-tailed pheasants. The chicks are usually quite calm and easy to rear. They are reddish to maroon. The males can be distinguished from the hens after three months. The males then get barred tail feathers.

In the aviary

The Elliot's Pheasant can withstand our climate well. The aviary must be large enough, for example 3 by 7 metres. Good planting with also ornamental grasses to hide under or get away for the hens is recommended. They can also be kept as a trio. The main food consists of ornamental fowl pellets. But also a lot of greens: they like apples, pears and carrots. Fresh and clean drinking water is a must. If you pump water yourself, make sure that it contains little or no iron. Avoid giving them a lot of grain or fattening feed (oats contain 4.9% fat and hemp 32.1%). Foods that are too fatty will affect fertilisation.



Elliot's Pheasant, fighting males
(photo: Wang LiQiang - Shutterstock.com)

Experiences with

THE ELLIOT'S PHEASANT

by Gerbrand Andeweg (NL)

After a year in which I only owned a male from the Elliot's Pheasant, I was able to purchase two hens in the autumn. Because I now hoped to have an unrelated trio, I had high hopes for a good breeding season. I've had Elliots in my collection for several years and have never really bred well with them. Infertile eggs, poor hatching and an egg pecking hen did not help.

I decided to keep the sexes separate in the following months because there were many plans to refurbish and renovate the aviaries. As soon as this was done I would place them together in a new aviary.

At the end of February it was time. The aviary was in good order again and ready for the season. I first placed the two hens in it and gave them some time to get used to their new environment. Then I added the male. He was immediately impressed and began to display and show off to his new hens. This went on and it clicked well between the three of them.

On March 16, one of the hens was digging a hole in the back of the aviary. They do this more often, but the next day there were two eggs in that hollow. Because I'd rather not encourage natural breeding this early in the season, I removed the eggs. Meanwhile, the other hen had also started laying. The first eggs had all been placed in the incubator.





At the end of May, I let one of the hens try it herself. She laid her eggs in the same hollow in the indoor part of the aviary. The other hen did it differently. She always laid in a different place and had no inclination to breed herself.

In the end, one hen was sitting on five eggs. She did this very well until a week or two. She then left the nest and did not return to the eggs. There were no signs of stress and the other Elliots showed no interest in the hen or the eggs. There was no other choice than to put the eggs in the incubator. Four of the five eggs were fertile of which three hatched.

The hens laid a total of 78 eggs. I thought that was quite a high number. 64 eggs were fertile and 55 chicks hatched.

Once the chicks have hatched, they remain in the hatcher for another day so that they can dry up nicely and gain strength. They are then placed in a small chick brooder with a heat lamp. Usually they share this space with some chicks of other pheasant species that hatched at the same time. They grow quite easily and soon move to a larger brooder. Here, the heat lamp hangs in the middle and they have enough space to get used to a life without extra heat. They are calm and not annoying to other chicks. On the other hand, they are easily bullied and harassed by chicks of other species. That's why I have tried as much as possible to keep the young Elliots separate as soon as they go into the bigger brooders. Here they continue to grow steadily.

As soon as they become too big to walk under the heat lamp, they are moved to a space without extra heating. This is still inside with a comfortable temperature.

As soon as they can be ringed, they immediately go outside, weather permitting, into a covered aviary. Because they are already ringed, they can stay here until they go to their future owner. This way they only have to be caught once in this aviary. Soon males and hens can be distinguished. The males get maroon feathers on the shoulders. The hens continue to show almost the same colour feathers for a long time. It turned out to be about 1/3 males and 2/3 hens, which is a nice ratio. In the meantime they have all left for breeders in the Netherlands but also far beyond. After some lesser years with a lot of bad luck, 2021 was a fantastic year for the Elliot's Pheasant.

2022

Like almost every year, the Elliot's Pheasants were the first species to start laying. They started on March 21. Also this year I bred with the same trio as in 2021. And also this year both hens laid well. Of the first 7 eggs, 4 were fertile and on April 20, 4 beautiful Elliot chicks hatched.

Both hens laid until the end of May. A total of 52 eggs. Less than the year before, but again a good number. A good number of eggs were fertile and the chicks grew up into beautiful birds. The ratio was reversed this year: 2/3 were males and 1/3 hens. Most of the young birds have already gone to other breeders who were only too happy that they could still find this species. Despite their beautiful appearance and easy character, there are not many people breeding them.

Hopefully next year will be as successful with this pheasant with hopefully also natural breeding.



Young male
(photo: Allandoo Pheasantry,
www.allandoopheasantry.com)

Breeding experience with

THE ELLIOT'S PHEASANT

by Aart Deetman

I bought my first pair of Elliot's Pheasants in 1985. From that time on I had them in my collection, both as a trio and in pairs. I have bred with them for several years with widely varying results.

Housing

I now keep my Elliots as a trio in an aviary of 3.20 by 7.50m and 3.60m high. The sides at the back are uncovered. The first 1.50m is covered with ivy and rhododendron on the outside. The roof is completely uncovered. The aviary has a layer of sand and is planted with some *Skimmias* (*Skimmia japonica*) and a conifer, some boxwood and laurel. The Elliot's Pheasant is not one of those species that digs up the whole aviary with its beak. I have not mixed any other birds with them. The Elliot is a quiet bird and to keep it that way I don't want any other flying birds in the aviary.

The aviary is also equipped with thick perches of eight cm in diameter at a height of 2.50m. Elliots can withstand our climate well. They are hardy but like to hide high in the conifers.

Food

The Elliot's Pheasants only get pheasant maintenance pellets. Towards the breeding season I switch to breeding pellets. The parent birds get food from an automatic feeder that they themselves tap with their beak and can thus determine the right amount of food, that they can eat immediately.





Like other pheasants, the Elliot's Pheasant likes to take a sunbath (photo: sleepmyf - CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

I never give them extra vitamins. I do give apples (the kernel contains hydrocyanic acid) against worms. They also get plenty of pieces of winter carrot, endive, chicory and kale if the local horticulturist has them available. I hardly ever give them lettuce because of the large amount of moisture it contains.

Reproduction

I have practiced natural breeding. This is possible with the Elliot, but you have to remove the male when the hen starts to sit. The hen lays about 8 eggs per clutch in a hollow behind a partition in front of which I planted Skimmias. I like this because then you don't see the planks or Trespa and Skimmia is soft on the arms and hands. The laying season starts in March. The hen incubates the eggs for 25 days. The hatching ratio is about two thirds of the number of eggs laid. In the outdoor aviary I made a small shelter under which the food is placed to keep it dry.

However, with the incubator I have the best results. I have a fully automatic incubator at a relative humidity of about 45% and a temperature of 37.7 °C. After hatching, the chicks are placed in a chick brooder with a temperature of 32 °C. An Elstein lamp,



Elliot's Pheasant eggs (photo: Franz Duister)



One day old (photo: Gerbrand Andeweg)

controlled by an ether capsule thermostat, serves as heating. In the morning at 8am the lighting in the chick brooder is switched on and it goes off at 8pm. This ensures peace in the night hours.

They don't get buffalo worms or mealworms. They are the smallest chicks of the long-tailed pheasants. If you incubate the eggs under a bantam hen, do not use silkies as the little chicks will get stuck in them.

The rearing feed is composed of starter mash for chicks and ground cat kibble (this contains fish because animal protein is no longer allowed to be processed in chick feed, but chicks do need it). Through all this I mix oats.

At six weeks I ring the birds with a 12mm ring. At that age you can determine the sex from the tail markings. At that time they also move to the outdoor aviaries, preferably separated, hens in a different aviary than the males.

After the moulting period I rake the aviary. At the same time this removes all the moulted feathers.

In February I worm the Elliots with Flubenvet. I do this by mixing feed with some sunflower oil and then sprinkle Flubenvet over it. They get this for a week.

The Elliot comes under CITES 1A and Annex X of the European regulation. It is therefore recommended to ring your Elliots with a recognised ring because this is a condition for transfer within the EU. It prevents you from needing an EU certificate. *(editor's note: In the UK too it is advisable to ring young birds as proof of conservation breeding and as a source of information (age, breeder) to more reliably compose unrelated pairs for example).*



Elliot's Pheasant, male (photo: Gert Kieft)



Elliot's Pheasant, hen (photo: Gert Kieft)

Breeding LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

by Tom De Graeve (B)





Koppel (foto: Fons Lievens)

A few years ago I had the opportunity to purchase a trio of Lesser White-fronted Geese consisting of an old female of fifteen years, a young female of about three years old and a two-year-old male. Shortly afterwards I was able to find a second male through a trader, also an old rascal of about fifteen years.

Lesser White-fronted Geese are a smaller version of the (Greater) White-fronted Goose. They are indeed not large, only slightly larger than a Red-breasted Goose, but they are lively and always active. With the yellow eye-ring and the bright white blaze (hence 'white-fronted'), they are an attractive addition to any waterfowl collection.

I had expected that the four geese would spontaneously form a young and an old pair, but they didn't see it that way. The young male couldn't keep away from the old female. On the other hand, there was a rather moderate interest of the young female in the old male, which wasn't always mutual.

My Lesser White-fronted Geese are being kept on a piece of land of over 2000 m² with various other goose and duck species. Towards the breeding period, that space is divided into four pens, each with a pond.

The Lesser White-fronts have been placed with Greater White-fronted Geese and Pink-footed Geese and on another occasion with Red-breasted Geese, Emperor Geese and a number of ducks. In all cases I have found them to be perfectly tolerant, both outside and during the breeding season. They can therefore be kept perfectly in combination with a number of ducks to keep the grass short.

The breeding also went smoothly, even if it wasn't always with the hoped-for results. The first year, the young female made a nest under a bush with dense foliage and began to breed there. After a few days I saw a Greater White-fronted Goose emerge from under the scrub, while the brooding Lesser White-fronted Goose was calling nearby. Upon inspection, it turned out the Greater White-fronted had acted like a cuckoo. The nest was full to the brim and there were even eggs lying next to the nest. I moved all the eggs to the incubator. Result: six Lesser White-fronted Goslings and one Greater White-fronted Gosling (my Greater White-fronted Goose lays many infertile eggs). The goslings were first placed in a rearing tank and then in a run on the grass. They grew very quickly and consumed a large part of my lawn.

