

Beauty And Cruelty – Unknown Facts Of Indian Peafowl

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Abstract:

Peafowl is a common name for two bird species of the genus Pavo and genus Afropavo within the tribe Pavonini of the family Phasianidae (the pheasants and their allies). It elaborates the unknown facts of Indian peafowl regarding their habitats, myths and medicinal ways of peacock moreover it explains conservation issue and remedies plans. It briefly explains about illegal trading of peacock.

Keywords:

Peafowl, Myths, medicinal ways, Illegal trading, conservation.

Introduction:

The Majestic Peacock:

The peacock is celebrated as a symbol of beauty and grace, with the male's dazzling. The peacock, scientifically known as Pavo cristatus, is a fowl that has interested human beings for centuries due to its splendor, grace, and distinctive capabilities. The peafowl family is further divided into the Indian or Blue Peafowl (Pavo cristatus), Green Peafowl (Pavo muticus) and the Congo Peafowl (Afropavo congensis). Peacocks are local to the Indian subcontinent, in general India and Sri Lanka, despite the fact that they can also be discovered in some parts of Southeast Asia and were introduced to various nations worldwide.

A symbol of beauty and pride:

The Peacock, with its stunning iridescent feathers and impressive courtship displays, is a bird that has captivated humans for centuries

India's National Bird:

The peacock was officially declared the national bird of India in February 1, 1963, embodying the nation's beauty and rich heritage.

Today, the peacock is India's national bird. It is also a bird that survived for 4000 years against climate change and the mass destruction of ecology caused by humans, making it one of the world's oldest ornamental birds.

Habitat of peacock:

Peacocks may be observed in both wild and domestic environments, in which they often live in organizations known as "muster." A muster typically consists of one male and numerous women, although some agencies may additionally have multiple males.

The Indian Peafowl, the bird measures about 100-120cm from its bill to tail. The average lifespan of an Indian Peafowl in the wild is about 20 years. Don't be fooled by their large size, these birds are capable of flight and can easily perch on tree tops. They usually roost on trees during the night time.

Indian Peafowl build nests on the ground, lining them with sticks and debris. A typical clutch size is about 6-8 eggs, light brown in colour and are incubated for about 28 days by the female. Male peafowl defend their territory from rival males during the breeding season.

Feathers of Peacock: (Colours both Dull and bright)



Photograph: Damith Danthanarayana

"Peacocks are not born with these colorful feathers. Males start to develop colour at about three months of age and their feathers only become fully developed when they sexually mature at about three years. Peacocks also undergo moulting and lose their feathers at the end of the mating season.

Courtship Displays:



Photograph: Merlin Selvan

One of the most impressive aspects of Peacock behavior is its courtship displays, where the male peacock spreads its magnificent train of feathers and performs a complex dance to attract a mate. The display includes shaking, vibrating and rattling of the feathers, as well as loud calls and whistles.



Photograph: Divya Dwaraknath

Physical characteristics of peacock:

Adult male peafowl (peacocks) are large than the female peafowl (peahens) and are most well-known for their magnificent tail feathers, referred to as the "train".

- Peacock (Male Peafowl): The male peacock is known for its spectacular, fan-shaped tail, a "train" of feathers adorned with hundreds of eye-like patterns.
- Peahens (Female Peafowl): The female peahen has a more subdued, muted appearance with dull brown feathers, which helps her blend into her surroundings.
- Crest: Both sexes have a distinctive crest of hair-like feathers on their heads.



Photograph by Kunal, jain



Female Indian Peafowl aka Peahen (left) Photograph: Gokul Prasath

Male Indian Peafowl aka Peacock (right) Photograph: Vatsal Parikh

The Inter connectedness of Peacock Population and Biodiversity:

As a species, they Play a vital role in maintaining biodiversity and their population dynamics have a ripple effect on the environment.

