

TRAGOPANS



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What are Tragopans ?

Tragopans are pheasant-like birds from Southeast Asia and the Himalaya region. Tragopans in the wild have an endangered status and some become very rare. A variety of Tragopans are kept and bred with success in captivity. These however have a protected status and are covered under the CITES Flora and Fauna regulation Art.13. Fanciers and breeders are member of the Aviornis society, a

club especially for ornamental birds. They publish a bi-monthly full-colour magazine (see www.aviornis.nl).

This magazine is filled with excellent stories and articles about keeping and breeding of ornamental fowl. Compared to chicken and pigeons, ornamental birds are not exhibited in large numbers. Members however visit each other at home to admire these birds in their own protected environment.

Experiences and hints are exchanged to maximize the pleasure of keeping and breeding these birds. Networking with fellow-



breeders abroad is important (for example by using the Internet).

Right: A picture of me and a Cabot-Tragopan cock which was responsible for natural-bred offspring.

A fascinating hobby

Tragopans are monogamous and are kept as pairs. Much space is not necessary but 15 sq.meters is the minimum space to accommodate them. Every day I make my round to observe my birds if they feed well, if their droppings are OK and if their general condition is OK. As a breeder you need to learn fast to keep your birds healthy and to get in action if required.



The direct contacts with my birds are some sort of therapy. I feel relaxed and happy knowing that these birds give me great satisfaction. The spring season (March – April) is the highlight of the hobby. This is the time for courtship and mating. You can see some spectacular behaviour in your own garden.

See movies;

<http://www.tragopan.nl/Cabotmovie.wmv>

<http://www.tragopan.nl/temminckmovie.wmv>



Left: A young Cabot-tragopan eating some greens out of my hand. They can become very tame.

Right: Young chick

After courtship and mating the eggs are laid and this is a very special and tensed period for the breeder. Eggs being incubated by the birds themselves are preferred but using an incubator is a solution too.

Natural incubation is very fascinating and especially if you see the young chicks running around with their parents.





In the wild, Tragopans occupy deserted crow-nests to lay their eggs. These nests are most of the time positioned in very high trees. This is a safe heaven for them. The wings of a very young chick (hatched from the egg) already have the size of a human hand.

This enables them to fly and land safely after leaving the nest. After all chicks are hatched the hen leaves the nest too. Hens in captivity will return to their nest for some nights but will soon take place on the roost with her chicks resting under her body. A safe and warm place.

On the pictures you clearly can see the long feathers of the wing !

Above: straight from the egg (1 hour old)

Right: 1 hour old

Below: 5 hours old

After about 4 months the young birds become independent. The hen will leave them alone most of the time. If not enough space is

provided a chance exists that the old cock will fight off his own offspring.

But if lucky the cock will walk them as a big happy family. This however ends

when mating time comes up again. The older birds will occupy their courtship territory known as "river". Young birds are not welcome during this ritual and must go. This is the time to separate the young birds from their parents. You can keep them on their own without any problem and after 2 years the birds are ready for breeding.



Accommodation

Pens for Tragopans are relative easy to construct. A heated pen is not necessary. Very important is the size of the accommodation (7 meters long – 2 meters wide – 2 meters high). Plants are very important. Your best choice is shrubs. The surface of the pen should have good drainage and a layer of 20 Cms of (river)sand is recommended. It is not necessary to construct a fully covered night-accommodation. Place the entrance of this accommodation in a south-east direction to keep the rain outside. Place the roost on a height of about 120 Cms. Wired mesh is OK for the pens but I prefer nets myself. This allows a better view and the birds cannot damage themselves. To prevent any fights between the birds boards of about 60 Cms are placed between every pen. A piece of board placed at an angle is useful for the hen to protect itself from an over-active cock during the courtship period. I try to clean the pens about 2 times a week and remove the droppings with a fine garden-rake.

A sieve-spade is useful too to separate the droppings from the sand.

Pictures: a view in my aviaries



A lawn in a pen less then 20 sq.meters is very difficult to maintain. I prefer sand as a lawn is very difficult to clean. Sand is a much better choice. A clean pen is also a must to prevent worm and cocci-diosis infections. The absence of grass is compensated by giving them enough greens. Fresh air, sufficient light, dry pens and a clean environment are the basic rules for a successful keep of Tragopans. On my website you will find examples of my pens along with clear instructions about the construction of pens and a collection of plants.



Feeding Tragopans

Tragopans are pheasant-like birds and concerning feeding a lot has been written already. Most Tragopan-fanciers already have noticed that the results are unsatisfactory and disappointing when their birds are fed with a regular chicken feed mix. This can even result in problems. Tragopans are similar to pheasants as they have virtually the same diet. Tragopans like pheasants don't do well on wheat and barley as they cannot digest the so-called short carbon hydrates. They have no problem with the starch-carbon hydrates from maize. Some people however have a different opinion on this subject. If the diet of a Tragopan contains sufficient fibres, maize will cause no problems at all.



