Helmeted Guineafowl

Scientific Name: ***Numida meleagris***
Class: Aves
Order: Galliformes
Family: Numididae

These birds are related to turkeys, pheasants, partridges, grouse, quail, and chickens. They have plump roundish bodies that range in length from about 16-28 inches. They typically weigh between 1.5 and 3.5 lbs. In many places these birds are raised for their meat and eggs, just like chickens. The name is derived from a large backward curving bony “helmet” on top of its head. The body is covered in gray feathers with tiny white spots, but their heads are featherless. A wattle hangs on each side of the beak. Males and females look alike, though the male may have a larger helmet and wattles.

Range
Wild birds are found in much of sub-Saharan Africa, and they are raised on farms around the world

Habitat
Semi desert and savannah

Gestation
24-28 days

Behavior
They become alarmed fairly easily and if threatened, they call out with high shrieking voices. They may be kept as a “security system” against predators in a barnyard. Males make “kek-kek” or “chi-chi” calls while the female makes the 2 note cry imitated as “buck-wheat”. They are highly social birds who don’t do well if alone, though they may split into pairs during breeding periods. They spend much of the day scratching for food. Though they can fly, they seem to prefer to walk or run, and usually roost in trees at night.

Reproduction
Guineafowl couples are usually monogamous. They lay 12-15 eggs in a nest scratched into the ground and which may be hidden by a clump of weeds or other cover. Their eggs are small and extremely thick shelled. The chicks are called “keets”, and they are cared for by both parents. The young keets are highly susceptible to dampness, but after a few weeks they become some of the hardiest domestic land fowl.

Wild Diet
They are omnivores, eating seeds, berries, spiders, worms, and other small invertebrates. They eat a wide variety of insects including ants, termites, wasps, and ticks, so they are valuable as pest controllers around farms. They help reduce tick-spread illnesses such as Lyme disease.