

# Peacock Information Sheet

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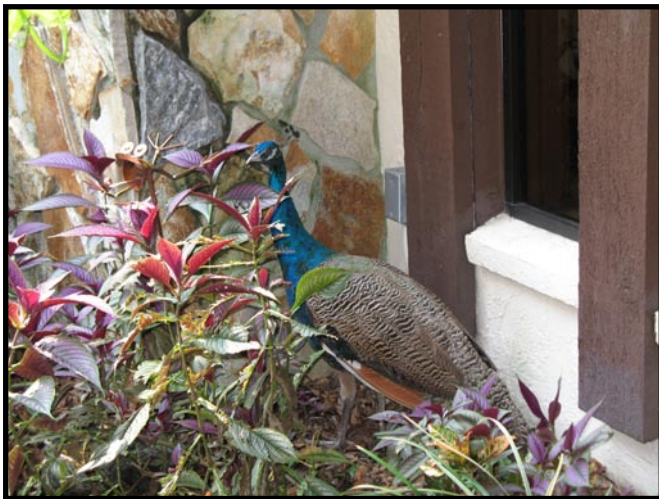


## SPECIES

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 PEAFAWL

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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FACULTY OF  
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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.

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.



*Male displaying his train*



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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.*