As for all geese, grass is essential. They also get it from day one when I rear them artificially. I also give them starter crumbs for the first few days. After about ten days I switch to growth pellets and supplement it later on with a little mixed corn.

The second year, the young female was assisted at the nest by a flying Barnacle Gander, a visitor who landed and stayed here a number of years ago. I have been able to observe that my Lesser White-fronted Ganders do not permanently guard the nest of their brooding female, as many other geese do.



Lesser White-fronted Goose in close-up (foto: Leander De Ceulaer)



Trio (photo: Nico van Wijk)



Mother and brood
(photo: Etienne Arnould)

Result of this brood: three Lesser White-fronted Goslings, one Emperor Gosling and unfortunately a 'White-fronted Barnacle' Gosling. My three-year-old Emperor Geese had not made their own nest, but did produce a fertile egg!

The following year presented a similar scenario. The young female made a nest under a bush. She started sitting on April 29, but the days before she was almost constantly on the nest. Apparently, the Emperor Geese had again paid a visit before starting their own nest, for of the six young born on May 24-25, one was clearly of pure Emperor origin.



A family of Lesser
White-fronted Geese
(photo: Etienne Arnould)

In 2007 and 2008, the old female always made a nest in a rather unfortunate place, namely between the hedge and the wire fence and facing directly south, so in the full sun. She brooded in an exemplary manner, but always without results, probably due to the bad position of the nest.

In 2009 this old female nested a little later and in a different place. She laid six eggs and brooded properly again. However, one week before the goslings pipped, she lay dead in the morning, some distance from the nest. Externally there wasn't a mark on her and the previous day she still made a healthy impression when she left the nest to eat and wash.

I took the eggs to the incubator. The weather was quite warm, maybe they hadn't cooled down too much.

A week later, two goslings hatched. They were placed with some young Bar-headed Goslings that had also hatched in the incubator (from displaced eggs). Again, the artificial rearing went smoothly.

Conclusion

Lesser White-fronted Geese are graceful and tolerant geese that can be kept well in combination with both geese and ducks.

They readily proceed to nesting, sit firmly and take good care of their young. Incubation period: about 25 days.

The rearing of the young goes smoothly, both with and without the parents. They grow quite quickly. After ten days(!) you can ring them with a 14mm ring.

As I have unintentionally experienced, you can also let the female incubate eggs of other species of waterfowl and let her raise the young.



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Calling gander
(photo: GrahamC57 - CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The Fischer's Turaco

by Marij de Vos (NL)

Scientific : *Tauraco fischeri*
(Reichenow, 1878)
Dutch : Fischer-toerako
French : Touraco de Fischer
German : Fischerturako
Spanish : Turaco de Fischer



in its natural habitat

The Fischer's Turaco belongs to the turaco family or Musophagidae. The scientific name for this species is *Tauraco fischeri*. There are two subspecies:

- *Tauraco fischeri fischeri* which occurs from southern Somalia to north-eastern Tanzania.
- *Tauraco fischeri zanzibaricus* from Zanzibar, near Tanzania.

The difference between these two subspecies is small. *T. f. fischeri* has greenish upperparts, wings, rump and tail, whereas these are more violet-blue in *T. f. zanzibaricus*. However, their habitats are clearly different.

Characteristics

The Fischer's Turaco is a fairly large bird. Nevertheless, it is graceful and beautifully coloured. It is glossy green and dark blue, has a bright red crest that extends into the neck and a fairly long tail. The bare orbital skin around the eyes is bright red and the short beak is red. Its bright red primaries and secondaries are only clearly visible in flight.

Another unique feature of this bird is that it can change the position of its toes in such a way that it can move easily and with great agility along branches. It can not only put three toes forward and one toe back, but also two toes forward and two back! This is very unusual in other bird species.



This bird species is completely adapted to life in forests. He doesn't fly a lot, but he can climb all the better. They deftly hop from branch to branch like acrobats and seem to float through the trees. Young turacos have little claws on their wings that help them climb. The toucan, as one of the few other bird species, also has this. The Fischer's Turaco is quite shy but at the same time he is very curious.

In captivity, a turaco can live up to 20 years. The literature mentions 30 years in its natural habitat, but that seems a bit unlikely.

Distribution

Turacos are only found in Africa. The Fischer's Turaco is mainly found in East Africa in tropical areas rich in forests with fruit-bearing trees.

Since its habitat is limited, it is very vulnerable to extinction and as such is listed as *Near Threatened* on the IUCN Red List. The greatest threat comes from the trade in these birds and the ever-shrinking habitat due to deforestation for agriculture.

Food

The Fischer's Turaco is a real fruit eater. In addition to fruit, it eats flower buds, leaves, berries, sometimes figs. Occasionally it also eats an insect or worm. Its short red beak isn't strong enough or suitable for cracking or peeling seeds.

Reproduction

In principle, the Fischer's Turaco can breed all year round in the wild. The temperature differences between winter and summer are not exactly extreme and there is sufficient food available all year round. They nest high in trees, about 3 to 10 meters from the ground, protected by foliage. The female lays two, sometimes three, white round eggs per clutch, which she incubates for 21 to 23 days. The chicks are covered with black downy feathers and have a black beak. After 10 to 14 days, the chicks are already foraging for food. They are sexually mature after 1 to 3 years.

* Aviornis has a Turaco Focus Group. If you are interested, please contact the Aviornis secretary (secretary@aviornis.uk).

Do you sometimes meet people who also have a passion for Aviornis birds, and aren't a member of Aviornis UK yet? Show them this magazine and encourage them to have a look at our website www.aviornis.uk so they can see what Aviornis UK has to offer!

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Breeding experience with THE FISCHER'S TURACO

text and photos: Marij de Vos



Jan, whom I am visiting for an interview about the Fischer's Turaco, has loved birds from an early age. When he was 10 years old he already had canaries and parakeets. After his marriage, he built an aviary measuring 7 x 3 metres at his new house, containing songbirds such as Goldfinches and Siskins. His love for park birds started with a Golden Pheasant. When he later moves to a bigger house, he expands his collection of park birds considerably with different types of cranes, waterfowl, pheasants and turacos.

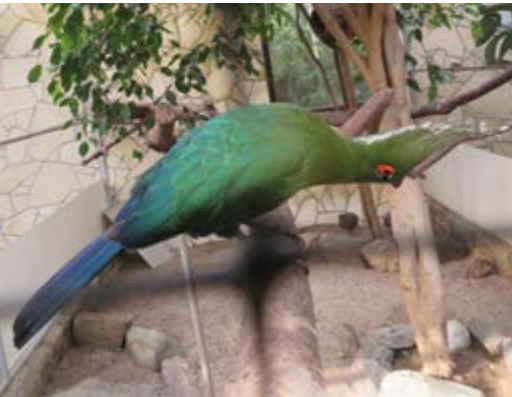
Fischer's Turacos

While we watch the turacos, Jan starts to talk about his passion: "I absolutely love turacos, they are beautiful, lively birds! They are colourful and are funny in their behaviour.

A pleasant bonus is that they don't demolish anything. This allows you to decorate the aviaries beautifully with lots of greenery.

At the time I kept White-cheeked, Violet, Purple-crested, White-crested and Fischer's Turacos. I had a pair of each species. I developed health problems and was forced to drastically reduce my collection. When the situation became a bit more stable, I decided to re-start with a pair of turacos. My choice clearly fell on the Fischer's Turaco (*Tauraco fischeri*).

This species poses a major challenge in breeding. The male can be so aggressive towards his female that she eventually dies. In general, the female is feisty enough to be able to defend herself but once brooding she doesn't really want his company anymore.



That is the moment when you have to watch out and intervene if necessary. The male doesn't tolerate her dismissive attitude and becomes aggressive. He is then so fierce that it can eventually lead to her death. After you've experienced this a few times, you know what to do. I then temporarily place the male in the adjacent aviary. This way they can keep making contact with each other without any problems. Of course, this doesn't make breeding this species any easier.

What also makes this species attractive to me is that it is a fairly rare species."

Description

The Fischer's Turaco's crest is red with a white border on top that fades into black. The rest is mostly grass green and it has a characteristic fruit-eater's beak, short and somewhat blunt. There is a cobalt blue shine on its wings and when it flies the underwings show a beautiful bright red. A bright red border around the eyes is surrounded by two graceful white lines. The adult bird's beak is red, the juvenile's beak is black. It has short, stout legs.

The Fischer's Turaco's length is about 40cm and it weighs 230 to 280 grams.

The ring size is 8mm.

Breeding

Turacos are sexually mature after one to three years. The sex of the bird cannot be determined by external characteristics and must be done by DNA testing or experience (behaviour during courtship).

Jan provides the turacos with a basket filled with some straw on the highest possible spot. The birds drag in some more twigs but don't bother too much and are easily satisfied. The courtship display mainly

Van boven naar onder:
(Lady) Ross's Turaco, Red-crested Turaco,
White-crested Turaco, Schalow's Turaco



The pair of Fischer's Turacos



The pair at the nest basket

consists of impressing the female with the male spreading his wings and raising his crest somewhat.

Laying starts around the first two weeks of March and can last until the end of October. The female lays 1 to 2 eggs, exceptionally 3. The eggs are almost round. Normally the eggs are incubated in 21 to 23 days, alternately by the male and the female. Jan has not had good experiences with natural breeding of this species and puts the eggs in the incubator. When the chicks have hatched, they are handed over to acquaintances of Jan. "Hand rearing is not for me, as I would have to feed the chicks every two hours. I've done that in the past, I'd now rather go cycling for a while," says Jan. When the young are big enough they are returned to Jan.



Fruit pellets

Food

"At my place, the turacos mainly get diced apples, they really love fruit. As additional food they receive T16 fruit pellet (Versele-Laga – Nutribird). During the breeding season they get T20 as this contains more proteins. They can actually eat all fruits except citrus fruits. The food must be low in iron because these birds are very sensitive to iron overload."

Housing

"They are housed in an aviary of 7 by 2 metres. Especially the length of the aviary is important because they don't really fly but hop and jump more. They hop from one branch to the other. Usually, I keep my turacos with other ground-dwelling birds and although the male can sometimes be aggressive towards his female, keeping them with other birds is going quite well. There is no night house connected to this aviary, but turacos absolutely need this in the winter. I then temporarily move the birds to a barn."

