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Review of The Pheasants of the World

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The Pheasants of the World.—Jean Delacour. 1977. second ed. Hindhead, England, Spur Publications. 395 pp., 17 color plates, 16 black and white plates, 20 maps. 18£ (about \$35.00).—This book, one of Delacour's three major monographs on avian families (the others being the Anatidae and, with Dean Amadon, The Cracidae), was originally published in 1951 but went out of print in the late 1960s, when it quickly became a collector's item. At the request of the World Pheasant Association, an avicultural organization concerned with galliform conservation, Delacour undertook a revision of the book, and a new colored plate has been prepared by R. David Digby. That Delacour, now in his late 80's, should undertake such a project at all is a testimony to the amazing vigor and enthusiasm of this remarkable man. (He has just completed translation of the book into French!)

Inasmuch as the earlier edition was never reviewed by *The Auk*, it is appropriate to discuss the general organization of the work in addition to mentioning the major changes brought about by the new edition.

Prior to the major body of the book, dealing with individual species, a "general account" of the Phasianidae is presented, about 90% of which relates to avicultural concerns. Those parts dealing with systematics and "life habits" are brief at best, in spite of the fact that Delacour is an astute taxonomist. His classification differs from that of Peters primarily in providing a somewhat greater lumping of genera, but regrettably he does not deal with the interesting question of how the Phasianidae may be related to the typical partridges on the one hand, or to the grouse on the other. Although the significance of hybridization and cytological studies to taxonomy is mentioned in passing, none of the more recent studies (Sandnes, Knoder) in this area is specifically cited, nor is the taxonomic importance of behavioral studies such as those of Schenkel mentioned. The avicultural portion of the general account is much more complete, and in the new edition there are discussions of feeding methods, aviary design, disease control, and incubation that are of value to aviculturalists.

As to the organization of the taxonomic accounts, a standardized format is followed. Following a generic diagnosis, a key to the species and subspecies is provided and a section on "general habits and captivity" follows. Next, a description of each form is provided, including plumages of both sexes, immatures, and downy young, as well as of eggs and their incubation periods. The associated distribution maps are probably as good as any that are available for the birds of eastern and southeastern Asia, but that of *Phasianus colchicus* ignores all of the areas of the world where it has been introduced successfully. Only half of J. C. Harrison's paintings of the adults and downy young have been reproduced in color; two of the plates that would have been especially desirable to have available in color are those of the downy plumages. Harrison's paintings are generally attractive and are well reproduced; in my copies the plates in the new edition are if anything slightly brighter than those in my copy (4th printing) of the original edition. Probably the most interesting plate of all is the new painting by R. David Digby; his impression of a male Blood Pheasant (*Ithaginus cruentus*) on a lichen-covered rocky slope in the Himalayas not only portrays the bleakness of the environment and the probable protective coloration adaptations of the plumage, but also strongly shows the partridge-like features of this interesting genus. In an interesting addendum to the account on the blood pheasants, Delacour quotes Iain Grahame's recent observations on the species in the wild and in captivity, which support the view that a partridge-like covey life and relatively monogamous pair-bonding may be the blood pheasant's normal social system. Excepting the monogamous eared pheasants, the typical reproductive strategy of the pheasants is that of polygyny or promiscuity, which is of course a key to an understanding of the biological and taxonomic significance of sexual dimorphism in the group.

Complementary notes added to the text provide additional avicultural information on such species as the Bulwer's Pheasant, Rothschild's and Bornean Peacock Pheasants, and the Congo Peacock, and an initial description of the female of *Tragopan blythi molesworthi*. There is also a description of a new subspecies of *Lophura nycthemera*, which was collected in Szechwan in 1932, but not described until 1962.

Apart from aviculturalists, the book should have a high degree of appeal to curators of zoos, and the average ornithologist will find the plates a convenient method of learning to recognize the often similar-appearing species of pheasants. The taxonomic arrangement is no doubt as good as or better than that of any earlier systems, although the only evolutionary "tree" presented is one for the species and subspecies of *Phasianus*. Game managers will probably find little information of direct value to them relative to Ring-necked Pheasants or other potential exotic introductions.

There are slightly over 100 references cited at the end of the text, in addition to numerous in-text references, but only two of the former are more recent than 1949. This fact provides some insight into the Delacourian approach to avian monographs, which is to be in total command of the taxonomic and avicultural literature of the early 1900s, during the golden years of exploration and expeditions in search of rare pheasants, but to pay little attention to more recent studies in evolutionary biology, ethology, and

ecology. It would be unkind and grossly unfair to seriously criticize the book on that account; Delacour is a giant among living ornithologists, and perhaps more than any other person has been responsible for forcing the rest of us to look at such families as the Anatidae and Phasianidae on a world-wide basis, rather than be content to have our own vision limited by regional or political boundaries. Books such as this set the stage and lay the groundwork for other studies; the maps provide many opportunities to estimate areas of sympatry or infer distributional origins, the data on clutch-sizes and incubation periods offer clear invitations for ecological analyses, and the color plates of the incredible male plumages of pheasants excite the limbic system of any ethologist with an iota of enthusiasm for possible research topics.

In view of the fact that about a third of the world's pheasants are now considered endangered, and their habitats in Asia are deteriorating at an alarming rate, the updated publication of this book should go a long way toward aiding with conservation efforts and encouraging the captive propagation of the rarer species. With that in mind, the strong avicultural flavor of the monograph may be one of its strong points rather than a liability. Whether anyone with the richness of Delacour's background may ever undertake a modern monograph on the pheasants and their relatives remains to be seen, but until such time arrives the present work will certainly be the primary reference for the group. We can do no less than enthusiastically applaud Jean Delacour for his willingness to share his knowledge of and concern for pheasants by providing ornithologists with this book.—PAUL A. JOHNSGARD.