Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

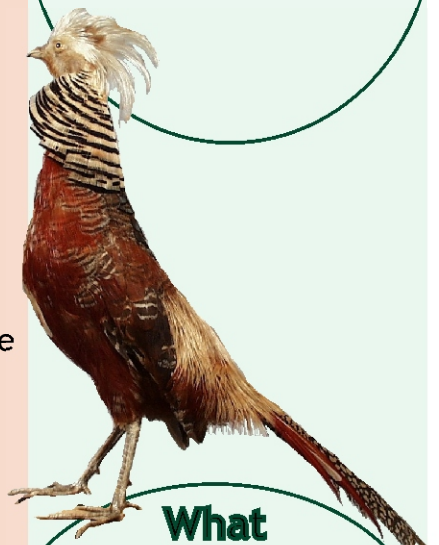
READING MUSEUM SERVICE

GOLDEN PHEASANT Z101
(Chrysolophus pictus)

Description

The golden pheasant was introduced into East Anglia (from western China) in 1845 and further introductions took place in Wales, Sussex and Scotland. Most of the current small population is to be found in East Anglia. Although an introduced bird, the golden pheasant was put on the official British list in 1971. The bird is very elusive and accurate population statistics are hard to obtain, but it is thought that the population is declining. The East Anglian, South Downs and Galloway populations were sustained by a regular release of captive stock until at least the 1960s, but this has since ceased.

What does it eat?
They tend to eat berries, grubs, seeds and other types of vegetation.



What does it sound like?
A loud 'chack chack'

The adult male is 90-105 cm in length, its tail accounting for two-thirds of the total length. It is unmistakable with its golden crest and rump and bright red body. Unfortunately, this example has lost a lot of its colouring, particularly the bright yellow crest and rump, but the photograph on page 2 gives an indication of its gorgeous appearance in life. The deep orange 'cape' is spread in courtship displays, appearing as an alternating black and orange fan that covers all of the face except its bright yellow iris, with a pinpoint black pupil. The female is much less showy, with dull mottled brown plumage similar to that of the female common pheasant.

Despite the male's showy appearance, these birds are very difficult to see in their natural habitat, which is dense, dark young conifer forests with sparse undergrowth. They are very shy and in the dappled conditions of the undergrowth the brilliant colours often appear as little more than an occasional tantalising flash. Consequently, little is known of their behaviour in the wild. Although the bird can fly they spend most of their time on the ground.

Reading Borough Council
Heritage Lottery Fund

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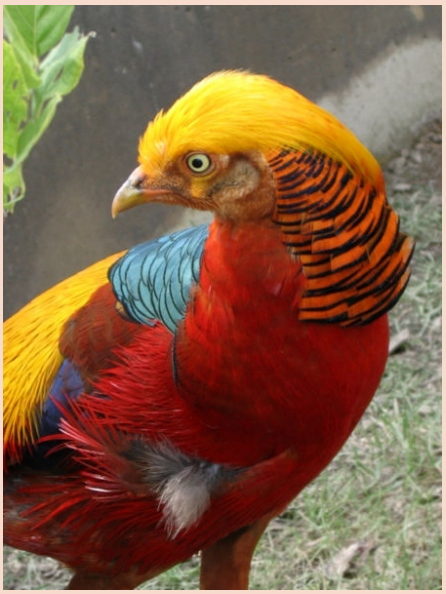
Vital Statistics
Eggs: 5-12
Incubation: 22-23 days
Fledging: Flies when small, after 12-14 days
Length: 60-115cm
Wingspan: 65-75cm
Weight: 550-710g
UK breeding population: 1,000-2,000 adults





UK Distribution

Breeding
They nest in dense plantations of Scots pine, larch and some other trees, with extensive ground cover, but little is known about the bird's breeding behaviour as it is so intensely secretive. One researcher discovered that when incubating (a period of about three weeks) the female never moves. The observer noted that spider webs, just 5cm from the female, remained intact throughout this time. The bird didn't even turn around on the nest, as this would have broken the webs. Radio tracking has also revealed that after the chicks leave the nest they are accompanied by the male pheasant, presumably while the female recovers from her marathon incubation.