

# Things to Consider Before Purchasing Your First Peafowl

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Peafowl are gorgeous birds that require relatively little upkeep to raise successfully. But before you purchase your first peafowl there are some very important things to consider.

- **Space Requirements** - Peafowl are large birds. Mature peacocks with full trains can be almost six feet in length. Therefore, peafowl need a lot of space to thrive. For healthy, happy birds consider at least 200 square feet for a pair or trio of mature peafowl. The more space available the better.
- **To Freerange or to Pen: the Great Peafowl Question** - Many people buy peacocks with the intention of having them roam their property as they've seen in zoos, manors, and many farms. While this can be done with great success, it isn't quite as easy as it may seem, and requires a timely acclimation process and some training on the birds' part. For a more in-depth exploration of this issue, check out [To Freerange or Not to Freerange](#) (coming soon). Before you buy birds to let loose, be aware that you will need to keep them penned for awhile if you want them to stick around, and there's always the chance of losses to predators or their own wandering whims. Keeping peafowl penned, while requiring more money for aviary construction and not as fun in some respects, is a much safer alternative, especially if you intend to buy any of the fancier colors or patterns.
- **Shelter and Pen Construction** - If you plan on keeping your peafowl contained, pen construction will be your most important concern prior to purchasing your birds. Tips on building pens for peafowl can be found [here](#). Pens should be large and tall (when displaying peacock's trains are often over 5 feet tall) and include a shelter so the peafowl can escape rain and snow, get out of the cold, and have a shade from the sun depending on the weather. Under the shelter should be at least one roost. Even if your ultimate plan is to freerange your peafowl, you will need to have a pen to contain them for at least a month, and shelter is an important issue.
- **Dietary Needs** - Although peafowl love a whole variety of treats, for the proper vitamins and minerals they should be fed a gamebird pellet or crumble feed. This can be purchased at any store that sells feed for livestock. Before you purchase peafowl find such a store-you will be there often. Consider supplementing their diet with dried dog or cat food for extra protein and cracked corn during the winter months for extra body fat.
- **Weather** - Peafowl of the India Blue variety and any of its variations (basically, anything that doesn't have 'Spalding' or 'Green' behind it) are



very hardy birds which can withstand a wide range of temperatures. But it's important to consider your local weather before you buy birds, especially while building pens. If your winter temperatures frequently go below zero consider insulating the pens, and be sure to feed lots of cracked corn as soon as breeding season's over. If you're often over the hundreds, lots of shade, and possibly a sprinkler system, is a must. Although blue peafowl can survive most temperatures, extremes can stress them out if they are not properly compensated for. If possible, find a peafowl breeder in your state and ask if they do anything special because of the weather or habitat. Green and higher percentage spaldings are more susceptible to cold weather, and should have insulated shelters available if your winters are frigid.

- **Noise** - There's no way around it: peafowl are noisy birds. Although pretty quiet during most of the year unless startled, spring heralds the beginning of breeding season and a period of frequent calling by peacocks, even (and often) in the middle of the night. If you've never heard a peacock's call, listen to [this](#). I have a vague memory of being a little kid at a produce auction and almost leaving with an adult peacock until the guy told my mom they scream like a woman being murdered. (I think my parents forget this when I started asking them for peacocks eight years later). I personally think it sounds more like a dying cat. That being said, I actually love the sound and start to miss it when I'm away at college. You'll get used to it, and the spring and summer late night callings won't bother you. Your neighbors and even family members, who may not love the birds as much as you do, might not be so understanding. Talk to them beforehand and warn them that the birds will be noisy for a few months. Invite them over to see the peafowl as soon as you get them-if you can get them to love the birds as much as you do they're much less likely to be bothered. And, if the noise really is a problem, its best to know this before you pay for birds and get all attached to them and then find out your neighbors want them gone. There's very little that can be done about the noise itself. An old book on peafowl offers instructions for a devoicing operation, but this is dangerous and rarely done, and not something you really want to but your peas through. A little bit of creative landscaping/windbreaks/pen construction might cut down on the volume, but the calls carry. The up side is, that by the end of August and probably before breeding season is over and the noise all but stops for eight months or so.
- **Predators** - Because peafowl are so large and are strong fliers, they are less vulnerable to predators than chickens or smaller fowl. However, peafowl can be prey to foxes, dogs, and even weasels, owls and hawks if they are young. Freeranging peafowl with tall trees around are almost completely safe if they are healthy and alert with one exception-setting peahens. While peahens are nesting they are extremely vulnerable to any predator that happens by because they are not likely to abandon their nest, and even if they do it might be too late. Here lies one of the great dangers of freeranging-many keep their hens penned during the spring and summer to prevent deaths. Chicks are also very vulnerable until they can fly, and even then they are in some danger until they grow. With penned birds, it's extremely important for the pens to be predator proof. Peafowl are in the most danger if they are locked in a pen with a predator. I lost my first four peafowl when our dog dug under the chain



link fence. Their roost wasn't high enough to be safe and they had nowhere to go. Consider burying the wire a foot in the ground to prevent things digging under it, make sure your netting is strong and secured both to keep peafowl in and other birds out, and make sure no local varmints can get in through the holes in the wire: smaller is better.