Passion

I ask Jan if he shares his passion with his partner. He replies: "Well, not really. My wife doesn't dislike it, but she doesn't care too much about it. She prefers to focus on the plants and flowers in the garden."



Philby's Partridge

by Johan Ameel



The Philby's Partridge is named after the British explorer Harry St. John Philby.

Philby's Partridge (photo: Christiaan Luttenberg)

Scientific : *Alectoris philbyi* Lowe, 1934
Dutch : Philby-patrijs,
Philby's steenpatrijs
French : Perdrix de Philby
German : Philbys Steinhuhn
Spanish : Perdiz gorginegra
Portuguese : Perdiz-de-papo-preto

Order : Galliformes
Suborder : Phasiani (turkeys, grouse,
quail, pheasants, partridges,
francolins, guineafowl)
Family : Phasianidae (pheasants,
partridges, francolins,
Old World quail)
Subfamily : Perdicinae (partridges,
francolins, Old World quail)
Genus : *Alectoris* (rock partridges)

Systematics and distribution

The Philby's Partridge belongs to the genus of rock partridges (*Alectoris*). This genus includes 7 species:

- Arabian Partridge (*Alectoris melanocephala*)
- Przevalski's or Rusty-necklaced Partridge (*Alectoris magna*)
- (Common) Rock Partridge (*Alectoris graeca*)
- Chukar Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*)
- Philby's (Rock) Partridge (*Alectoris philbyi*)
- Barbary Partridge (*Alectoris barbara*)
- Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

According to Watson (1962), this isolated form is part of the superspecies chukar and is a very recent offshoot of the Chukar Partridge, which reached the Arabian Peninsula only late. It is possible that the Philby's Partridge arose through separation from the Chukar Partridge due to the drying out of the northern and central part of the Arabian Desert after prolonged periods of abundant rainfall in the Late Pleistocene (11,800 to 126,000 years ago).

According to Meinertzhagen (1954), the Philby's Partridge is a subspecies of the Common Rock Partridge.

Most sources today consider the Philby's Partridge to be a separate species with no subspecies.

Meanwhile, DNA research (2010) has shown that the Philby's Partridge is more closely related to the Chukar Partridge than to the Arabian Partridge.

The Philby's Partridge is found in rocky, mountainous desert regions of western Arabia from southwest Saudi Arabia to northern Yemen. In Saudi Arabia it lives at an altitude of 1400 to 2950 meters and in Yemen from 2300 to 3600 meters. Its distribution area overlaps with that of the Arabian Partridge. The habitat of the Philby's Partridge too is similar to that of the Arabian Partridge, but where the latter is mostly found on rocky mountain slopes and plateaus with little cover, from sea level to 3000 meters, the Philby's Partridge is more likely to occur on slopes with more thickets.





Philby's Partridge (photo: Christiaan Luttenberg)



Chukar Partridge (photo: Nico van Wijk)



(Common) Rock Partridge (photo: Nico van Wijk)

Description

33-36m of which the tail takes up 9.5 to 11.4cm. In the wild, the weight of only one specimen is known, namely 441 g.

The Philby's Partridge is easily distinguished from the other rock partridges by the black chin, cheeks and throat. Otherwise, it resembles the Chukar Partridge very well. The crown is bluish grey, becoming light brown in the neck. A white band runs from the base of the beak above the eyes and ear coverts, fading into ochre on the sides of the neck. The upperparts and breast are yellowish brown, the underparts and undertail coverts are cinnamon. The side markings are vertically striped with white, black and maroon. The beak, eye-rings and legs are coral red. The iris is dark brown.

The hen is slightly smaller than the male and lacks the knobby spur on the tarsus. After their first moult, young birds closely resemble the adult birds.

The call, which can usually be heard early in the morning or late in the evening, consists of a series of 'chuk' sounds. There is also a cackling call that is especially uttered when the birds fly away startled.

Food

Like the Arabian Partridge, the Philby's Partridge feeds on plant matter, seeds and insects.

Reproduction

The laying period starts at the end of March. Information about breeding in the wild is only known from clutches of 5 to 8 eggs. This seems like a very small number and therefore more research is needed.

The eggs have an average size of 40 x 30mm and are light greyish brown with pinkish spots. They are incubated in a nest on the ground for about 25 days.

Status

The Philby's Partridge is considered *Least Concern* on the IUCN Red List (2016). In Saudi Arabia it is locally common, but rare in Yemen. The distribution area is not very large. The population development is unknown, but probably stable. No real threats are known, but habitat destruction (e.g. in North Yemen) may have an impact in some areas. The hunt is not systematic and is therefore considered non-harmful. The remoteness of its mountainous habitat is currently the best protection for the Philby's Partridge.

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Philby's Partridge (photo: Nico van Wijk)

Breeding THE PHILBY'S PARTRIDGE

by Marij de Vos



Day-old Philby's Partridge chicks
(photo: Allesandro Pavesi)

Paul Meyers' passion for partridges dates back to the early 1970s. "My father had received a few Red-legged Partridge eggs, which hatched successfully. Once the chicks were fully grown, I was fascinated by their beautiful colours.

Years later, around 1983, when cycling to school, I heard the call of partridges along the way. That call turned out to be from Chinese Bamboo Partridges. That autumn I bought a pair of Bamboo Partridges with the money I earned from my summer job (for 80 guilders a pair at the time; *editor's note: around £18*).

Around 1990 I came into contact with Pierre Geerlings from Elsloo. I took my young rock partridges and quails to him and exchanged them for, to me, newer species of rock partridges. I bought my first pair of Philby's Partridges from him." (It was Pierre Geerlings who imported the Philby's Partridge from America.)

"Since then I have always had the Philby's Partridge and other rock partridge species in my collection. However, Philbies are not kept very often, making it increasingly difficult to maintain a strong bloodline.

It probably has not become a common species because they are quite sensitive," says Paul.

In addition to partridges, Paul keeps an impressive range of birds: quail, francolin, tinamous, pheasants and tropical doves.



Photo: Marij de Vos



Photo:
Allesandro Pavesi

Breeding with the Philby's Partridge

"It is important to have strong blood-lines, but as I said, it is not easy to get hold of them. Good, unrelated pairs are needed to get a significantly higher success rate of breeding. It's not an easy partridge to breed.

They are only broody once a year for a six week period. The breeding season starts around late March – early April. They lay 5 to sometimes 7 cream-coloured eggs if you are lucky.

I never use artificial light to promote breeding, nature has to do its job. I also don't want to run the risk that the male gets broody before the hen, as there is a chance that the hen won't survive this. The birds being broody too early can also cause egg binding and sudden frosts can stop the hen from laying.

They don't really make a nest, it's a hollow in the sand, nothing more. I have an upside-down bucket or flower pot in every aviary with a (cut out) opening as a door. In this way, not only the eggs are sheltered, but also for the hen it is good to have an escape option from a male that is too frisky. In addition to the fact that the hen can sit in it, she can also jump on top of it. In that case, the male continues to run circles around the bucket until he calms down."

To avoid all the risks that natural breeding entails, Paul puts the eggs in the incubator. They hatch after 23 days. The eggs have to be turned 24 times a day, so every hour! This is to prevent dormant embryos. If there is no more activity, the embryo in the egg can die.



The breeding room
(photo: Marij de Vos)



One day old (photo: Allesandro Pavesi)

Editor's note

Regularly turning the eggs is of great importance for the development of the embryo (heat distribution), for the humidity balance and for the proper development of the embryonic membranes.

The temperature should be 37.8 °C with a relative humidity of 45 %.

After hatching, the chicks are moved to the drawer at the bottom of the incubator for a day, not to the hatcher. The chicks must use up the rest of the yolk. This prevents infection, etc. Only the next day do they go into the rearing box and receive chick crumbs (so no starting mash) from De Heus. According to Paul, the rearing box should be as small as possible to prevent them from pecking at each other. There is a light bulb with a dimmer above the chicks. Subdued light to protect the eyes, but warm enough (around 32 degrees). Very advantageous as almost no light bulb breaks because the tungsten wire no longer gets very hot.

Another additional advantage is that you use much less electricity, which is useful in these expensive times. It is easy to see from the chicks whether the temperature is set correctly or not: if they are all together under the light bulb, then it's too cold, if they are all huddled together in a corner, then it's too hot. After four weeks, when they no longer need heat, they move to a larger space or an aviary.

Paul has his rearing room and incubators in the basement. This is very favourable in terms of temperature because it's a constant 17 °C all year round, with no weather influence from outside.

Because the chicks are quite vulnerable, Paul adds apple cider vinegar to the water every day, because the light bulb also heats the water, which in turn promotes the growth of bacteria. This prevents coccidiosis, among other things. In the unlikely event that a chick does become ill, it is separated and receives a Baycox treatment. Paul gives the other chicks, just to be sure, because coccidiosis is contagious, a little bleach in the drinking water. One tablespoon or cap in a bucket of water.

Editor's note

Apple cider vinegar does indeed inhibit bacterial growth. But if you give it every day, it affects the intestinal bacteria and they become more acidophilous. As a result, the added value for a healthy intestinal flora disappears. It is better to give clean water daily and clean the bowl well. Giving them apple cider vinegar twice per week is fine. It doesn't prevent coccidiosis, but combined with careful rearing the chance of this parasite does decrease. The chance that coccidiosis is the cause of sick chicks is indeed high. You can only use Baycox a few times per season, otherwise resistance will develop. It is therefore better to treat the chicks on the basis of faecal examination, as this prevents unnecessary treatments. Clear bleach, not a thick bleach, inhibits the development of the oocysts, which cause coccidiosis. Indeed, it lowers the coccidiosis pressure. 1ml of bleach (4%) per litre of water for 3-4 days.



Sex distinction

Male and female are both sexually mature after one year. According to Paul, there are some differences between the sexes. For starters, there is a size difference. In adults, the male is a bit more robust. (They also only leave until they are fully grown, around November – December). By that time, a thickening (a kind of spur) on the leg can be felt in the male. The female doesn't have this. Then there is the difference in leg length; the female's legs are shorter.

