

Birds of Paradise

BY EDWIN SCHOLES; PHOTOS BY TIM LAMAN



red bird of paradise



blue bird of paradise

Look who's decked out and ready for a show! These birds could win top prize at any costume party. Only thing is, they aren't wearing costumes.

So, what's up with all the bright colors, fuzzy feathers, and streamer tails? Are those for real? You bet! These fancy feathered creatures are all called *birds of paradise*.

Where is paradise, anyway? For these birds, it's the tropical island of New Guinea (see map). This far-off land is home to most of the 40 kinds of birds of paradise. Even though the birds are all related, just look at how different they can be from one another. And you haven't seen anything yet. Stay tuned for more of the show!



king bird of paradise

These aren't your typical backyard birds. They're bright and they're flashy. And they've got some dance moves that will blow you away!



ribbon-tailed bird of paradise



Who's that punk rocker with the fiery mohawk above? He's a Goldie's bird of paradise, strutting his stuff in the leafy tree-tops. He shows off to both females and competing males.

The blue-headed jewel of the jungle below is a Wilson's bird of paradise. He shows off the dazzling colors on his back to some females watching from above. How do you like his strange curly tail? And that brilliant blue "skull-cap" is bare skin. Next, he faces upward and fans out those emerald-green breast feathers (right). What a guy!



Check out who's "wired for love" on the perch above. He's a twelve-wired bird of paradise, calling out to some females. The name comes

from his tangle of twelve wiry feathers. Can you see them? They look like broken guitar strings sticking out from his bright-yellow side plumes.

SONG-AND-DANCE ROUTINES

You might think that singing and dancing are for fun. But for birds of paradise, they're part of the serious business of courtship. The males spend hours a day performing their special routines. Why? It's all about attracting mates and making future birds of paradise.

Just as it is on "American Idol," the competition is fierce. Plus, the female judges are a

choosy bunch. Only males with the fanciest feathers and coolest moves get picked.

As you can guess, no two species have exactly the same routine. Some sing and shake their feathers high up in the trees. Others dance silently on the forest floor. And still others perform way out in the open. Some even get attention by hanging upside down!

The velvet-black fellow at right is a *six-wired bird of paradise*. What gives him his funny name? Those three long, wire-like plumes growing from behind each eye. You might think he looks cool now, but you should see him dance!



up the forest floor. Since dead leaves are always falling, he must clean his “stage” before every show.

When it’s show time, the not-so-fancy females gather on a branch above the stage to watch the ballet. All set? Then let the show begin!

First, the male races back and forth across the stage. Then he spreads open his “skirt” and flashes his shiny rainbow patch of throat feathers. Next he wags his head and wiggles his wires until they’re all a-blur. Finally a little sashay from side to side—wow—what a sight to see!

And this isn’t even the only show in town. Wouldn’t it be great to watch *all* the bird shows of paradise? Don’t just sit there and let us tell you about it. See for yourself. You can catch a few of these hip-hop birds in action by going to www.nwf.org/rangerrick for some wild video links. 🐦

RAINFOREST BALLET

The six-wired bird of paradise has one of the most complicated courtships. Not only is the male a tireless dancer, but he’s also a skilled decorator. He makes his own dancing grounds by clearing away leaves that might block the view. He also cleans

Mr. Six-Wire dances like a ballerina, while females gather above him to watch (left). He makes his amazing “tutu” by lifting special feathers around his body.

The young male at right is practicing for his day in the spotlight. He has no audience and hasn’t grown his manly plumes yet. But he’s already working on his moves.



In New Guinea, it’s not just the birds that perform wild, colorful displays. The man below, for example, is from the Huli tribe of Papua New Guinea,

and he’s all dressed up for a special celebration. What do you suppose inspired his fancy costume? Those fabulous birds of paradise, of course!