The joy of watching your peafowl makes the hassle of dealing with any of these issues well worth it. But these practical concerns should be addressed before you make a purchase so your new birds will be as safe, happy and healthy as possible.

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Tips for Building Peacock Pens

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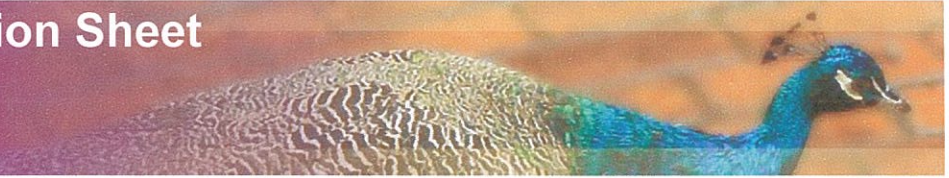
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# Peacock Information Sheet

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## SPECIES

Our peafowl are known as Indian Peafowl, or Indian Blue. The males are known as peacocks, while the females are peahens, and the offspring are peachicks. Typically people tend to refer to them all, regardless of gender, as peacocks, even though the collective name is actually "peafowl".

## WHITE PEAFOWL

Contrary to popular assumption, the white peafowl are not albinos, they are a common genetic variety of the Indian Blue and are born of parents who are either hybrids or white. Hybrids are normal coloured peafowl with a recessive white gene. Hybrids are easily identified by the white feathers present amongst the large brown wing feathers. Hybrid parents have a 25% percent chance of producing white offspring. This percentage increases to 50% if one of the parents is white.



*Hybrid male with obvious white feathers amongst rust coloured wing feathers. This one is also a juvenile with no train and the beginnings of back feathers turning green between the wings*

## LIVING ENVIRONMENT

If you intend to keep peafowl you need to be living on a property with a lot of space. It is not appropriate to keep peafowl in an ordinary suburban backyard. Peafowl like to wander around a large area and must have tall trees or something similar to roost in at night for safety. Even on larger properties they may be inclined to visit your neighbour's yards, and they defecate everywhere they go! A spacious cage or pen is needed to keep new peafowl in when bringing them home for the first time. They should be kept in the pen for at least three weeks before being allowed

to wander freely, in order to get them used to knowing where their regular food supply is coming from. A large, spacious chicken coop is ideal, but be sure to have roosts as least as high as you are tall for roosting at night. Some peafowl owners shut their birds in the pen every night, however they are happiest when roosting in tall trees, or on other high perches like water towers (or even balcony balustrades!!)

Think of your neighbours when contemplating peafowl, there needs to be enough space between your and your neighbours to allow for wandering, and a fair amount of seasonal noise.

## FOOD

Peafowl are best fed on turkey pellets, not chicken pellets. This is because chicken pellets typically do not contain sufficient levels of protein for larger birds.

In Australia turkey feed is known as turkey finisher and is relatively inexpensive when bought in bulk. Peachicks should be fed on turkey starter, also known as turkey crumbles. Boiled eggs (i.e. chicken eggs) can also be given to peachicks for extra protein.

Our peafowl are also fed black sunflower seeds (unshelled) which they love above all else. For this reason the seeds are given in the proportion 1:4 (seeds to pellets) because the peafowl pick out and eat all the seeds before eating the pellets and seeds alone are not nutritionally adequate. As with chickens, peafowl happily devour kitchen scraps from vegetables, fruit and bread. Celery leaves are a huge favourite, as are bananas. They are very clean eaters and will generally eat everything you put out for them, provided they like it.

In addition to what you feed them, peafowl will forage for plant matter, seeds, insects, spiders, small reptiles and amphibians.

## BEHAVIOUR

Indian Blues are the most commonly kept domestic peafowl because of their mild, timid nature. Green peafowl are less common because they tend to be too aggressive. Our peafowl will let people get relatively close to them but are not tame enough to be touched or petted. The only exception is when you have food in your hands, which they will happily take from your fingers if offered (and sometimes without being offered). They are quite pecky when they do this and so caution is advised if small children are feeding them, as it tends to scare or even hurt.

Peafowl are quite clever when it comes to recognising who



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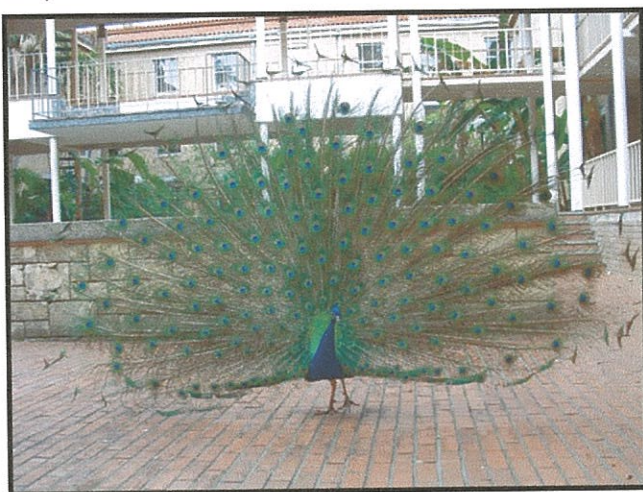
is their regular feeder and will come running *en masse* when the food appears! Peahens encourage their chicks to eat by making a soft “bup, bup, bup” noise which you can also use to tempt a bird to feed.

