



Red Jungle Fowl

Red jungle fowl is one of the four jungle fowls found in the Indian subcontinent belonging to genus Gallus, the other three being Sri Lanka Jungle Fowl (*Gallus lafayeti*), Grey Jungle Fowl (*Gallus sonnevatii*) and Green Jungle Fowl (*Gallus varius*). It is believed to be the direct ancestor of all domestic chickens and is an attractive game bird, with a long history of association with humans.

The red jungle fowl is a rare case in which the domestication of a species has not resulted in the extinction of its wild ancestor. The birds were originally kept for sport, cockfighting being a favourite pastime of ancient civilizations.

They are omnivorous and feed on insects, seeds and fruits. Flight in these birds is almost purely confined to reaching their roosting areas at sunset in trees or any other high ground and for escape from immediate



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danger through the day. They prefer open woodland and scrub areas, grasslands, plantations and agriculture areas. In U.P. the Red Jungle Fowl is a common forest bird. It has been included in the Schedule IV of the Wild Life Protection Act 1972.

Morphology

In the wild there is lot of variation, which is conspicuous in colour, length, and shape of male hackles during the breeding season. The males and females show very strong sexual dimorphism. The male is 65-75 cm while female is 42-46 cm in height. The male bird is black below and orange red above. The neck and the rump is covered by long yellowish colored feathers called Hackles which fall off

during the molting phase. The tail is laterally compressed and black (glossy deep green) in colour. The cock has a comb and earlobes in addition to wattles. The female is brown above and pale reddish brown below. The neck is covered with short hackles, streaked in black and gold. The adult males weigh 700-1100 g while the females weigh 500-750g. The wing and tail lengths of male are approximately 210-250 mm and 300-380 mm while the values for females are 180-200 and 145-165 mm respectively.

The polygamous males are highly aggressive and show territorial behavior which he shares with 3-5 hens. The territory usually extends to 60-70 feet.

The clutch size 4-6 eggs with an incubation period of 19-21 days. The female will care for young upto 85 days until the young form their own social group. Red jungle fowl is a shy bird that spook easily and when alarmed runs for the forest cover with neck stretched out and tail depressed or will flush into a low flight. The nests are well hidden and protected. Egg weight ranges from 24 to 30g with an average of 26.81g. Egg colour ranges from the shades of pink to creamy white. Average body weight of day old chick is 16.34g.

Morphological differences with the domestic chicken

The red jungle fowl molt into a plumage called eclipse plumage. The major difference is in the absence of eclipse plumage in domestic chicken or crosses of domestic chicken and red jungle fowl. It is visible in male's hackles during the month of June through September; the females also grow parallel plumage, but are not distinguishable. The red jungle fowl possesses slender and dusky blackish legs while the legs of domestic chicken are thick and yellow in colour. The red jungle fowl females lack combs almost completely while the domestic stocks shows the presence of prominent combs and wattles on the head. The spur is long and pointed in red jungle fowl compared to domestic stock and shows the aggressive behavior of the birds. The red jungle fowl has a typical characteristic that it carries its tail horizontally. Both male and female have a proportionately longer beak compared to domestic stock giving them a distinct game like appearance.

Association with humans is the greatest threat to this handsome bird-because of hybridization and domestication.

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