Food

"After four weeks of chick crumbs, the chicks move to another space and receive maintenance pellets. This shouldn't contain too much protein as this would increase the risk of twisted legs. They don't get fruit and vegetables either, because they easily suffer from intestinal disorders," says Paul.

Housing

In addition to the rearing and breeding boxes in the basement, Paul has numerous aviaries in the garden. All with a concrete floor. Underneath the concrete is a layer of wire as optimal protection against unwanted visitors. A concrete floor is highly recommended, especially for Philby's Partridges. This type of floor can be kept dry as the Philby cannot withstand moisture very well. Blackhead, coccidiosis and worms can largely be prevented by a dry floor. There is wooden decking on the floor so that the feet don't get too cold during periods of frost.

This partridge species can withstand cold and heat well, after all, they come from North Yemen in Arabia, where it is hot during the day and cold at night. Paul only keeps one pair of rock partridges per aviary. Philby's Partridges are believed to be monogamous.

Music can be heard everywhere in the aviaries. Paul does this because he likes to hear a bit of music when he's working outside. It also prevents the birds from being startled when the silence is suddenly broken, such as upon entry into the aviaries.



Photos: Marij de Vos



Chick crumbs



Maintenance pellets
(photos: Marij de Vos)



15 days



30 days



40 days
(photos: Allesandro Pavese)



60 days

Miscellaneous

The behaviour of the Philby's Partridge can be compared to the Chukar Partridge according to Paul. Rock partridges do not differ much from each other in appearance. The Philby's Partridge is medium in size with a length of 33 cm. The ring size is 9 mm.

Epilogue

I thank Paul for his explanation and time. Given the large selection of small Galliformes and the necessary experience, I'm hoping to see him soon!

Editor's note

We have submitted the rearing method and the measures to prevent and control coccidiosis to Aviornis veterinarian and advisor Mr. Sible Westendorp (NL). His response has been included in italics above as a further clarification.



Adult Philby's Partridges
(photo: Marij de Vos)

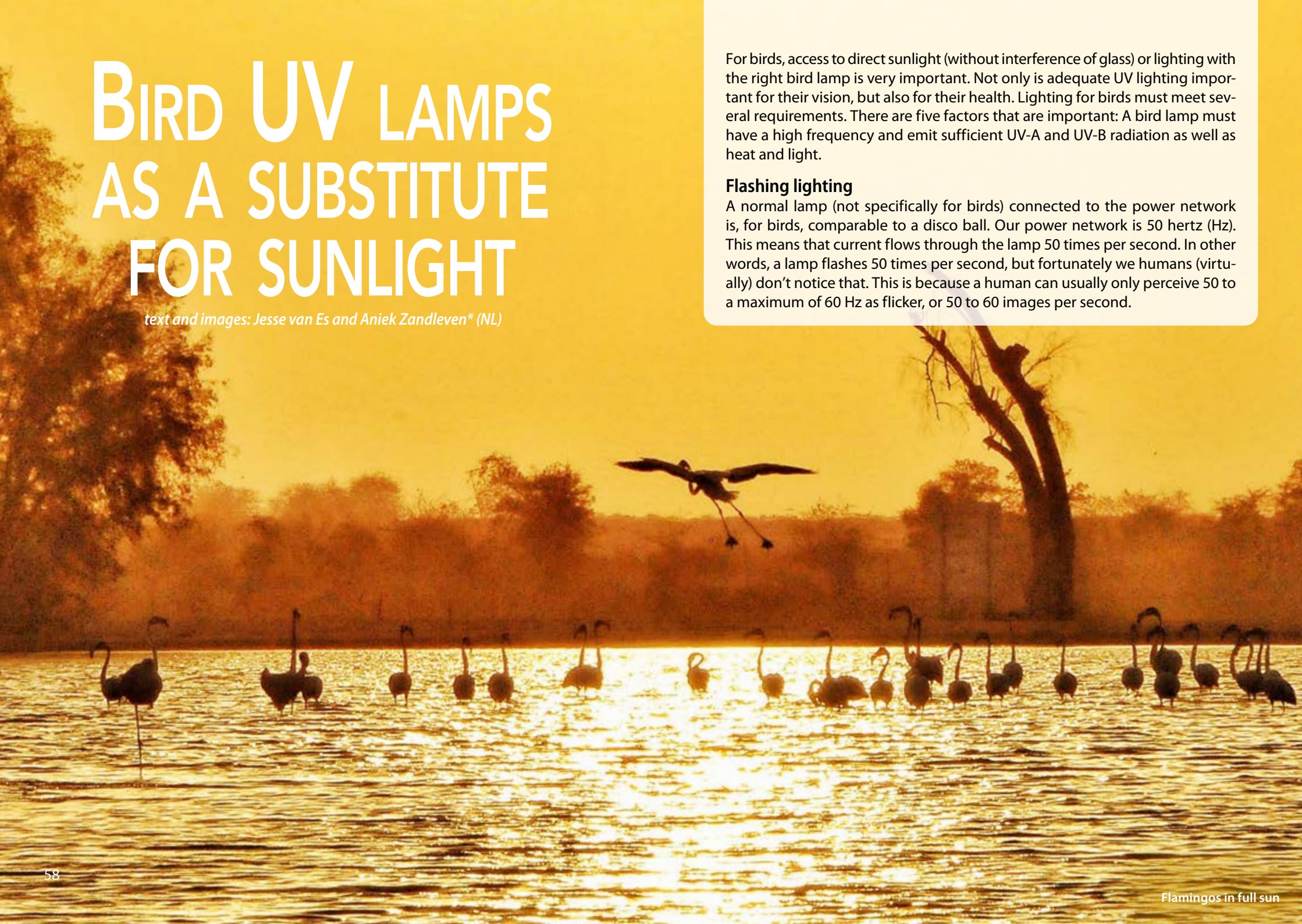
BIRD UV LAMPS AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR SUNLIGHT

text and images: Jesse van Es and Aniek Zandleven (NL)*

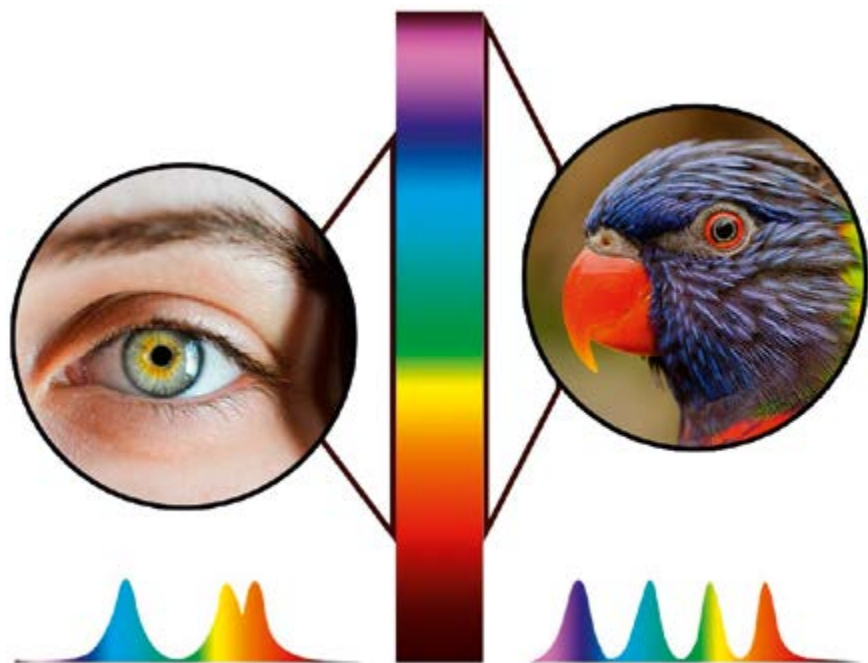
For birds, access to direct sunlight (without interference of glass) or lighting with the right bird lamp is very important. Not only is adequate UV lighting important for their vision, but also for their health. Lighting for birds must meet several requirements. There are five factors that are important: A bird lamp must have a high frequency and emit sufficient UV-A and UV-B radiation as well as heat and light.

Flashing lighting

A normal lamp (not specifically for birds) connected to the power network is, for birds, comparable to a disco ball. Our power network is 50 hertz (Hz). This means that current flows through the lamp 50 times per second. In other words, a lamp flashes 50 times per second, but fortunately we humans (virtually) don't notice that. This is because a human can usually only perceive 50 to a maximum of 60 Hz as flicker, or 50 to 60 images per second.



The threshold at which you perceive a light source as a constant light source, without flicker, is also called the 'Critical Flicker Fusion Rate', or CFFR. Birds see much more and much faster than humans. The chicken has one of the lowest CFFRs of all birds, at 71.5 to 74 hertz, but some bird species have a CFFR of up to 145 hertz! The number of hertz that a bird can see differs per species, but also per individual. EVERY bird sees a normal lamp flashing. A good bird lamp therefore has a **high frequency** (sometimes even up to 20,000 Hz) which means a bird will never see the lamp flicker. It is a constant source of light for the bird.



UV-A radiation for vision

To complete a bird's vision, UV-A (ultraviolet A) light is a must-have. We as humans can NOT observe UV-A radiation (from the sun), but a **bird sees UV-A radiation**.

We humans see three basic colours (green, red and blue), but a bird sees a fourth colour, namely UV-A light. As a result, a bird not only sees more colours, but also colour combinations and patterns that we can never perceive with our eyes.

There are substances that reflect UV-A light and therefore glow when UV-A light shines on them. For example, a black bird can be very colourful, only we humans cannot see that, birds can! This way, UV-A light makes it easier for birds to recognise their partner, but also to recognise ripe seeds and fruits, which have a waxy coating that reflects UV-A light.



So UV-A radiation actually ensures that birds can see all the colours that they can see naturally. A bird in the house, without sunlight, therefore does not see everything. You can compare it a bit with colour blindness, or a clouding layer on our retina, as a result of which we see less or poorly. When the bird has access to sunlight or a bird lamp with UV-A lighting, the bird can see everything as it should.