Keeping clean is important to peafowl and they like to take dust baths. Don't be surprised if you find a peafowl rolling in a shallow hole and kicking the dirt up onto its back. They also like to sun bathe, and will often lie in the sun with legs stretched out to the side for warmth.

If you are keeping a flock of peacocks, the ideal ratio of males to females is one to four. Flocks with more than one male will inevitably result in some fighting between males, but it is not usually very serious and the alpha male *may* tolerate the presence of younger males provided they understand their place in the pecking order. After fighting you may see blood on the feet of the protagonists, particularly around the spurs, but it doesn't usually require veterinary attention. We have three males at present and the oldest, alpha male tolerates the two youngsters. This may, however, just be a symptom of his advanced age - a younger alpha male keen on securing his “harem” of potential mates might not be so tolerant.

Henpecking can occur where the alpha male allows his hens to peck out the feathers in his crest, even to the point of bleeding. Who knows why!? Peafowl display a distinct pecking order when it comes to feeding and the bossier types will chase away the young, or rival males, when it comes to feeding time.

Peafowl are capable of a lot vocalising but tend to only do it for good reason. Typically those reasons are to raise the alarm when stressed, or during mating season. Fortunately they make no noise at night as they are generally fast asleep.



Male displaying his train

Displaying is the term used to describe the lifting up of the male's decorative feathers in a shimmery dance of courtship. Males also do this as an act of defense when they feel threatened. The beautiful eye feathers on a peacock are not part of his tail - they are his “train” - much like a bride has on her dress - and they come from the middle of his back. They are held up by long thick grey tail feathers and it takes a lot of effort to lift them up and make them quiver. Peahens and even peachicks also raise their tail feathers when threatened but do not have a train to put on display. The peacock sheds his train over a two week period at the end of every mating season and these highly prized feathers can be collected and kept.

## TEMPERAMENT

Indian Blues are generally very mild-mannered and a little timid with people. They stress very easily when noise, dogs, or unruly children prevail in their territory. A stressed peafowl will pant excessively with an open beak and heaving chest/throat. They are a very easy and pleasant bird to keep.

Regular offerings of food tidbits by hand may have something of a “taming” effect, with the birds taking food from your fingers or from close proximity to you, but otherwise they won't let you get too close.

## BREEDING

Our peafowl breed in the middle of Summer although the mating displays put on by the peacock start in Spring. Peahens show very little interest throughout the season except for a small window of opportunity for which the peacock always tries to be prepared! In the absence of an interested peahen the peacock will display to any bird he sees, including doves and crows, and the person who feeds him!

Peahens typically lay up to six eggs per year, and do this only once in the mating season, although they may lay an additional clutch if their eggs are removed from them. They sit for 28 days and will leave the nest once every day to strut around squawking to warn off predators, or occasionally eat. Many peahens lay a single decoy egg in an open place and abandon it. This is deliberate and not a cause for concern. Hens often nest together, always on the ground, but very often in hopelessly open, unsafe areas. A hen will persist in sitting on rotten or infertile eggs long past the 28 days if the eggs are not removed. The stress of having an egg removed brings on a lot of unhappy squawking, but will only last a few hours before she quiets down. If you find a decoy egg while it is still warm, you can place it near a nesting hen, who will adopt it.



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Peafowl flocks can become quite inbred if you do not introduce new blood. Consider making swaps with other peafowl enthusiasts.

## RAISING CHICKS

Chicks are born with quite well formed wings so that after a mere couple of days they can fly up about 30cm at a time. As soon as the chick is big enough to roost up on a perch the mother and chick will huddle together at night with the mother putting her wing around the chick. This persists until the chick is almost fully grown.



*Difference between a normal and white chick. The wings are clearly well-formed from a few days old.*

Crows are keen egg and chick snatchers and an eye should be kept on their presence. Ideally a mother with chicks should be kept in a pen until the chicks are too large to be killed by crows. Water dishes need to be shallow to prevent accidental drownings.

Full grown chicks of both genders are identical to their mothers until about six months old when the male's cream coloured chest feathers start to turn a blacky-blue colour. This is usually the only way to tell a male from a female chick. From this point on he will continue to turn blue but will keep his tiger-striped back and train feathers until about two years old when they start to turn green. At about three years he will begin to grow eye feathers but may take two winters to grow full length eye feathers. It is very difficult to determine the gender of white peafowl since this colour change does not occur. You may have to wait until three years old to see if the bird grows a train, in which case it is a male. The only other clue is the length of legs, and size of spur. Males have longer legs than females, and females don't grow large spurs.

Males and females are not sexually mature until at least two years old. Once a chick is fully grown it seems to continue to have a relatively close relationship with its mother.



*Two fully grown white peahens*



*Peahen roosting with her wing around her chick*

*The information presented in this guide is based on observations that have been collected from experience raising peafowl and is not intended as an "official" source of information.*