Peacocks as indicators of Ecosystem Health:

As per researchers report, peacocks are considered indicators of ecosystem health due to their specific habitat requirements and sensitivity to environmental changes. Peacocks serve as valuable indicator species for ecosystem health by reflecting the availability of food, water, and shelter, and their presence in an area can signal a well-preserved and functioning habitat. As omnivorous birds that consume insects and seeds, they help control pest populations and aid in seed dispersal, contributing to ecological balance. A decline in

Peacock populations can signal broader ecosystem issues, such as habitat loss, fragmentation or degradation.

The Role of Peacocks in Maintaining Biodiversity:

- Seed Dispersal
- Pest Control
- Habitat Engineering
- Threats to Peacock populations and Biodiversity:
 - Habitat loss and Fragmentation
 - Climate changes

Human – Peacock conflict

As peacocks encroach on agricultural lands as human settlements, conflicts, arise, leading to persecution and population decline.

The primary reasons for conflict between farmers and peacocks are crop damage by increasing peacock populations, which find food in farmlands, and habitat loss due to urbanization and agricultural expansion that pushes peacocks into human areas.

This conflict leads to financial losses for farmers, and demand effective legal solutions to protect their crops from the widespread national birds.

From Cultural Reverence to Conservation Attention

Indian Peafowls play a crucial role in keeping a check on local reptile and insect populations. They also feed on insects that harm crops, indirectly protecting the harvest of farmers but sometimes creating a threats to farmers like consuming crops and vegetables.

Myth and usages of peacock in various religions:

In Hindu mythology, the peacock serves as the vehicle of many Gods and is a symbol of prosperity and opulence. Many tribal cultures consider the peacock to be a divine bird. In Hindu mythology, the peacock is the mount of several gods, including Kartikeya, Saraswati, and Lakshmi.

As per known facts, In Buddhist traditions, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, peacock feathers considered as a symbol of wisdom, purity and transformation of negativity into enlightenment.

Muslims traditions, one where the peacock's admiration of its own beauty leads to the five daily prayers, and another where the peacock aids Satan in entering Paradise by his deception, resulting in the peacock's own expulsion from heaven alongside the other fallen beings.

In Early Christian art, the peacock traditionally symbolizes immortality. This symbolism derives from the ancient Greek belief that the flesh of the peacock did not decay after death. However, the use of peacock feather within the Indian Christian faith is not widely documented or a prominent part of their current religious practice.

Myths about Peacocks and their Feathers

- Omen of Death: Some cultures believe a peacock's cries can foretell a death in the family.
- "Eyes" and the Evil Eye: The eye-like spots on their tail feathers are thought to ward off the "evil eye" or bring good luck and protection.
- Magical Protection: In some beliefs, peacock feathers are used to keep a house free from flies and other insects.

Myths about Peafowl Abilities

- Snake Charmers: Peafowl are believed in folklore to be able to charm and even eat snakes.
- "Eyes" of the God: One story explains the eye-like spots on peacock feathers as the "thousand eyes" of the god Indra, who was blessed with them and fearlessness from serpents.
- Fertilization by Tears: A myth claims that a peahen can become pregnant by drinking the tears of a male peacock.

Cultural and Symbolic Myths

- Divine Creation: In Indian mythology, the Khond tribe believes their goddess created the first peacock from wax, while the Baigas say it came from the saliva of their ancestor.
- Symbol of Pride: In art, particularly depictions of the Seven Deadly Sins, the peacock is often used to represent the sin of pride.
- Rebirth and Renewal: The annual shedding and regrowth of their elaborate tail feathers symbolizes renewal and rebirth.
- Goddess of Wealth: In Hinduism, the peacock is associated with Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, wealth, and good fortune.
- Deity Conveyance: Peafowl are considered the vehicle for several Hindu deities, including the god Kartikeya, and are sometimes depicted with Krishna.

Indian Peafowl used in Indian traditional medicine

The peafowl is supposed to have the ability to hypnotise snakes as well as make their eggs rotten, thus it is the main destroyer of snakes. With such power, is it a wonder then that the flesh of the peafowl is believed to have the property of curing snake bites?, still its has a question..