UV-A radiation has several benefits for birds:

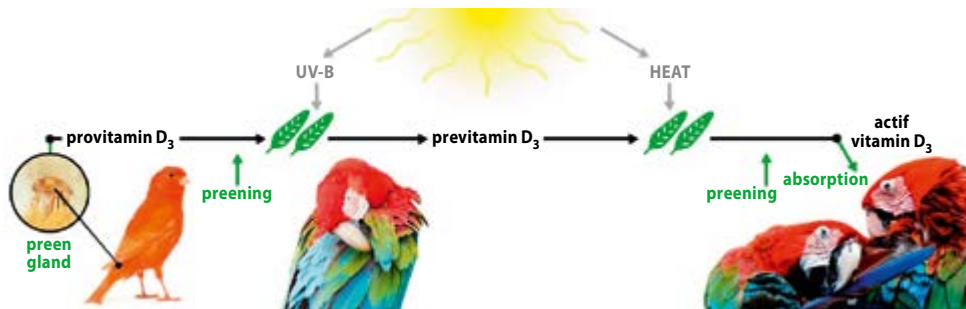
- Enhanced vision: Being able to see all colours as they are supposed to see them naturally.
- Partner: Partner selection is based on sight; the difference between male and female is more apparent with UV-A light.
- Breeding: Not only the partner, but also eggs and chicks are better recognized.
- Appetite: Recognising ripe seeds and fruits through a waxy coating.
- Behaviour: More rest and less stress, better vision and a bird is also less likely to be startled and plucking itself.



UV-B radiation for vitamin D₃

Birds have a preen gland on their back just in front of the tail (by the rump). This produces a greasy substance that they brush over the feathers. Some species of birds do not have a preen gland but special downy feathers, which the bird can pulverise into powder and have the same effect. This greasy layer on the feathers ensures that the feathers remain in good condition, shine and are water-repellent. This layer with which they coat their feathers has another important function, as it contains the precursor of vitamin D₃ and is important in the absorption of calcium.

UV-B (ultraviolet B) radiation activates the vitamin D₃ that is present in the layer on the feathers. When a bird starts preening its feathers, it receives activated vitamin D₃ (due to UV-B radiation) through its beak. Why is this so extremely important? **A bird cannot absorb calcium without vitamin D₃.** And not only is calcium so important for birds, not only for growth and their bones, but also the feathers and eggs need calcium. Calcium deficiency is one of the most common problems in birds.



When vitamin D₃ is naturally produced through UV-B radiation, it can NOT be harmful in excess. The body can regulate and deactivate this natural vitamin D₃; this can leave the body if there is enough calcium present. In this way, a bird that spends the whole day in the sun, or under a bird lamp, cannot overdose on vitamin D₃, because any excess is naturally removed by the body. If there is enough calcium in the body, the body produces a substance called PTH (Parathyroid Hormone), which converts the active vitamin D₃ into non-active vitamin D₃, which will then leave the body.

Symptoms Of calcium deficiency:

- Egg binding
- Bad eggs, weak shell
- Muscle weakness
- Poor plumage
- Neurological problems
- Skeletal deformities in young birds
- With a large deficiency, bone decalcification can also occur.

Why can't you just give vitamin D₃ as part of the diet?

In theory it could be done, but in practice it is actually **impossible** and it can also be **dangerous**. This is not for one simple reason, but there is a series of factors that are impossible to get right. If you were to add vitamin D₃ to your bird's diet, it would be impossible to dose this at all. Vitamin D₃ 'disappears', it has a short shelf life. There are 2 types of vitamin D₃ on the market, normal and stabilised vitamin D₃. A deficiency of vitamin D₃ is harmful, but an excess (poisoning) of vitamin D₃ is also possible. Vitamin D₃ that is absorbed through the diet (non-natural form) is less effective than vitamin D₃ that is made via UV-B radiation and can even be dangerous if overdosed.

A bird can only absorb about 60% of vitamin D₃ in food into the blood, in contrast to the naturally formed vitamin D₃ through UV-B radiation (100% absorption). In addition, vitamin D₃ that has been added to animal feed degrades. You have to know exactly when the product was produced, then calculate how much active vitamin D₃ could still be in it (not safe, preference is testing, which is impossible for a normal person, you don't have the equipment for that). But there is also a difference in the decay of vitamin D₃.

- Vitamin D₃ that has been stabilised loses **10 to 30%** of its activity in **4 to 5 months** after production, at room temperature in complete animal feed.
- Vitamin D₃ (not stabilised) loses 31% of its activity within **12 weeks** after production (the product is often not even in the shops yet).
- Vitamin D₃ (not stabilised) in combination with trace element premix loses **66%** of its activity after **6 weeks!** (So before this product hits the shelves, the vitamin D₃ is actually gone!)



So you can't buy vitamin D₃ with minerals together in a jar, that doesn't work!

Then there are two more important factors that we shouldn't forget. This non-natural vitamin D₃ can only be absorbed for about 60%. So you still have to subtract this percentage from the above figures. But you're not there yet at all, because you also need to know how many grams your bird eats per day. How much vitamin D₃ does it contain? Has the vitamin D₃ been stabilised? When was it produced?

But then comes the most important thing, we don't know exactly how much calcium a bird needs; this differs per bird species! To figure this out, the blood values of birds in nature, per bird species, must be accurately measured for calcium content. Then we're still not there... but we think it's already clear, right...?

There is only one safe way for the right amount of vitamin D₃ and calcium to be absorbed, and that is direct sunlight, or a good bird UV lamp! (UV-B radiation does not pass through glass!)

Symptoms of vitamin D₃ overdose from supplements:

- Drowsy
- Decreased food intake
- Increased water intake
- Watery stools
- Restlessness
- Being dehydrated
- Weak
- Stiff joints

Heat

The fourth important factor in a bird lamp, or the environment, is the heat. In order to activate vitamin D₃ on the feathers, not only UV-B radiation is needed, but also heat. UV-B radiation converts the non-active pro-vitamin D₃ into a pre-vitamin D₃ in the first phase. In the second phase, this pre-vitamin D₃ is converted into active vitamin D₃ by means of heat. You can of course heat your bird (accommodation) in various ways, for example by letting the birds sit under the sun or by using a UV lamp that also gives off heat. You will of course understand that these two options (sun or UV lamp) generally have the most effect, because they are often warmer than the room temperature. At lower temperatures, significantly less vitamin D₃ is activated. Subsequently,

this activated vitamin D₃ is absorbed by the liver (3rd phase) and passes through the kidneys (4th phase) finally to the bloodstream (the liver and kidneys add elements along the way). From this point calcium can be absorbed.

Light itself (colours)

In addition to the above four important factors in a bird lamp, there is one last (5th) factor, the (ordinary) light itself. We are talking here about the normal vision spectrum, which we as humans also see, namely the colours with a wavelength between 400 and 700 nanometres (such as the basic colours green, red and blue). With almost every lamp you can see these colours, but with one slightly more beautiful and better than with the other lamp of course! If we as humans can see all colours when a lamp is switched on (within the normal vision spectrum of 400 to 700 nanometres), then we can assume that a bird sees them too.

Conclusion

A bird needs direct sunlight, with no glass in between. If this is not available, the bird should be provided with a UV lamp with the following factors: high frequency, UV-A radiation, UV-B radiation and also heat and light. The last 2 factors can also be offered in a different way, but the preference is an 'all in one' lamp, to really simulate the sun.

Practical information

- Place at least one high-frequency lamp in indoor accommodation or winter accommodation.
- "Back Zoo Nature Bird Sun UV" lamp is the best combination of high frequency, UV-A, UV-B and heat available on the market.
- Provide a shady spot and see the leaflet for the best distance between the lamp and the birds.
- Always leave the lamp on during the day, especially in aviaries with several birds, so that every bird has a chance to use the lamp.

* The full article including all sources can be found on the website of Avonturia Shop: www.avonturiashop.nl
<https://www.avonturiashop.nl/info/vogel-uv-lamp-of-zonlicht-49>

The Bufflehead

by Liliane De Boeck-Pauchet (B)

in the wild



Large photo: drake in breeding plumage (photo: Mick Thompson - CC BY-NC 2.0)
Inset: female (photo: Rhododendrites - CC BY-SA 4.0)

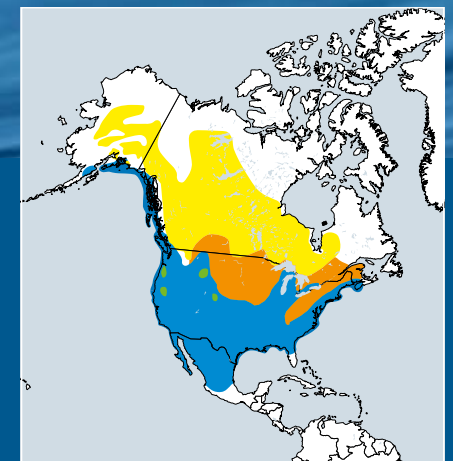
Scientific : *Bucephala albeola*
Dutch : Buffelkopeend
French : Petit Garrot, Garrot albéole
German : Büffelkopfente
Spanish : Porrón coronado, Patomoñudo

Bufflehead are widespread in North America. The total population is said to consist of 1.3 million adult birds (Partners in Flight, 2020) and is still growing (Birdlife International, 2022). This means they are not endangered. They are migratory birds. They breed from

central and southern Alaska west and south across much of Canada, and in the north-west of the USA.

They occur in open forest landscapes on fresh, stagnant or slow-moving water; especially on ponds, pools and small lakes that contain many invertebrates, preferably aquatic insects and their larvae. They also eat seeds and aquatic plants.

From mid-October, they migrate to wintering grounds along the Pacific coast (from Alaska to Mexico), along the Atlantic coast (from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico), and inland south of the breeding range (a large part of the USA). There they are found on fresh and salt water, including ponds, lakes, freshwater bays, sheltered coastal waters and estuaries. At that time of the year they mainly eat molluscs and crustaceans, some fish and fish eggs and also water plants.



