

**INDIAN PEAFOWL: ENVIRONMENT**

NEWS: Study reveals exponential rise in peafowl population in Tamil Nadu

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Recent research by SACON reveals a significant increase in Tamil Nadu's peafowl population, causing crop damage and raising conservation concerns. The peafowl, now widespread across India, is protected under Schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act.

Indian Peafowl:

- **National Bird of India:** The Indian Peafowl (Peafowl) is India's national bird, symbolizing beauty and grace.
- **Population Growth:** The species has seen a rapid increase in population, expanding into previously uninhabited regions.
- **Recent Range Expansion:** Over the past 20 years, the peafowl has moved into areas like the high Himalayas and the Western Ghats rainforests.
- **State Expansion:** Peafowls are now present in all districts of Kerala, a state where they were once rare.
- **Habitat Adaptation:** While traditionally found in scrub forests and dry areas, peafowls have adapted to urban and semi-urban environments.
- **Crop Damage:** Increased peafowl populations have led to significant crop damage, with sorghum, vegetables, paddy, and flowers being particularly vulnerable.
- **Causes of Mortality:** Common causes of death include pesticide poisoning, electrocution, and vehicular accidents.
- **Legal Protection:** The species is listed under Schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act, 2022, granting it the highest level of protection.
- **Diet and Ecological Impact:** Peafowls consume seeds and snakes, and their population surge may disrupt local ecosystems.
- **Predator Decline:** The decline of natural predators such as jackals and jungle cats has contributed to the peafowl population growth.
- **Cultural and Religious Significance:** In Hindu mythology, the peafowl is the vehicle of Lord Muruga, giving it cultural and religious importance.
- **Recent Data Trends:** According to the Nature Conservation Foundation, peafowl sightings in Tamil Nadu have increased six-fold in 20 years, and sightings across India have doubled in the same period.

Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON):

- **Establishment:** SACON was established in 1990 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.
- **Namesake:** It is named after Dr. Salim Ali, the "Birdman of India."
- **Focus Areas:** SACON specializes in ornithology, biodiversity conservation, and human-wildlife conflict mitigation.
- **Affiliation:** It operates under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India.
- **Key Activities:** SACON conducts research on bird ecology, wetland conservation, and monitoring avian diversity and habitats.
- **Publications and Policy:** It publishes scientific papers, research reports, and policy recommendations on avian and ecological conservation.

Indian peafowl

(Pavo cristatus)

Largest peafowl and India's national bird; males have exquisite plumage



GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE Indian subcontinent

HABITAT Forests and shrublands

Neck and chest are iridescent blue

Long, strong, greyish-brown legs equipped for running

"mayyow"

Iridescent green neck

Brown plumage

Both males and females have crest feathers

- Long train of 150-175 feathers, each ~1.2 m long
- Metallic green feathers with iridescent ocelli (eyespot) ringed with blue and bronze
- Males shed feathers after every mating season

AKA
Common peafowl, blue peafowl, peacock (though used for both sexes, technically refers to males; females are peahens)

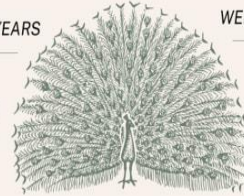
THREATS: • Predation • Poaching • Diseases
• Electrocutation from flying into power lines
• Pesticide poisoning • Destruction of their natural habitat

FAMILY: PHASIANIDAE

LIFESPAN: ~20 YEARS

WEIGHT: 2.7-6 KG

WINGSPAN: 140 - 160 CM



LENGTH: ~213 CM (MALES); ~121 (FEMALES)

BREEDING

- Reach sexual maturity at three years, and males develop trains
- Breed between Apr-Sep (monsoon)
- Chicks have feathers and are mobile, and capable of flying in about a week
- Male and female chicks are identical for six months, after that, males start changing colour

COURTSHIP

- Males spread out train when courting females
- Train rattling – vibrate tail feathers at the end of the courtship display
- Females use crest feathers to sense vibrations from courting males

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern on the IUCN Red List

EAT Insects, worms, lizards, frogs, snakes, and termites. Also, flower buds and petals, grain, grass, and bamboo shoots

CALLS Emit various alarm and territorial calls. Distinct incessant screams of "may-yow" heard in the monsoon



ILLUSTRATION: RAJIVKEL.COM MALE; NIKOLAYENKO YEKATERINA/SHUTTERSTOCK (FEMALE); TEXT: ANURAG NAIR; DESIGN: DRIYA MEHRA