

Birds of Paradise

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8274097>

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Introduction

The birds-of-paradise are members of the family Paradisaeidae of the order Passeriformes. The majority of species are found in eastern Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and eastern Australia. The family has 45 species in 17 genera. The members of this family are perhaps best known for the plumage of the males of the species, the majority of which are sexually dimorphic. The males of these species tend to have very long, elaborate feathers extending from the beak, wings, tail or head. For the most part they are confined to dense rainforest habitat. The diet of all species is dominated by fruit and to lesser extent arthropods. The birds-of-paradise have a variety of breeding systems, ranging from monogamy to lek-type polygamy.

Taxonomical class

The family Paradisaeidae was introduced (as Paradiseidae) in 1825 with Paradisea as the type genus by the English naturalist William John Swainson. For many years the birds-of-paradise were treated as being closely related to the bowerbirds. Today while both are treated as being part of the Australasian lineage Corvida, the two are now thought to be only distantly related. The closest

evolutionary relatives of the birds-of-paradise are the crow and jay family Corvidae, the monarch flycatchers Monarchidae and the Australian mudnesters Struthideidae.

General features

1. They are very beautiful and they have the most vibrantly coloured feathers.
2. They have feathers that extend from the beak and tail of the bird.
3. They have a characteristic plumage observed in the morphology of the adult male.
4. The plumage of the adult male shows evidence of strong sexual dimorphism.
5. Bird of paradise tail feathers are also called as plumage.
6. They follow different types of breeding patterns.
7. They are generally herbivores depending upon the seeds of various trees, while some of them are carnivores and they feed on arthropods.



Habitat and distribution

The centre of bird-of-paradise diversity is the large island of New Guinea; all but two genera are found in New Guinea. Those other two are the monotypic genera *Lycocorax* and *Semioptera*, both of which are endemic to the Maluku Islands, to the west of New Guinea. Of the riflebirds in the genus *Ptiloris*, two are endemic to the coastal forests of eastern Australia, one occurs in both Australia and New Guinea, and one is only found in New Guinea. The only other genus to have a species outside New Guinea is *Phonygammus*, one representative of which is found in the extreme north of Queensland. The remaining species are restricted to New Guinea and some of the surrounding islands. Many species have very small ranges, particularly those with restricted habitat types such as mid-montane forest (like the black sicklebill) or island endemics (like the Wilson's bird-of-paradise).

The majority of birds-of-paradise live in tropical forests, including rainforest, swamps and moss forest, nearly all of them solitary tree dwellers. Several species have been recorded in coastal mangroves. The southernmost species, the paradise riflebird of Australia, lives in sub-tropical and temperate wet forests. As a group the manucodes are the most plastic in their habitat requirements; in particular, the glossy-mantled manucode, which inhabits both forest and open savanna woodland. Mid-montane habitats are the most commonly occupied habitat, with thirty of the forty species occurring in the 1000–2000 m altitudinal band.

Growth

Newly hatched bird of paradise chicks have no feathers; their eyes open in about six days. Their feathers start to appear at 8 to 10 days. They fledge at 20 to 30 days of age but may stay with the parent(s) for many weeks before heading out on their own. Females may reach maturity at about



one year of age, males usually take longer: two to four years, depending on species. However, it may take males that need fancy feathers for courting from four to seven years to gain their full adult plumage.

Diet

The diet of the birds-of-paradise is dominated by fruit and arthropods, although small amounts of nectar and small vertebrates may also be taken. The ratio of the two food types varies by species, with fruit predominating in some species, and arthropods dominating the diet in others. The ratio of the two will affect other aspects of the behaviour of the species; for example, frugivorous species tend to feed in the forest canopy, whereas insectivores may feed lower down in the middle storey. Frugivores are more social than the insectivores, which are more solitary and territorial.

Even the birds-of-paradise that are primarily insect eaters will still take large amounts of fruit. The family is overall an important seed disperser for the forests of New Guinea, as they do not digest the seeds. Species that feed on fruit will range widely searching for fruit, and while they may join other fruit-eating species at a fruiting tree, they will not associate with them otherwise and will not stay with other species for long. Fruit are eaten while perched and not from the air, and birds-of-paradise are able to use their feet as tools to manipulate and hold their food, allowing them to extract certain capsular fruit. There is some niche differentiation in fruit choice by species and any one species will only consume a limited number of fruit types compared to the large choice available. For example, the trumpet manucode and crinkle-collared manucode will eat mostly figs, whereas the Lawes's parotia focuses mostly on berries and the greater lophorina and raggiana bird-of-paradise take mostly capsular fruit.

Mating Rituals

Most species have elaborate mating rituals, with at least eight species exhibiting lek mating systems, including the genus *Paradisaea*. Others, such as the *Cicinnurus* and *Parotia* species, have highly ritualised mating dances. Across the family (*Paradisaeidae*), female preference is incredibly important in shaping the courtship behaviors of males and, in fact,



Drives the evolution of ornamental combinations of sound, colour, and behaviour. Males are polygamous in the sexually dimorphic species, but monogamous in at least some of the monomorphic species. Hybridisation is frequent in these birds, suggesting the polygamous species of bird of paradise are very closely related despite being in different genera.



Many hybrids have been described as new species in the past, and doubt remains regarding whether some forms, such as Rothschild's lobe-billed bird-of-paradise, are valid.

Birds-of-paradise build their nests from soft materials, such as leaves, ferns, and vine tendrils, typically placed in a tree fork. The typical number of eggs in each clutch varies among the species and is not known for every species. For larger species, it is almost always just one egg, but smaller species may produce clutches of 2–3 eggs. Eggs hatch after 16–22 days, and the young leave the nest at between 16 and 30 days of age.



Exceptions

Not all birds of paradise are brightly colored or have fancy feathered “ornaments.” And not all males leave the female after breeding. Some, such as manucodes, are less colorful and flamboyant, the males tend to mate with just one female each breeding season, and both parents help with nest building and chick feeding.



EXAMPLES

- The southern hemisphere constellation Apus represents a bird-of-paradise.
- An adult-plumaged male bird-of-paradise is depicted on the flag of Papua New Guinea, designed by Susan Karike.
- The various members of the family were profiled by David Attenborough in *Attenborough in Paradise*.
- The Indonesian Army has a Military Area Command named after “Cenderawasih”, the local name for the bird.
- The plume from the bird of paradise was used in Shripech, the royal crown worn by the King of Nepal, before the establishment of a republic. Now, the crown is housed in Naraynhiti Palace Museum.



Conservation

Birds of fashion. Bird of paradise plumes were known and prized in Asia 2,000 years ago. Skins and feathers were very important to European women's fashion over a century ago and are still used by Indigenous people in New Guinea in their dress and rituals. During the 1880s and 1890s,



some birds of paradise were almost wiped out because of the fashion of using the bird's feathers to decorate hats. Up to 50,000 skins were exported each year. This practice was finally stopped in the 1920s, when all birds of paradise were protected from export. Today, some hunting is allowed but only to meet the ceremonial needs of the native.

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