

*All About ...*

*Ruffed  
Pheasants*



*Amherst's Pheasant*



*Golden Pheasant*

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**Golden pheasants**



**Lady Amherst’s pheasant**

All About ...

# *Ruffed Pheasants*



(CLICK Picture) Video courtesy Gorden Miller

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## Preface

I hope after you read this book, you will know more about the Lady Amherst's pheasant and Golden pheasant than before. Information is a valuable asset. If you learn **only one thing** from this book, the price is worth it! Knowledge about the Ruffed pheasants will not only make you appreciate them, but your understanding of all gamebirds will be increased.

I would like to thank the many people who helped produce this book. Mr. Jerry Harrell of Virginia Beach, Virginia and his company, Applecore Media, are partners in this project. Jerry loves gamebirds and this love shows in his work. I am very grateful for his help. If you need a Media Consultant who understands you can contact Jerry

at: [www.applecoremediagroup.com](http://www.applecoremediagroup.com) .

Also, my thanks go to the generous men who gave their permission to use their beautiful photographs.

Not only are the Ruffed pheasants among the smallest of all pheasants – they are perhaps the most popular pheasant in captivity because of their striking beauty and amusing personality. I would like to thank the Creator for giving us these beautiful and interesting pheasants to enjoy!

## Part I

### *The Ruffed Pheasant Family*

*(Pheasianidae)*

The pheasant family is not a native group to North America. Many feel that these gamebirds are more colorful than the gamebirds that are native to America. I agree that there is no other family of gamebirds that is so striking in appearance as the *Phasianidae* genus, especially the Ruffed pheasants.

All members of this genus (pheasants) share some common traits such as: 1) the hen always is the nest builder 2) she is also the setter and raises the family without the assistance of the male 3) she is always the more plain in coloration (Gerrits, 1974).

Most authorities confirm that there are forty-nine different species of pheasant. These birds can be split into two groups, those that live in high altitudes, and those that live in the low altitudes. It seems astonishing that some of

these live as high as 14,000 feet above sea level and some live at sea level.

Another interesting fact is that most, if not all domestic poultry are derived from the pheasant – the Red Junglefowl is said to be the parentage of these popular domestic fowls. Peafowl are classified as pheasants as well and are listed in the forty-nine separate species.

There is still much more to be learned about all of the pheasants in the wild and in captivity. It is reported that over one-third of the forty-nine pheasant species are officially listed as in danger of dying out in their original habitat. This adds much importance to the keeping of this family of birds in captivity so as not to lose them completely.

In general, pheasants are excellent aviary birds. They spend most of their time on the ground and thus they adapt well to large ground type pens. Their diets are easily adjusted to captivity as they are omnivorous with seeds, berries and the like forming most of their daily diet. They will also eat insects, mealworms, and another animal matter. Nothing is more thrilling than to see a "clipped or pinioned" Lady Amherst's pheasant or Golden pheasant loose in an uncovered pen. Every pheasant fancier should acquaint himself with the habits and nature of the species that he intends to work with as some of the species are quite different and must be handled accordingly.

## *Getting to Know the Ruffed Pheasants*

Lady Amherst's pheasants (*Chrysolophus amherstiae*) along with Golden pheasants (*Chrysolophus pictus*) are the

only two species in this pheasant family . This family of pheasants is so named because of the “ruff” around the heads of the males. The Ruffed pheasants are very closely related and cross breed very easily with the young being fertile. As a result, it seems that there are very few birds now in captivity that are of the true “wild” type birds. The hybrids do not appear to be nearly as beautiful as the wild-type birds. No one has developed a very pretty cross-bred bird. Minor changes in the birds in captivity have occurred through the years as a result of breeders not breeding true “wild” type birds.

The experienced breeder can look closely at a Lady Amherst’s and tell if it has been crossed with the Golden pheasant. This takes a trained eye, but if you work with these birds you will soon be able to see the subtle changes.

Since Ruffed pheasants have rather long tails, it is best that they are kept in large ground pens to keep their feathers in good condition. I do know of a breeder that keeps his birds in large wire bottomed pens because of the wet climate, but this is unusual.

Ornamental pheasants can offer the aviculturist many hours of enjoyment. They are very tame and make friends with their keeper. I have had them jump up on my hand for a peanut treat that delighted me to no end. When kept in large pens they keep their feathers in excellent shape.

There are many “fun” things about raising Ruffed pheasants. I really do enjoy their strong personality which includes a very gentle and tame disposition. To take complete advantage of this, the breeder needs to learn to think like a bird. This is not as hard as it might seem! I

talk about this later in this book, but here I would like to emphasize that time needs to be spent with the birds in order to get to know them. I have a chair or bench handy so each evening or early morning, I can sit and watch.

Some gamebird breeders have a different approach to this than I have. They seem to think it is not good to give treats that will dilute the good ration they are getting from the commercial gamebird feed. Really, I agree with this concept. I do not feed enough “treats” to cause any unbalance of nutrition. I feed just enough to accomplish the benefit of feeding the treats.

Here is what I do with my treats feeding program. I toss a handful of wild bird seed or hen scratch to the birds and just watch them eagerly eat it. They will chatter and call everyone to the treat table. After doing this for a week or so, the birds will come over to the edge of the pen to be first in line to get their treats. They will get tamer and tamer with this procedure. They will associate this with you and will gradually become your friend. By the way, never give more treats than they will clean up in a few minutes. Keep them wanting more treats.

The next step in the program is to go inside the pen with the birds and sit down. Move very slowly while you are in the pen so you will not startle the birds. It is a good idea to get in the habit to do everything around your birds in slow motion. They will not be startled and be in general happier. Just remain still and quiet for a few minutes. Then toss out a small amount of grain and see if they will go for it. If they do, it is a good sign. Gradually, toss the grain closer and closer to yourself until finally after a few weeks you will have them coming right under you for the



treats. Soon, the birds will be running along the front of the pen trying to get to you for their daily treat.

Mealworms make an excellent treat. They are easy to raise and have a high amount of protein. All gamebirds need lots of protein (except waterfowl) and mealworms are a good source for adding more protein to the diet. I give detailed information on how to successfully raise them in my book, *Upland Game Birds, Their Breeding and Care on pages 323-326*. We have had a culture of mealworms going now for nearly 15 years. They are very interesting to raise.

Now, while the above is really lots of fun and give satisfaction to the breeder and to the birds, the real benefit is it gives you the opportunity to observe the birds. Look, for feathers out of place (indicating fighting), drainage from the nostrils, eyes that are tearing (indicates upper respiratory problems), injury to the feet or legs (indicates flying up hitting top of pen—check for night visitors), and droppings stuck to the vent (indicating digestive troubles). All of these signs indicate that there may be a problem. If found early, it is much easier to treat the problem and save the bird.