



# GUINEA FOWL

**GALLIFORMES**  
**Family: Nunididae**  
**Genus: Numida**  
**Species: melegris**



**Range:** Sub-Saharan East Africa though has been introduced world-wide

**Habitat:** savannahs, dry steppes, open forest and rocky terrain

**Niche:** terrestrial, diurnal herbivorous

**Wild diet:** seeds, berries, tender shoots and invertebrates including frogs and snails

**Zoo diet:** chicken mash, bread and what ever forage they find on grounds

**Life Span:** (Wild)  
(Captive)

**Sexual dimorphism:** none

**Location in SF Zoo:** African Aviary

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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The plumage of the Guinea fowl is chiefly black and spotted with white. The top of the head has a bony casque or helmet. The head and neck are almost bare of feathers. The facial area is bluish with a yellow helmet and red at the end of the wattles. There are bluish wattles near the beak. The bill is short, thick and curved down (like a chicken). The legs are short with three toes in front and one toe in back.

The helmeted guinea fowl have short rounded wings and are capable of strong flight, but are only capable of flying short distances.

**Weight:** 2.4 - 3.5 lbs

**Length:** 15.5 - 22 inches

**Wingspan:**

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Helmeted Guinea Fowl have a worldwide distribution and are raised for food by the people of Africa. It is not threaten at this time.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Vocalizations are loud with harsh crackles or metallic clicks. Soft chirps among other calls are produced as well. The birds are gregarious and are found in large flocks (~25 – 200 birds). The flock will pack in a dense cluster for defense when potential predators approach a flock containing young birds.

The Guinea fowl walk in single file behind a leader or 'scout' whose warnings call will scatter them to cover and call them back when the danger is past. These birds run instead of fling to escape predators. At other time these birds will form large groups and will pack together to protect young birds from jackals, baboons and snakes. At night they roost in trees.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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The breakup of the Helmeted guinea fowl follow flocks at the onset of their breeding season results from an increase in aggression between males that consist of ritualized chasing. Females view these chases and presumably assess potential mates by determining the strongest male. At the same time as this increase in chasing, males and females form short - term pairs. This 'dating' probably allows females to compare potential mates more rigorously. After 2-3 weeks of such dating, stable pairs form and usually last until the females begin to incubate the eggs. Although the males and females are closely similar, the male is easily identified since he spends most of his time sitting and resting in alert postures or in aggressive encounters with males who approach his hen. The female of a stable pair does little more than feed and preen. Nests are simple scrapes on the ground lined with leaves, grass and feathers. Once the hen begins the incubation, the male deserts temporarily. Since he can be sure of the paternity of the eggs and of his hen's commitment to hatch them he then associates with other females. However, when the 'keets' (chicks) are about to hatch he returns to his original mate and helps to rear them, especially during the first two weeks.

Incubation: 23 - 28 days	Sexual Maturity: ~ 2 years
# of eggs: 4 - 12 white to pale brown	Fledging: 14 days

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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The 30 formally known races have recently been reduced to nine. Guinea fowl probably evolved from a chicken-like ancestor.

### **Sources:**

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Birds of the World © 2005 page 331

The New Larousse Encyclopedia of Animal Life © 1980 page 401

<http://www.stlzoo.org>

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