■ throughout the year
■ breeding areas ■ during migration
■ wintering areas

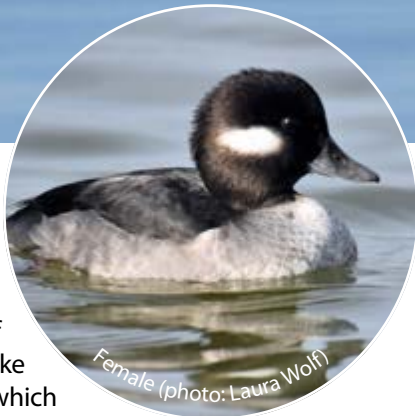


Display flight (photo: Andrew Reading - CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Description

With a length of 32-40cm, the Bufflehead is the smallest diving duck in North America; its tail takes up 1/5 of that length, which is unusual for a diving duck. It owes its name to the dome-shaped head of the drake that resembles the head of a buffalo. Like the goldeneyes, it belongs to the genus *Bucephala* (which also refers to that resemblance) and belongs to the sea ducks.

The drake has a black and white breeding plumage with a black head and back, a white upper back, neck, breast, belly and sides and a white head patch. Its head patch is larger than that of the goldeneyes; it begins as a rounded triangle behind and below his one eye (lower left), extends to the back of his head and forms one whole with the white head patch under his other eye (lower right). In the sun, the black of its head can show purple, green and bronze hues. He has dark brown eyes and a blue-grey beak with a black tip.



Female (photo: Laura Wolf)



Photo: Jan Harteman



Photo: Liliane De Boeck

The grey tail feathers have light tips. The legs and toes are pink, the webs grey. With spread wings, the large white zone of the wing coverts and wing mirror attracts attention and the pointed white strip along the dark shoulders (top left) also stands out. The underwings are grey and white. With folded wings, two dark lines on the white sides become visible (below). In eclipse plumage he resembles the female but he is somewhat darker, larger and more robust, his head is somewhat thicker and his white head patch slightly larger.

The female has a blackish-grey head and upperparts with a brown cast, a white cheek patch, brown eyes and a dark grey beak. Her chest, belly and sides are grey and white. Her grey feet have a lilac cast. She doesn't have a large white zone on the dark upper wings like the drake, only the wing mirror and the coverts above are white.

Behaviour and display

Bufflehead are very lively and energetic diving ducks. They fly very fast and low over the water, higher over the land. During migration, they mainly fly at night. They rarely come ashore and usually rest on the water or on a boulder or rock protruding from the water. They mainly search for food while diving with closed wings, in water that is 1.3 to 5m deep. They aren't noisy; the drake now and then groans or whistles sharply, his partner whines 'heh-euh-euh' or quacks hoarsely. In the moulting, migratory and winter period they form small groups, but as soon as the breeding season arrives, each pair separates itself.

The courtship display can begin in winter. Sometimes a popular female is chased in the air by a group of squabbling drakes (above left). If a drake manages to land next to her in the water, he quickly pumps his head up and down, interrupts this pumping momentarily and raises the folded wings in a flashing movement against his head. When the whining female swims behind him, he occasionally points his beak over his shoulder in her direction. When she invites him to mate, he plunges the beak into the water, smooths out a back feather, jumps onto her back, grabs her by the neck feathers and mates. While mating, he holds her for a while and both rotate around their axis a few times in that position.



The drake pumps his head up and down



The drake preens a back feather



Mating pair (photos: Liliane De Boeck)



Photo: Laura Wolf

The breeding season

Bufflehead usually fly to the breeding grounds in small groups. Many pairs are formed during migration. They form a monogamous bond.

From March to May they arrive in the breeding area and each pair occupies a territory (a small lake, pond or pool), and defends it against conspecifics and other waterfowl.

Characteristic of female Bufflehead is that they like to nest in their native region. If for some reason that isn't possible, they will look for a place as close as possible to that area. They are a cavity-nesting species and prefer a tree cavity, but if there is a shortage, they can also nest in a nest box. Nest cavities carved by woodpeckers in pines and poplars close to the water are very popular. If a female can't find a tree cavity with a nest hole of 6 to 7cm, she will be forced to look for one with a larger hole (below). That could end in a fiasco. If a Goldeneye female in the same breeding area has already set her sights on such a cavity with a large nest hole, the smaller Bufflehead female won't get a chance. There is even a known case where a female Bufflehead was killed by a female Barrow's Goldeneye!

Sometimes a nest that meets all requirements is being used by several Bufflehead females or by a female Bufflehead and a Goldeneye. That too can end badly.



Photo: Larry Jordan
- CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

In the south of the breeding area, laying starts around the end of April, in the centre around the beginning of May and in the north around mid-May. Eggs are laid every 1 to 3 days. A complete clutch contains 8 (5-12) smooth, oval eggs with a creamy, pale brown or light olive-green tint and an average size of 52 x 37mm. During the laying, the drakes remain nearby. Every 24 to 36 hours, the females fly to their partner to feed in his company. Incubation period: 30 (29-31) days.

After a few days of breeding, the drakes sometimes start to leave the nesting area for a while. Finally, they leave for a large, open lake in a safe moulting area. This means that a pair of Bufflehead with offspring is seldom observed.

As a result of nest disturbance and nest predation, a female may abandon her clutch. It happens that squirrels or tree swallows place their nesting material on top of the Bufflehead eggs, woodpeckers and starlings pierce the eggs and small mammals destroy entire broods. After the loss of the first clutch, sometimes(!) a replacement clutch is produced.

The ducklings remain in the nest for 24 hours or more after hatching. Afterwards, they jump to the nest opening, bounce down and gather around their mother in the water (bottom left).

If a female has nested near a small pond that contains too little food, she will migrate overland with the ducklings to a more suitable environment and raise her offspring there. During the first week, a family moves an average of 700 m. Duckling mortality is greatest during the first 14 days.

Some females have a stronger maternal instinct than others, which may result in a confrontation between two families transferring some or even all of the ducklings from one female to the other.

Initially, the ducklings feed on the water surface, but soon they also dive for food. They mainly eat aquatic insects and their larvae.

The drakes can be distinguished by their larger size after 20-40 days.

After ± 40 days the young are almost fully feathered and after two months they weigh 15 to 20 times more than after hatching.

The female often migrates to a moulting area even before her offspring can fly after 50 to 55 days. The young that are left behind then join other young birds or adult Bufflehead that moult in the breeding area. Young females growing up in the breeding area are already inspecting tree cavities. It is presumed that during those summer months they already choose a suitable cavity in which they want to lay their eggs once they are mature.



Photo: Liliane De Boeck

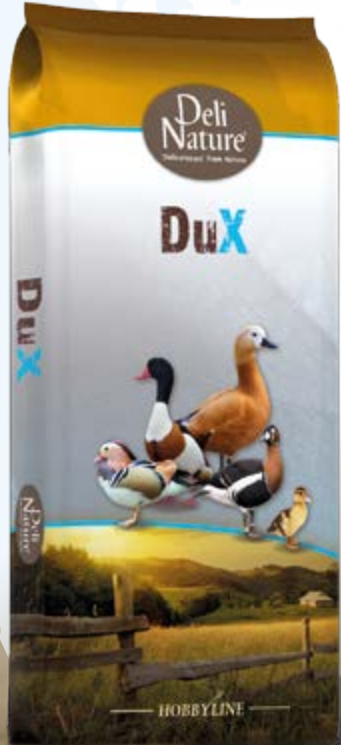


Photo: Larry Jordan - CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

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Experiences with BUFFLEHEAD

by Liliane De Boeck-Pauchet (B)



Bufflehead drake in breeding plumage (photo: Laura Gooch - CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In the early years of our hobby we decided to add a pair of Bufflehead to our waterfowl collection. We had heard from an experienced breeder that these little diving ducks are very lively rascals that spend a large part of the day frolicking and playing in the water. We really wanted to experience that up close.

So we went looking for a young pair after the breeding season. In the end we bought not two but four unrelated Bufflehead, two from Belgium and two from the Netherlands. We had been made aware that these diving ducks, once mature, can be quite aggressive, especially during the mating season. As that time hadn't arrived yet, we

temporarily housed them in the common area with our Carolina Ducks, Falcated Ducks, Ringed Teal, Smew, Hooded Mergansers and Barrow's Goldeneyes.

In those days we had adopted the habit of opening the doors of the communal areas after the breeding season so that our ducks could spread freely over the garden and ponds. This worked out well for the four newly purchased Bufflehead, because it allowed them to get used to our garden and ducks at ease. Pretty quickly, I saw them happily going about their business and demonstrating their diving skills with great dedication.



Young pair (photo: Andrew Reding - CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

After a few weeks they became hand tame, which was mainly due to the 'treats', especially the millet seeds, which I handed out daily. So it was all going very well. This also remained the case during the winter period. They weren't bothered by the cold. Even when the temperature dropped to -18 °C that year, we hardly noticed any discomfort. However, during frost we always had fresh groundwater flowing into the ponds. This way the pond water never froze.

Precocious

In the beginning of spring it became a lot busier in our garden. I regularly saw the Belgian Bufflehead drake display fiercely towards the two females. He pumped his head up and down very fast, which was so funny to see that I kept laughing out loud. However, as the little fellow became more and more enterprising, I held my breath. Every time the other Bufflehead drake or the Barrow's Goldeneye drake came a little too close to one of the females, he would rush towards him and grab him by the wing or tail so that only after much pulling and dragging could he tear himself free and flee. In this way he managed to eliminate all competition and to hook the Dutch female. What an achievement for such a spring chicken. And that was not the end of it!

A few weeks later, the precocious little fellow also tried to seduce a female and, miraculously, he even succeeded. The Dutch drake got off to a slower start, but gradually showed his affection for the Belgian female. However, she didn't seem interested. Females, however, are said to be quite fickle. So you never know.

An ill Bufflehead

Very unexpectedly there was a spanner in the works. Our Belgian drake became ill! He retreated into a corner and lay there panting with his beak wide open. Thinking he had throat worms, I put a Spartakon worming tablet in his beak. However, no improvement occurred. Because the other ducks were quite disturbing, I moved him to a container in the breeding room. In the afternoon I found him there lifeless. I wanted to know exactly what had happened to him and had an autopsy performed. It revealed that he had died of aspergillosis (lung fungus). So we were left with two females and one drake.

In the autumn, the remaining drake underwent a complete metamorphosis. By now, his body was stunning black and white and his head shone purple, green and bronze in the sun.

His beak and tail had become grey adornments and his feet had acquired an intense lilac-pink tint. It was just a pity that he still wasn't in good form. Because no matter how much the Belgian female insisted on mating and how much he tried to satisfy her desire, he never succeeded.

