

GREAT ARGUS PHEASANT



Photo: Peter Gordon

The Great Argus Pheasant, *Argusianus argus*, also known as *Phoenix Pheasant* in some parts of Asia, is brown-plumaged with a small blue head and neck, rufous-red upper-breast, with black hair-like feathers on the crown and nape, and red legs. The male is among the largest of all pheasants, weighing up to twelve kilograms (2¼lbs), and being up to 200cm (78¾") in length, much of this length consists

of the very long tail feathers. The male's most spectacular feature is the huge, broad and greatly elongated secondary wing feathers patterned with large ocelli¹. The long feathers of the wings and tail are used in indigenous Bornean cultures for ornamental head-dresses. The female is smaller and duller than the male, with a shorter tail and less ocelli. Young males attain adult plumage in their third year.



Photo: "Stavenn"

The Great Argus occurs in Borneo, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula in southeast Asia. It inhabits woodland, deciduous forests, tropical rain forest and grassy areas from sea-level to 1220m (4,000'). The diet includes fruits, seeds, flowers, leaf buds, and leaf-litter invertebrates for which it forages on the forest floor in the early morning and in the evening. Unusual among Galliformes, the Great Argus has no oil gland and the hen lays only two to three eggs.



Display posture

The Great Argus is not as colourful as many other pheasants, but its display ranks among the most remarkable. The male clears an open spot in the forest and prepares a dancing ground. He then calls loudly to attract a female. When a hen appears he dances with his wings spread like two enormous fans, revealing their multitude of "eyes" while his real eyes are hidden behind them, closely observing her.

The scientific name of the species is derived from the many eyes-like pattern on the wings, "Argus" being a hundred-eyed giant in Greek mythology.

Due to ongoing habitat loss and hunting in some areas, the Great Argus is evaluated as "Near Threatened" on the IUCN Red List. It is listed on Appendix II of CITES.

¹eye-like spots.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia