

# Birds of Paradise



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Looking closer at the plumage of birds, a kaleidoscopic tableau of textures, swirls, and patterns emerges. Every shade in the color spectrum is represented, from canary yellow, golden orange, and radiant red, to verdant greens, sapphire blues, incredible indigos, and rich violets. These vibrant hues are masterfully blended together, creating a natural tapestry that captivates the eye. Like artists blending paints on a palette, these fabulously feathered birds from regions all around the world were brought together for this feature, yet each of these birds is enchanting in its own right, with unique traits that make it a winged wonder.

## Golden Pheasant

One of the most brilliantly colored of all birds, male Golden Pheasants (*Chrysolophus pictus*) are instantly recognizable. The rich golden plumage on their crests and back side forms a "cape" on its bright red body, one that the birds often show off to full dramatic effect. Fanning their feathers to effectively camouflage their other features, they draw attention to a single shimmering yellow eye dotted with a black pupil.



## Scarlet Macaw

As their name implies, Scarlet Macaws (*Ara macao*) primarily have red plumage, but they also have feathers that are light blue, yellow, dark blue and even a richer shade of red that is underscored with an iridescent gold tone, all seamlessly blended into their gorgeously hued coats. Some of these vividly colored birds may even have a hint of green to their wings.

## Mandarin Duck

A strikingly unmistakable bird, the adult male Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) has a red bill, large white crescent above the eye, reddish face and "whiskers," purple breast with two vertical white bars, and ruddy flanks with two orange "sails" at the back. The less flashy females are similar in appearance to female Wood ducks, while Mandarin ducklings closely resemble Mallard ducklings.



## Little Blue Heron

The Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) is the only heron species in which first-year birds and adults show dramatically different coloration. The young herons are all white except for their pale, darkly tipped bill, and greenish legs, and look similar to juvenile Snowy Egrets. As they mature, herons, acquire the signature slate-blue plumage and blue bill, which retains a black tip.



## Mottled Duck

The adult Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*) has a dark body and eyes, paler head and neck, orange legs, and a shiny green-blue wing patch. The ducks' bills provide a key difference in distinguishing the sexes, as males have bright yellow ones, whereas females possess bills that range from deep to pale orange and are often lined with black splotches around the edges and near the base.



## Red-winged Parrot

Both sexes of the Red-winged Parrot (*Aprosmictus erythropterus*) have vividly red wings and a bright green body. Males also have black napes, blue lower backs and rumps, yellow tips to their tails, orange bills, and grey feet. Females have a yellowish green body, wings with red and pink trimmings, light blue lower backs, and dark irises. Juveniles resemble females in coloration yet have yellow-orange beaks and pale brown irises.



## Peafowl

Three species of these winged wonders are found around the world: the blue or Indian peafowl that originated in the Indian subcontinent, the green peafowl of Southeast Asia; and the Congo peafowl that is native only to the Congo Basin. Although these birds, regardless of their sex, are collectively referred to as "peacocks," that term actually denotes males of the species, while females are known as peahens. While females tend to be less ostentatious, peacocks typically have extravagant plumage such as the Asiatic species' eye-spotted "tail" or "train" of covert feathers that are displayed as part of a courtship ritual.

*The avian species featured in this article provide a tantalizing glimpse into the world of beautiful birds. Let the vibrantly hued birds presented on these pages inspire you to explore the amazing diversity of these fabulously feathered creatures!*