

The European Junglefowl Focus Group

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Red junglefowl in Shimla, India

Galliform species belonging to the genus *Gallus* are commonly known as junglefowl or “wild chickens”. The red junglefowl *Gallus gallus* is within this genus and, as the wild ancestor of all domestic chickens, is perhaps the most important bird species in the world.

In 1758, Carl Linnaeus, a key figure in determining modern-day taxonomy, realised that the red junglefowl was a member of the pheasant family and described it as *Phasianus gallus*. The species is poorly represented in pheasant collections today, perhaps due to its resemblance to certain bantams. There are three other species within the *Gallus* genus: grey junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* from southern India, Sri Lanka junglefowl *Gallus lafayetii*, and green junglefowl *Gallus varius* from Java, Bali and other nearby Sunda Islands.

The first meeting of the ‘wild junglefowl’ focus group was held in 1978 in Rotterdam Zoo. Participants included Aviornis International members, as well as those from WPA. Aviculturists from several European countries soon joined the group and today captive junglefowl are found in all WPA chapters. Now the group is known as the European Junglefowl Focus Group (EJFG).

The aim of the EJFG is to contribute towards the conservation of all the junglefowl species and subspecies. The group supports organisations and private breeders that keep pure junglefowl and are working to limit in-breeding and avoid hybridisation with other subspecies. A captive population of red junglefowl with

white earlobes *Gallus gallus gallus* has been monitored by the group since its six founder members were imported from Hanoi in the late 1990s. A captive population of red junglefowl with red earlobes *G. g. jabouillei* is also being monitored. This group of birds is largely descended from those of the same subspecies kept at Clères by Jean Delacour, WPA's first President and author of *Pheasants of the World*.

EJFG also actively promotes research into the *Gallus* genus, particularly investigating morphology (especially using museum skins), behaviour, genetics and the

available relevant literature. Several visits to the Natural History Museum in Tring, England, as well as surveys of museum collections in Paris, Berlin and Leiden, have studied the five subspecies of *Gallus gallus* and looked to identify pure birds. Regular samples from birds within the group's own collections have been provided to several scientific institutions for genetic analysis. For example, Ettore Randi in Bologna has shown that much of the captive population of grey junglefowl appears to have been hybridised with *G. gallus*, or even *G. domesticus*. Samples have also been sent to Sweden and to the University of Leuven in Belgium, where blood samples of the four junglefowl species have been used in analyses. In addition, EJFG works to increase awareness of the junglefowl by presenting talks, publishing articles and providing a help channel for queries relating to the species. If you have any questions about junglefowl please contact the group at ejfg@wpa-benelux.info.

One of the main consultation themes for EJFG concerns the purity of junglefowl, both in captivity and in the wild. In-breeding is a current concern as almost all pure birds of the four species are thought to originate from a very limited number of founder birds. An extensive survey across Europe is necessary to understand the current genetic status of all captive junglefowl. This would identify pure birds from hybrids and allow the best genetic pairings to be made to minimise in-breeding. If you would like more information about EJFG please contact ejfg@wpa-benelux.info.



Grey junglefowl in India