Indeed oil from the fat of the peafowl is used to cure rheumatism, gout and arthritis. This ointment is recorded in the Singhalese pharmacopoeia as a cure for sprains and dislocation of the joints.

The ash from the burnt feathers is a remedy for vomiting. The smoke from burning feathers is claimed to remove the poisonous effect from the house and purifies the environment.

The "eye" in the feathers is used as an antidote for rat-bite (above). These feathers are used to treat various eye problems.

Burning a peacock feather and combining the ash with water is a ritualistic practice to create a shield against bad energy, curses, and negative vibrations.

Ash of peacock feathers mixed with coconut oil is used for headaches, and fat or ghee from peacocks is used to treat joint problems and fractures.

Peacock feather ash is also mentioned in the treatment of hiccups, coughs, tuberculosis, and to promote sexual health. Peacock legs are also documented as a part used in traditional medicine.

Water extracts of peacock feathers have been shown to inhibit the activity of enzymes found in snake venom, which cause local tissue damage.

Displaying a peacock feather in a home is thought to draw in positive energy, wealth, luck, and happiness, fostering harmony and optimism.

According to Vedic astrology, Vastu Shastra, and spiritual practices, peacock feathers are considered extremely auspicious. They offer protection, attract positivity, wealth, and mental clarity.

Conservation Status of Indian Peafowl:

Indian Peafowl are widely distributed in the wild across South Asia and protected both culturally in many areas and by law in India. Indian peafowl is mentioned in Schedule-I of Wildlife Protection Act 1972, indicates the high conservation value of species. Conservative estimates of the population put them at more than 100,000. Illegal poaching for meat however continues and declines have been noted in parts of India. Poaching of peacocks for their meat and feathers and accidental poisoning by feeding on pesticide treated seeds are known threats to wild birds.

Conservation Issues and Action Plans:

1. Direct Population Threats: The Indian Peafowl is under threat from various quarters that include the demand for feathers and wild meat. The fallen feathers are collected and sold in the local markets and the birds are also reportedly killed to increase revenue return.

Conservation Plan: In India, Indian Peafowl is protected both by law and culturally in many areas. Poaching of peacocks for their meat and feathers has declined their population in many parts of India. Any kind of illegal collection of feathers or poaching noted in study area will be immediately informed to concern authority.

2. Conflicts With Farmers: During the cropping season in parts of India, the Peafowl can be a nuisance to agriculture as they damage crops. Peafowl are omnivorous and their diet includes seeds, fruits, flower buds, shoots, invertebrates, and small vertebrates. To counter crop damage by Peafowl many time farmers used to poison the bird, as they treat bird as big threat to their crop.

Conservation Plan: The role of Peafowl in cropland ecosystem is very crucial, and the damage done by the bird is negotiable in terms of direct benefits and environmental services. The awareness among the farmers will be generated through the formal educational programmes.

Farmers poisons peacock to death:

A dozen peacocks were poisoned to death by a farmer in various districts in Tamilnadu, raising concern over the protection of the national bird. Peacock, the national bird, is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act and its killing is strictly prohibited. Forest officials ordered a probe into the incident.

Threats to the Indian Peafowl population India:

Threats to the Indian Peafowl population include poaching for meat and feathers, which is illegal but still occurs. Habitat loss due to urbanization and agriculture is a major concern, impacting their access to food, water, and tall trees for roosting. Pesticide poisoning from consuming treated seeds is another significant threat. Finally, while the species is generally widespread, retaliatory killing by farmers, as well as loss of tall trees necessary for roosting, also contribute to population decline in some areas.

Specific threats:

- Poaching and Trade
- Habitat Loss and Degradation
- Pesticide Poisoning
- Retaliatory Killing
- Loss of Roosting Trees
- Conflict with Humans

Peacock poaching on the rise:

Peacocks are not only the national bird of India; they also hold great religious and historical significance. However, the recent discovery of disturbing cruelty against the birds have led many people to question if Indians and the government really care about this symbol of national pride.