Picture above: A Satyr-hen incubating her own eggs in a basket.

Left: The eggs



Tragopans are not kept in large numbers and therefore no special Tragopan-feed has been developed. A Tragopan-feed mix compared to a regular feed mix for ornamental fowl should contain more protein and fibres. Tragopans can live on a very scarce diet. A high-quality feed mix for ornamental fowl should do the job if fed to Tragopans. Some extra animal-based protein (available in various forms) would give good results if fed to the young chicks. Due to the BSE regulations producers of animal feed are not allowed to add animal-protein to their products. There are some producers who add some extra protein to their products. These are made from vegetable sources or milk. These feed mix products can give good results as they resemble a natural diet. In their natural environment Tragopans eat grains and seeds but also greens and fruits. Fruits are necessary as they regulate the acid level in the digestion system.

A well-balanced feed mix will generate a proper acid level within the intestines and the stomach. This without the addition of fruits.

Grain mixtures may only be used as an additional feed source, 25% is the maximum. Feeding a grain mixture is not advised during the mating and incubation periods. If you choose to use a grain mixture try to get one without any sharp-pointed grains like buckwheat and barley. To enable maximum feed efficiency you must supply sufficient grit. A regular grit mixture used for poultry will do.



Satyr hen with a young chick.

Taking care all year round

It is OK if Tragopans use the last grains and seeds during the autumn season and that they enter wintertime in a very good condition. Fat into the winter but lean when wintertime is over. Don't give the birds too much in wintertime (do this only after a completed moult). In their natural environment wintertime is a period where food is scarce. This period of the year food is scarce too. Better lean than fat. The birds should be lean if they go into springtime. Only lean males will fertilize well and females be fertilized successfully. This has also a positive effect on the egg-production and continuity. If you use a good feed mix you don't need to switch to a special feed mix. Grit can be added to the diet. The quality of the eggs is of major importance to the vitality of the young-born chicks in their first days after hatching. You can feed your chicks with a regular feed mix. But many breeders have experienced a faster growth and development using a rich feed mix. It is recommended to feed the chicks some extra animal protein during the first 6 weeks of their life.

Feeding my birds means that all feed-containers are filled to the top. I use feed-distributors with a capacity of 3 Kg which I have constructed myself. An average Tragopan-pair will do about two weeks with one filling (for examples of my feed-

containers please visit my website). Fresh drinking water is of main importance. Sufficient food and fresh water are essential. Beside this my Tragopans are frequently fed with vegetables, fruit, grass and weeds. Universal feed is a good addition and can be used to administer some medication (for example a worm remedy), or extra vitamins. If necessary I administer my birds some Gistocal, a multi-vitamin and mineral product which is also used for cats and dogs. During winter I experiment a bit with grinded Lucerne pellets. These are pressed and made from fresh cutted lucerne and serve as an additional source of greens, as during winter no fresh grass is available.

Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan Satyra* (see pictures on the right)

Origin : Himalaya mountains

It's a sturdy bird, high stationed with an erect stand. The upper head of the cock is black with a red band on both sides of the tuft. The upper side of the back and upper part of the front are deep red, the rest is red with black and white spots. These become bigger in direction of its belly. The downside feathers of the tail are red with white, a brown lacing and black on the edges of the feather. Back, tail and wings are brown and covered with small black, red , olive-green and white spots. The eye is brown, the beak black, the skin-flap is blue, and the edge blue-green, the naked throat is dark-blue. The fleshy horns on its head are blue, the legs pink. Length 70 Cms. The hen is reddish-brown, with pale yellow and black markings. The tail is brown with irregular black and cream markings, the chin and throat are yellowish-brown with some black markings. The bottom-side of the tail has a lighter colour, the belly dirty-white, the legs are grey-brown. Length 57 Cms.



In the first year young cockerels can be recognized by some red feathering on the neck and breast and they also show a black head. They are higher stationed then the young pullets.





Left: A Satyr male showing off

This breed is easy to keep in a fair sized pen with a surface of about 15 sq.meters. A half-open shelter is enough. The pen should be planted with sturdy shrubs because these birds like to climb on the branches. The surface of the pen must be dry as these birds cannot stand wet conditions. Their roost must be placed at a fair height and must be covered by a top-cover to protect them from storm and rain. The hen lays her eggs in a basket, which is also placed on a fair height. Eggs are laid every day. Every season

about 3 to 4 batches of about 4 eggs can be expected if you take away the eggs directly. The last batch can be used for incubation. Natural incubation is beautiful and nice to watch. The incubation time is 28 days. Satyr Tragopans become very tame and attached.

