

My Experiences with the Mountain Bamboo Partridge

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During the past four years, I have had the pleasure of working with a wonderful little species of birds at Bill and Edna Goldstone's. This species was originally imported into Canada by Bill Goldstone, who purchased the birds from the San Diego Zoo. He underwent an extensive period of evaluation of his eligibility to receive the birds, and it all paid off. He was originally sent six pairs from the zoo. All were progeny off of their two parent breeder pairs, and all were in excellent condition.



The birds were received in February of 2001, on the same day that Seattle experienced a fairly large earthquake, and trapped the birds en route to Vancouver in the Sea-Tac airport. The airline that was responsible for the transfer of birds to a Vancouver flight was unable to locate the birds, and a large search began. It was soon found that the birds were left on a loading ramp in the cargo area of the airport. Unfortunately though, they had missed all the afternoon flights to Vancouver, and were delayed until the next morning.

The five pairs he began to breed with proved to be extremely difficult in the first year. They were all placed in well-landscaped, sand-based pens. These pens were eight feet wide by sixteen feet long, and eight feet tall. All contained at least two perches, at varying heights to allow females to escape from any possibly aggressive males. Each pen contained pieces of driftwood, rocks, and small shrubs for cover. When breeding season neared, old Christmas trees were placed in the pens to provide additional protection.

The venture was somewhat a blind one, as there is an extremely small amount of information on this species, the major source was a small description in Delacour's "*Partridges, Quails, and Francolins of the World*". Which consisted of our only available picture, and a very small physical description. Evidently, there was no behavioral or reproductive information available either as the species has only been kept in the San Diego Zoo in North America, and in certain European collections. Our main source of information was David Rimlinger from the San Diego Zoo, who provided a great amount of detail on diet and some reproductive information. The Zoo had great success in reproducing young from their breeders.

The mountain bamboo partridge is a member of the bamboo partridge species, along with the more common Chinese bamboo partridge. The mountain species is slightly larger than the Chinese, which was previously kept in the same collection. The mountain species is also much more sexually monomorphic than their relatives. They are generally brown-grey. The feathers down the back and saddle are basically grey, with brown shafting to a black spot with white tipping. The tail is brown with some faded lighter brown barring. Breast and underside feathers are white, with black shafting that leads to a black tip, making the entire breast appear white with black spots. Hackle and neck feathers are short, brown feathers, fringed with a light-brown-yellow color. Throat and cheek feathers are light yellow, this yellow is also present above the eye, between the eye-band and the cap. The cap on both sexes is a darker brown color, and the eye band is the major phenotypic source of discrepancy between sexes, in the male, it is dark black, in the female it is light brown. The beak



is black, and the legs and toes are blue-grey. Shanks are not visible because of heavy chest feathers. There is also no apparent ear-lobe, it is present in the eye-patch. Both sexes eyes are brown. Primary and secondary flight feathers are brown, with no barring or other marks.

Another difference in sexes arises in the average size of the birds. Males appear to stand about a half-inch taller than females when relaxed. Spurs are also present on the male, and not usually on the female. We did however have one young bird with spurs that laid eggs, just ensuring its gender to its keepers.

The birds are kept in a fairly mild climate, in a region of fairly high rainfall in the spring and fall, with fairly dry summers and winters, which also have little snowfall. They stay outside all year, without any problems. Last year, winter temperatures dropped to a low of -13°C for two days, and the birds faired well. They are rare however, and chancing the low winter temperatures is probably not the best idea. They do take the summer heat well. In extreme heat, a sprinkler system, which is simply a garden watering hose strung across the roof of the pens is used to cool the ground in the pens, and to water the plants below.

Birds begin breeding in mid-April of each year. Females will lay a clutch of about six to eight eggs at intervals of about two days per egg. They usually break for about a week between clutches. When incubators are used, eggs are obtained up to mid-July. Eggs hatch in about twenty-two days. We are unsure as to why, but fertility has been extremely unpredictable, even though there is a constant feed and similar environment each year. Only two young were raised in the first year, as apparently the fertility was very low in the young males. Fewer eggs were also attained that year. The number of young reared did increase as the birds ages, but we also observed a higher mortality in females of over three reproductive seasons.



They seem to become extremely susceptible to egg-binding at this point. Another source of loss in the breeders, which was unpredictable, extreme aggression in males, which was particularly damaging this past year, when older males caused a lot of damage to many females.

Young are reared in rectangular brooders that are eighteen inches wide, by thirty inches long, and thirty inches tall. They are bottomed by plastic wire and walled by plywood and wire on the top. Young are reared under infra-red heat bulbs, which are raised as the birds age. At about four weeks, birds are let into outdoor runs to acclimatize to the outdoor environment. Young are reared on a higher protein turkey grower produced at the local feed mill. Breeders are fed turkey grower also, but a lower protein, and a half-mix of bird seed. They are also fed apple when they will eat it and sporadically fresh, unsalted peanuts.

The mountain bamboo partridge is a wonderful little species of bird, they become very tame, and are not aggressive towards their keeper, but have a very shrill, loud call. Often, the entire flock will initiate calling, which can be deafening to the nearby keeper. The call is very unique, as are the birds. They are a pleasant, friendly species to raise and keep, but not a bird for the beginner, more for an aviculturist with some galliforme experience.