When the Dutch female, in turn, stretched herself invitingly on the surface of the water, he failed again.

I actually felt compassion for the two females who kept begging him for 'it'. He was very wet behind the ears and it didn't seem to improve.



Drake in breeding plumage!
(photo: Liliane De Boeck)



Photo: Liliane De Boeck



Photo: Patrick Quévy

Bufflehead eggs

The Dutch female laid her first egg on April 13 in a wooden nest box with a ladder that was situated right next to the pond. The nest hole had a diameter of 7.5cm, which meant that large ducks couldn't cause disturbance. Inside was a thick layer of sand with some dry stems on top. Two days later, the Belgian female laid in a similar nest box. Both females laid 7 eggs and were brooding exemplary.

Upon candling I was surprised to find that 1 egg was fertile after all! Apparently, the drake had taken his first step into the adult world at the last minute.

On June 10, after an incubation period of 30 days, our very first Bufflehead duckling pipped. Too bad there was no other egg in the hatcher at that time. The duckling had to manage it by itself, and I was a little worried.

After it had slept, I waited for it to move around in the hatcher and then placed it with a three-day-old Smew duckling in a rearing box with a heat lamp.

The Bufflehead visibly brightened up, jumped bravely onto the platform of a red bowl with drinking rim and greedily swallowed the starter mash sprinkled on it. The Smew duckling was more interested in the mealworms floating around in the drinking rim.

Water rats

After about 7 days I regularly gave the chicks lukewarm bathing water in a shallow bowl. You didn't think it possible, but those two managed to dive in it. The fun they had! The Bufflehead turned out to be an even bigger water rat than the Smew.

A week later I moved the two rascals to a spacious rearing tank of 50 x 80cm with a mesh bottom and a fairly deep, metal swimming bowl and a 100 watt Elstein lamp hanging above it. Oh boy, they really went for it in that swimming bowl! At first they got wet, of course, but it was comfortably warm under the lamp. They always diligently preened themselves dry and afterwards took a good nap.

As soon as they were waterproof after a few days, I opened the door at the bottom of the rearing tank and waited. Neither seemed to feel like leaving the familiar space.

I gently pushed them towards the door. They now shuffled out foot by foot into the adjoining rearing space. Suddenly they caught sight of the little pond and instantly their fear was gone. Enthusiastically, they ran towards it and took a deep dive into the cool water.

That wild exultation at the sight of swimming water is typical for diving ducks. This is their element, this is where they feel at home. Experiencing that intense joy really gives you a kick. You look and smile and feel as happy and excited as a child.

Sexing Bufflehead ducklings

After some quite successful breeding years, sexing ducklings had become very common for me. "But sexing Bufflehead is more difficult than you think", I was assured. "In fact, the clitoris of the female looks somewhat like a male penis. It is a bit shorter, curls a bit and is a little more to the side of the genital area."

I cautiously began to explore. What did I see? Right in the middle a tiny, flesh-coloured bump with a black spot on top. "If black is involved, you are dealing with a female", I was told. I felt in seventh heaven with that little Missy.

Before the month was out, however, our little mademoiselle had gained so many centimeters in length and width that I had serious doubts about her sex. So, just to be sure, I sexed her a second time. After talking back and forth with an experienced breeder, I came to the conclusion that our young Bufflehead wasn't a little Missy, but a little Mister. That teeny bump had really thrown me!

A few months later we gave the little fellow three young, unrelated congeners. Our garden was now full of life. Actually, it was mainly thanks to these four playful rascals that the extremely wet summer was still enjoyable.



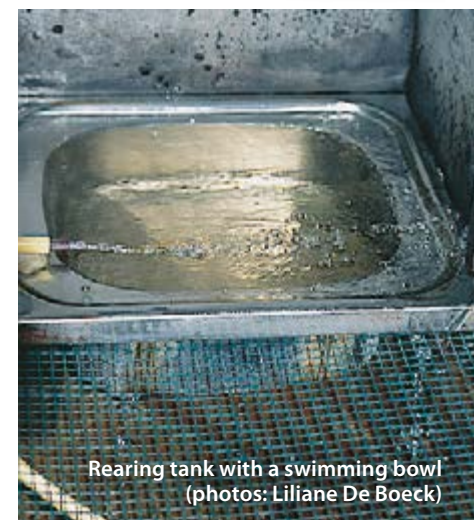
Red bowl with drinking rim (drawing: Ivo Tresinie)



Bufflehead duckling



Smew duckling



Rearing tank with a swimming bowl (photos: Liliane De Boeck)

In top shape

The following winter was as wet as the summer before but remained exceptionally mild, resulting in our adult trio of Bufflehead getting into shape quite early. The drake tried to win over the two females again, pumping its head up and down intensely. Sometimes he beat his wings against his head out of pure excitement (?!).

While he didn't consider the two young Bufflehead drakes as rivals, he did with the adult Barrow's Goldeneye drake.



Menacing drake
(photo: Dough Greenberg)



Diving drake
(photo: Liliane De Boeck)



Female (photo: Laura Wolf)

Every time that drake stepped into the pond, he rushed towards him, thrusting his head menacingly forward. If that impressive attitude didn't help, he dove under the big drake and simply popped him out of the pond.

I couldn't say what exactly made the difference. Was it his vibrant temperament? Or rather his good looks? The fact was that both Bufflehead females soon swam lovingly whining behind him.

One evening our Belgian whiner went into the rear garden area. The next morning she was still swimming there. Suddenly I heard her call loudly. I saw the drake stretch his neck in surprise and quickly run towards her. A little later, the Dutch female joined the duo and immediately swam behind the drake, whining 'heh-heh-heh-uh-uh-uh'. The Belgian female did not let that happen, no way! Angrily she grabbed her by the neck and smacked her so brutally out of the pond that she ran back to the front garden area at full speed.

When I noticed the following week that the Dutch female was looking more and more despondent, I felt sorry for her.

I consulted with my husband and we decided to look for an adult partner for her. Fortunately, we found one sooner than expected. He looked a handsome, healthy fellow. He also turned out to be very smart.

After only a few days he had succeeded in seducing our female.



Adult pair (photo: Liliane De Boeck)

Later I saw not only the female but also him on a nest box inspection. In the end, she chose the concrete plywood nest box with a ladder that he inspected. The brand new pair immediately took over the adjacent pond and on April 11 there was already an ivory-coloured egg in the box.

That same day our Belgian female had laid her egg in a wooden nest box with a ladder close to the pond in the rear garden area.

To avoid possible clashes between the two Bufflehead pairs, we quickly closed the door to that garden area.

During laying, the Belgian female was quite rowdy. If I say she was three times as aggressive as her husband, I'm not exaggerating.

All our ducks went out of the way for such a fiery little lady. Yet she still regularly found a victim and she didn't quickly release what she got hold of. I often saw her walking around with a tuft of down in her beak.

After ± 27 days of incubation, I transferred the eggs to two Brinsea hatchers. Five Dutch ducklings pipped in one hatcher; 1 embryo turned out to have died, the 4 last laid eggs had not yet been pipped.



Drake on nestbox inspection
(photo: Liliane De Boeck)

In the other hatcher, three Belgian ducklings broke through the shell, the other 6 eggs were infertile. Our warm-blooded lady might have spent more time hunting than mating.

Little whiners

After 24 hours I took the chicks out of the hatchers. The Belgian toddlers were pinned on the left, the Dutch on the right. I hung a 60 watt Elstein lamp above an (empty) aquarium of 40 x 60cm. I put a cloth on the bottom, placed a red water dish with a drinking rim on it (drawing page xx) and sprinkled some ground starting crumbs, dog kibble and dried shrimps on its platform. Only then did I put the ducklings in and waited...

They couldn't find their food and drink! They did keep running back and forth over the drinking bowl and got wet. The rest of the time they were jumping and whining. If that didn't change soon, they would all perish. What was I supposed to do with those little whiners? With tweezers I stuck some mealworms in their beak. Thank God the calling and jumping stopped almost completely. Then I pushed them one by one with their beak into the drinking rim until they made swallowing movements. That made them calm down a bit.

I continued to feed them and made them drink regularly. However, some died the next day.

Meanwhile, the last four chicks of the Dutch female had hatched and dried. I placed them in an aquarium of which I had covered the sides with black plastic so they couldn't see the surroundings and I installed a 60-watt infrared lamp above it.

I put a little bit of water in a white plastic lid and filled a shallow, sturdy dish, where they could easily jump in and out, with finely ground starter pellets. All four drank and ate by themselves.

The next day, however, I also heard them whining. What was wrong now? I had noticed that sometimes they lay in the white lid filled with water. Maybe that's why they got cold. Or maybe they were whining because they could hear the older Bufflehead ducklings in the adjacent aquarium?

I placed them in the aquarium of the older ducklings and immediately heard the entire group make very contented noises.

When I went to check on them the next morning, it seemed as if a miracle had happened. Apparently the older ducklings had learned from the younger ones how and what to eat and drink. No more inserting mealworms, no more pushing beaks into the water.

Everything went smoothly now. From the cheerful running back and forth and the cheerful flapping of the little wings, I noticed that they were feeling great.

The tricks of the trade

After 18 days it was time to sex our seven young Bufflehead and ring them with an 8mm ring.

I started this delicate 'operation' somewhat nervous. Twice a miniscule penis popped out, the other five times I saw nothing even remotely resembling it. Was I now dealing with two drakes? Or was it still too early to draw any conclusions? I decided to wait a little longer because I wasn't going to be fooled a second time, at least not by such small penises.

A few weeks later I could sleep on both ears. Two young were clearly larger than the others. It seemed that I finally knew the tricks of the trade.

It's still strange that I hadn't noticed anything about that so-called female penis when sexing the females. That would often be reflected upon. Definitely!



Photo: Liliane De Boeck



Photo: Patrick Quévy



Ducklings in a concrete plywood box on the grass (photo: Frans Denys)



Somewhat older juveniles (photos: Liliane De Boeck)

Unexpected family expansion among the ASHY WOOD PIGEONS

by Matthieu (B)
photos: Matthieu and Fabienne

Since I had the opportunity to build a large, completely open aviary with a spacious night house three years ago, I have also become a fan of exotic pigeons. In my canary past I paid little or no attention to other birds. I have missed so much!!! I didn't know that there was so much variation in pigeons, in terms of colour and size.

