

Sex change in female Silver pheasant bird at Lucknow Zoological Garden, Lucknow

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The Lucknow Zoological Garden has witnessed a rare phenomenon in a Silver Pheasant Bird. The female Silver Pheasant has changed its gender and has converted into a male Silver Pheasant. The Silver Pheasant bird shows sexual dimorphism. The male Silver Pheasant is 1200 to 1250 mm in length, the male is large robust looking creature with a Silver coloured wings, full and long crest, chin, throat and under parts glossy bluish black. Upper parts white with black lines, wavy and often broken, rectrices very long, the central part almost pure white with only a few thin broken black streaks on the base. The legs have spur used for protection and for fighting with competing males.

The Silver Pheasant female is mostly plain olive brown above and below, the feathers inconspicuously peppered with black and with pale shafts, including the four central rectrices, crest tipped with black, chin and throat mottled whitish grey, belly and vent plain brown, lateral rectrices are mottled brown, black and white. The female is smaller than the male.

At Lucknow Zoological Gardens, the female Silver Pheasant started changing its plumage in the year 2006 and within a span of about two years it completely changed its plumage and now resembles a male Silver Pheasant, though its size which is considerably smaller than a male has remained the same.

This change was first observed by the Head Keeper of the Zoo, Sri Siyaram. These observations were very very important as they indicated the change of sex in the female Silver Pheasant to a male.

According to Siyaram, the female Silver Pheasant was in the plumage of a female till 2005 and regularly laid eggs. From 2006 it laid only one egg which was unfertilized and hence the egg did not develop into a chick when incubated. There after the female bird laid no eggs and slowly changed its plumage to that of a male, though its size did not increase.

It appears to me that the plumage change in the female Silver Pheasant is due to hormonal disturbance. The female hormonal level must have declined and the male hormones level must have increased leading to the change in its secondary sexual characters, including the plumage change towards a male. This sexually changed female Silver Pheasant is staying with her male partner of previous years. They do not show any sign of fight or anger towards each other.

This sex change in the female Silver Pheasant bird has become a centre of attraction for the zoo visitors who are curious to know about this rare phenomenon and want to see the bird in person.

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