Incidents such as the one that occurred in Dharampur, Gujarat, on July 14, 2021, when three poachers were caught trying to hunt peacocks, and employees of the forest department had to fire bullets in self-defence, have been occurring at a disturbingly high frequency over the past decade. In 2020 alone, nearly 5.5 crore peacock tail feathers were smuggled to China by a firm named Galaxy Rider.

According to the official, as a 'Schedule-1 Species', peacocks enjoy the highest level of legal protection provided to any bird or animal. "However, despite being protected, peacock feathers are a valued commodity in India, for use in religious ceremonies, decorations and even some forms of jewelers," the official explains. "The most popular use of peacock feathers is as brooms to sweep temples and other sacred places.

As a result, illegal trade is thought to be booming. While this means that the trade of plucked peacock feathers or peacock meat is entirely prohibited and classified as a punishable offence, this criminalization only applies to the sale of plucked feathers, while the sale of shed feathers is entirely legal." "Peacocks are notoriously skittish birds, prone to high levels of stress and fear, which means that even a small amount of physical injury can cause them to suffer panic attacks and die."

The hunter adds, "A number of poachers try to pluck feathers from the tails of a living peacock, and when done roughly or violently, this can cause excruciating pain to a peacock. The pain caused by this violent encounter usually causes the bird to die of shock." The Narikurava gypsy tribe of Tamil Nadu poach peacocks for their oil considered an aphrodisiac, and for use as an ingredient in many Siddha preparations.

Peafowl carcasses are also bought and legs dried by Siddha physicians. Hot sesame oil is added to the powdered legs and administered for joint and bone pain. Believe it or not, they display peacock carcasses to prove the oil is genuine.

A 2016 study undertaken by traffic India states "Bhasma and churnam (peacock feather ash) were sold in many Siddha drug stores in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat and Rajasthan, and is used to cure hiccups, vomiting and morning sickness among other illnesses.

The Rebari community in Rajasthan use ash of peafowl feather mixed with honey to cure asthma, whereas ash of peafowl feathers mixed with coconut oil is used for headache. One bolus with cow milk daily early in the morning is given for five days to get male child." The report also points out that legs and fat of peafowl are fairly popular; and goes on to say 200 peacocks were killed in the Bundi district of Rajasthan in 2016.

A single peacock's feathers all together weigh about 300 grams so when 29.8 kgs of feathers valued at Rs 2.60 lakh in India (but said to fetch Rs 7.3 lakh abroad) were seized from a passenger travelling to

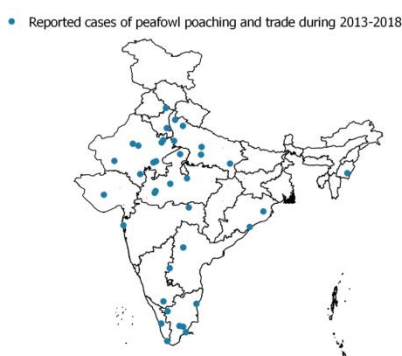
Singapore by the Customs at Kochi in September 2014, one wonders whether they were shed or plucked from around 100 killed peacocks.

This clearly indicates that there is no guarantee that the picchi made from peacock feathers used by Jain monks are naturally shed feathers as believed.

Illegal trade:

Since the early 1990s, there have been reports of increasing illegal trade in peafowl feathers, large-scale mortalities due to increased use of insecticides/pesticides in agricultural lands, poaching, and retaliatory killings by people. Several peafowl stronghold areas in the country are now concerned about the current declining status.

Wildlife Organization conducted a systematic review of online media reports over the 2013-2018 period and recorded at least 46 instances of illegal peafowl trade being detected by enforcement agencies. These included 32 cases of poaching of an estimated 400 birds, and 14 seizures of plucked feathers totaling over 370 kg.



Source: Locations of peafowl poaching cases and seizures as reported by media articles during 2013-2018 in India

In February 2024 the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence seized approximately 28 lakh peacock feathers and 16,000 feather stems being smuggled out of Nhava Sheva port in Mumbai. The consignment to China was labeled as “Door Mat made up of Choir”.