At a bird fair in the Netherlands I saw Ashy Wood Pigeons for the first time. That would immediately be the start of a new species in our aviary. Because I really liked them. It's a pity that they were already reserved, but I immediately went looking for another pair the next day!

A few weeks later, the *Aviornis* magazine arrived and someone advertised a pair of young Ashy Wood Pigeons for sale. I could pick them up the following week.

Origin

The Ashy Wood Pigeon is sometimes called the Nepal Pigeon. This name makes it easy to guess which area they originate from. I thought they must be hardy. After all, Mount Everest, that mountain that is quite popular with climbers, is nearby. So they wouldn't be greenhouse plants.

Description

Ashy Wood Pigeons belong to one of the largest pigeon genera, *Columba*. All pigeons from this extensive group are quite large birds. Ashy Wood Pigeons are about the same size as our homing pigeons. They reach about 36 cm. In their natural habitat they seem to be quite shy and often spend time high in the trees. They can be observed in pairs as well as in small groups when foraging on the ground. Their scientific name is *Columba pulchricollis*. If you google that, you will immediately see that they bear some resemblance to the Common Wood Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*). The latter are also beautiful birds, but hardly anyone pays attention to them anymore. It's only when something is no longer there that we realise that it was beautiful after all. I'm thinking here of the House Sparrow!

To be sure of the sex, it is best to have feathers tested for DNA. Another option is endoscopy. Sensible people don't gamble whether they have a pair, but want to be sure and have their birds sexed! They fly well and silently. They are very tolerant towards fellow residents. They even let themselves be bullied by smaller pigeons.

Food and housing

They are not fussy eaters. A mixture for ornamental pigeons is sufficient. As they live in a large community aviary at my place, they have a choice of seed mixture for pigeons, fruit pellets, pheasant pellets, universal food, small seeds and, if they are fast enough, sometimes a mealworm. My wife says they also eat the leaves of the plants, but I've never wanted to see that. In the aviary there are some firethorn bushes (*Pyracantha*). These get quite a few berries. The pigeons skilfully plucked them from the bushes. When they were all gone, I gave them the same berries that came from another aviary but none of the birds wanted them. I cut off the berry clusters and immediately offered them to the pigeons. They didn't give them a glance. Only self-picked fruits are good enough for them!





They sleep in the night house and can also regularly be found there during the day. But when it rains they like to be outside. It is nice to see how they raise their wings in turn. This is their way of bathing and it is obvious that they enjoy a gentle shower.

Acquisition

The pair of young birds I was able to buy, hatched in 2019. They were both endoscopically sexed. I presumed they were brother and sister, since the seller only had one breeding pair. I therefore had in mind to exchange one, which was recommended to me by the way.

I still had time for that because I was told not to expect anything the next year (2020). They wouldn't think about expanding the family until the second year.

They are quite expensive pigeons, but taking into account the fact that they have a slightly longer life expectancy than a canary or a Zebra Finch, I think that is actually quite good.

I picked them up on December 1st from a man who has a nice pigeon collection. Moreover, he already had some years of experience with pigeons. Some expert explanation during the purchase can sometimes be of gold value for a layman.

I released them in the night house, and only after a few days did I see them outside for the first time.

Unexpected events

I don't have to expect anything from my Ashy Woods, I thought. They are still too young and I will exchange one some time. What a misconception!

To my surprise, I saw them dragging nesting material early May. That was practice for next year I thought. But at one point I saw them mate several times.

That always happened on the perch. As usual with pigeons, the mating ritual is not as spectacular as that of a bird of paradise. But they still did it a few times a day.

In mid-May there was a white egg in a clay nest bowl. This bowl was placed in a wooden box at two meters high, so that they were covered and dry. The nest was made exclusively of sticks and formed a fairly solid whole. I think no more than 50 sticks were used, but by pigeon standards this is the most natural thing. They laid (as always by the way) one egg. After about ten days I could candle the egg, because they had both left the nest for a while. They were sitting very firmly, each in turn. Of course the egg was infertile. They are still too young, I thought.

I let them sit until they gave up on June 7.

Second attempt

To my great surprise, they mated several times the following week.

Another nest was built but in a different place and again in a pigeon nest bowl. At one point they stayed on the nest. They had started breeding again.



No disturbing now! The parents both did very well. There was always one of them on the nest, they are both very caring. On July 18, I was startled for a while. In the evening, both parents were sitting casually in the night house, at least 10 meters away from the nest, and spent the night there as well.

But no worries, the young continued to be well fed. I now clearly see it sitting in the nest, it regularly raises its head to explore the area.

On July 22, it's still in the nest in the afternoon, but in the early evening he jumped onto a branch that hangs half a meter in front of the nest. Both parents take good care of their young and it grows into an adult bird without any problems. It quickly masters flying and occasionally goes into the night house.

Fortunately, the parents haven't started a new nest this year.

Now I have to work on the unrelatedness first. That won't be easy, as there are not that many Ashy Wood Pigeons to be found, and when inquiring about the origin, one often comes across the name of the same breeders.

But with us they are definitely stayers. Beautiful, calm and tolerant birds towards all other residents, which cannot be said of many pigeons and some people. ■

It wasn't until June 28, at the changeover when no one was on the nest for a while, that I could take a look.

A fertile egg, or do I not know anymore what I'm talking about? Still thinking they were still too young, I thought this wasn't possible and hadn't seen it well.

I let them carry on with what they were doing.

On July 3, we were absent for a few days. If the egg really was fertile, it would hatch just then. My regular caretaker was not asked to keep an eye on things. Giving everyone food and water was the instruction.

We were back on July 7. The next day the parents were not on the nest.

I quickly ran into the aviary and gosh... a chick!

It was a nice yellow ball of down, clearly a few days old. In one way I was super happy with the squab, but also very disappointed that I hadn't acted faster to form an unrelated pair.

On July 10th I could still ring it quite easily with the prescribed 7mm ring. It grew like weeds and is now not so yellow anymore but is getting a bit greyer.



The Eurasian Hoopoe

by Hans De Jaeger



In the summer of 2016 we purchased a pair of Eurasian Hoopoes. The female came from the Netherlands and the male from Belgium. So the chance of having an unrelated pair was hopefully a bit greater.

Scientific : *Upupa epops*
 Dutch : Hop
 French : Huppe fasciée
 German : Wiedehopf
 Spanish : Abubilla

The behaviour of Hoopoes has always fascinated us; they fly like butterflies in the aviary and will never crash into anything.

We keep them in a night house of 2m by 2m and an outdoor aviary of 3m by 2m. The aviary is partly covered. There are two different nest blocks for parakeets in the night house. We lock them up in the night house when there is frost or strong, cold wind. The aviary is built fairly exposed in the open space, which means that an icy wind can blow in the aviary in winter. Even though the Hoopoe is quite a strong bird, we prefer not to take any risks.

From the first day we had the Hoopoes, the female slept in a nest block. The male always sleeps near the nest block but never in it.

There is little or no visible difference between the sexes. The male has a slightly longer beak and is somewhat stockier in stature. DNA sexing is therefore recommended. As a European species, the birds must be ringed with a recognised, fixed leg ring.

The Eurasian Hoopoe lives exclusively on animal food. With us they get 80% mealworms and 20% frozen insects such as pinkies and Wax Moth larvae. They always have water available but we never see them drinking; sometimes they dip the worms in the water.

They survived the winter well and started moulting around January, February. In March the male started displaying with a soft, pleasant sound that you could hear well, but was certainly not disturbing. The male also started chasing the female more and more until we saw them mating at some point.



At the beginning of April, the female disappeared into the nest box and then hardly left it. From that moment on, the male brought food to the female in the nest. After having stayed in the nest for a week, the first egg was laid. Every day she laid another until she had a clutch of six.

Remarkably, all hatchlings hatched almost simultaneously after 16 days of incubation. The female allowed nest control well and didn't move. After 3 to 4 days they were ringed with a 4.5mm ring. They really grew like weeds. The male had his 'hands' full to provide all the chicks with food. Three times a day we had to replenish the worms and insects.

When the young left the nest they were almost fully grown, only the beak was a bit smaller; it was fully grown two weeks after fledging.

A week after the young fledged, the female started to stay in the nest block again, resulting in a second clutch of 9 eggs, of which 8 young hatched and grew up nicely. This was repeated one more time with a third round of 5 eggs producing 5 chicks. After this I thought it was more than enough and I closed the nest boxes. The pair started moulting almost immediately after closing the nest boxes. This way they could gain new energy and go into the winter strong.

As beginners with Hoopoes, we couldn't have wished for a better start. They are very pleasant and active birds. Perhaps the only drawback for some bird lovers is that they eat exclusively animal food. We have never noticed any aggression towards other birds either. Here they are housed together with Sulawesi Ground Doves and Roul-rouls.

As I'm writing this breeding report in May 2018, the pair is back in the nest block with chicks. If people have any questions about this species, I am happy to help them. (hansdejaeger@gmail.com)



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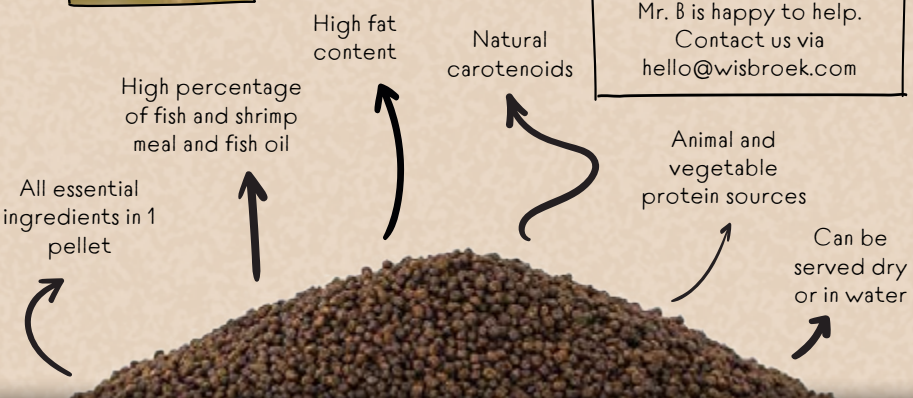
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