Temminck Tragopan *Tragopan Temmincki*

Origin : Himalaya mountains (the East) and North-west China

Left: Temminck Tragopan male.



Right: When the males display their courtship the dewlap gets blown up.

One of the most reputed and attractive Tragopan breeds are the Temminck-Tragopans. This bird has a black fore-head, tuft, neck-ring and edge of the dewlap. The rest of the head and neck is (red brick) orange. The face is blue as well as the dewlap which also shows some a light-blue colour, red spots and markings. The horns are blue. The ground-colour is brown-red, the upside covered with black-laced greyish spots. The bottom-side has teardrop-shaped dots and grey feather tips. The legs are pink. The length 64 Cms. The hen is reddish-greyish brown with a lot of arrow-shaped spots which are black-yellow and grey-coloured. The throat is white-coloured with black spots. The bottom-side is light-brown with large dirty-white specks and black spots. The skin is blue.



Left: Temminck hen with young chick

Of all Tragopan breeds, the Temminck variety is the best one to keep in a pen. Therefore the Temminck Tragopan is represented in most Tragopan collections.

The Chinese keep these birds already for a very long time as they believe the bird is a bringer of luck. This because of the marking on the bird's neck resembles a Chinese language character meaning "long life". The hen lays about 4 to 6 eggs. Incubation time is 28 days. The basket where they lay their eggs in should be covered with a layer of straw. Sometimes the hen

gets molested by the cock. But normally male and female should live together without any problems. To enable the hen to take cover in the breeding season, some sort of shelter should be provided to protect her from a possible attack of the cock. These birds stay outside in the pen all year round. They only take a dust-bad (which they really need) under a top-cover. Temminck Tragopans can get amazingly tame.

Cabots Tragopan *Tragopan Caboti*

Origin: South-east China (in the Fokien and Kwangtoeng mountain range).



Above: Cabot Tragopan, male and female

The cock has a black fore-head and tuft, black ears and a ring over the neck and breast. The face is yellowish-orange, the dewlap is yellow with a cobalt-blue edge and purple spots, the side of the neck is reddish-orange, and the ground colour of the body is pale with brown-yellowish black-edged spots. The wings and tail are covered with brown and light-yellowish brown spots. The tail-feathers have black tips. The eye is brown, the horns blue, and the legs pink-greyish white. Length 61 Cms. The upper part of the hen's body is covered with black and brown-red spots and triangle-shaped whitish markings. The bottom-side is grey-brown with large whitish spots. The skin around the eye is orange. They live in the trees and like to climb and clamber through the branches of the shrubs planted in the pen. In the wild they feed on fruits, buds, insects and seeds.

These birds however do very well on the range of excellent feed mixes available for pheasants.



Cabot Tragopans have been imported the first time in London and Berlin in 1882. They got popular very quickly. But after the First World War (1918) the breed almost disappeared completely.

A number of breeders used all their knowledge and skills to get this breed back on the map. This with help of breeding stock from Chinese imports. It's still a long way to go but using artificial insemination good results were booked and new bloodlines have been started. Also natural breeding has been successful resulting in new offspring.

These birds can only show their potential in a large spacious pen. The incubation time is 29 days. The chicks must be kept warm and in the first months, the temperature should be a constant 30 degrees Celsius. The young chicks are fed with pheasant starter and lots of fine-cutted greens. Grains are only fed after 2 months. Cabot Tragopans lack colour but their tameness and affection really compensates this.

Warning

I must warn anyone who wants to start Tragopan breeding. Think of the future and breed only with the most pure specimens of these beautiful birds. It's getting more and more difficult to import birds from their original habitats. This actually is a good thing but this also means that we really must take care of the birds we have. Nevertheless I noticed that many pens are disfigured by crossbred birds. These are a threat to the population of purebred birds. Some breeders breed these crossbred birds on purpose.....but in most cases breeders are unaware of breeding them !



Left: Crossbred Satyr Tragopan

A novice will have some problems in identifying birds. And this is the danger drops in. Breeding crossbred birds will be the result. To reverse this process – in principle an impossible task - fresh birds must be imported from their original habitats. But we better let them stay were they are. And be very selective and careful with the birds we have. Therefore it is of utmost

importance to know if the birds you want to breed from are meeting -natural purity- criteria.

Right: Temminck Tragopan crosses

It's not that easy to check this using the standard of perfections, as there are sub-species, lighter and darker-coloured specimens. These are all features making it very difficult to get a positive identification. Get some information first or make some pictures which can help to identify them. On my website you can read some information in the chapter -education-. You are very welcome with your questions or remarks. We promise you that you will get a satisfactory answer.



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