In April 2025 at Siliguri (West Bengal) acting on a tip-off, the Sukna Range team raided a house in Milanpalli and seized some kgs of peacock feathers and 733 feather fans, the estimated value of which was Rs 1.17 lakh.

In May 2025, 72,000 peacock feathers were seized by the Manipur police in Kakching district while trying to smuggle them to Myanmar. They were valued at approximately Rs 37 lakh along with the vehicle used for their transport.

In July 2025 the Forest Department arrested 11 persons and seized 500 kgs of peacock feathers in Pune. They were meticulously bundled and hidden ready for illegal sale. The Forest Department then issued a strong public advisory reminding citizens that peacock feathers can not be bought, sold or collected legally, and urged people to report any suspicious activity.

In fact, State Forest Departments have for the past year seized lakhs of peacock feathers being traded or exported from Mumbai and Pune to Siliguri and Kakching. It is obvious that they were obtained by killing the birds.

There have been multiple cases of peacock deaths in Tamil Nadu, particularly due to accidental poisoning from pesticide-laced grains or other food sources.

In a shocking incident, 10 peacocks were found dead on an open land near Trichy in the year of 2011. The dead bodies of around 20 peacocks were discovered by people in the locality of Villupuram District in the year of 2017.

Not just in Villupuram, two peacocks were found dead in Kollam district in Kerala also last week. The forest officials claim that they died due to the electricity lines in the area. The peacocks come to urban areas due to biting cold inside the forest, said a report.

In Coimbatore, a significant incident, 33 peafowls were found dead in farms near Coimbatore, suspected to be due to poisoning. In the year of 2023. Early 2025, in Pudukottai, Seven peacocks (three males and four females) were found dead in Melathur village after consuming rice mixed with pesticide, which a farmer had used to deter rats and other pests in his groundnut farm. The farmer was arrested and a case was filed under the Wildlife Protection Act.



Photo Credit: The Hindu News

Offense:

The killing a peacock is strictly prohibited and as per section 51(1-A) attracts imprisonment which may extend to seven years and also a fine which shall not be less than ten thousand rupees.

The peafowl is protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972, the highest level of legal protection afforded to wildlife in India. Killing, poaching, or trade of peafowls are strictly prohibited.

Government Enhancement and Penalties:

- **Protected Species:** The peacock is India's national bird and is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which strictly prohibits its killing and hunting moreover harming them is a punishable offense.
- Cases are registered under the Act, and arrests are made when negligence or intent leads to the death of these birds.
- **Penalties:** Poaching and unauthorized trade can result in imprisonment for up to seven years and a fine of at least Rs. 10,000 under Section 51(1-A) of the Act.

Way Forward:

- **Strict Enforcement:** Wildlife enforcement agencies must ensure stringent checks on dealers and conduct forensic investigations to identify the source of feathers.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Widespread, vernacular publicity is needed to educate the public about the laws, penalties, and the ethical implications of the trade.

- **Consumer Action:** A significant impact can be made by refusing to purchase products made from peacock feathers, thereby reducing demand and disrupting the trade.

Suggestions:

To protect peacocks, the government should increase forest department persons for rescue, anti-poaching measures, provide awareness through publicity campaigns, and work on habitat improvement by planting trees and providing water sources.

The public can contribute by avoiding chemically treated seeds and poisons in farming, reporting illegal activities. Both should participate in afforestation and educational programs for peacock conservation.

Conclusion:

Illegal trade in peacocks and their parts is ongoing despite the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which protects the peacock under Schedule I and prescribes significant penalties for killing and trading in them. The primary conclusion is that despite strong laws, loopholes and inadequate enforcement allow the trade to continue, driven by demand for feathers for decorative items, which causes immense suffering to the birds and jeopardizes their conservation. Effective enforcement, public awareness, and a comprehensive ban on feather products are critical to ending this harmful practice. As we move into the future, we ought to maintain to work closer to protective the herbal world so that future generations can hold to recognize the peacock and other species that contribute to the rich tapestry of life on Earth.

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