



## Peafowl



**W**e know what you're thinking: a peacock?! Our guests are always surprised to see Wiley at our sanctuary when they visit! And impressed. It's impossible not to be with his incredible beauty. Wiley is a peacock with a touch of leucism, which makes him mostly white, barring a shock of iridescent cobalt blue over his back and at the tips of some of his famous tailfeathers. But Wiley is much more than just a handsome face!

Wiley is about as personable as it gets. He's not terribly interested in us, but he is in our many bird friends! In fact, he's particularly interested in Dotty, our oldest rooster. He loves to follow him all around and tries desperately to be his BFF.

Like all peacocks, Wiley flaunts his feathers for his peahens. All of them. Peafowl are polygamous. And Wiley, well, despite having a bevy (actual scientific nomenclature) of peahens, extends his poly nature to just about anyone with wings at the sanctuary. We've seen him preening and dancing for highly uninterested geese, ducks, and yes, Dotty. None are as impressed as the peahens, but don't feel bad for Wiley: there is no telling him he's not fabulous. As it should be.

He considers himself king of the castle, and to be frank, we may be somewhat responsible for that. Wiley gets to wander freely about the Sanctuary. He's earned our trust though. Each night, he can be found high in the branches of the same tree, right next to our farmhouse. From there, he has a clear view of chicken village, the cow pasture, the pigs in their yard, and our offices. In the case of danger, he can be heard loudly calling, and it's a call the chickens, ducks, and geese have learned to heed—even if sometimes the "danger" is just a baby groundhog.

Truth be told, he can get a little bit too into his duties. When we have guests staying at our farmhouse, he is especially suspicious. He doesn't really trust our open nature in letting whomever it is just STAY at HIS farmhouse. He needs to step in and make extra sure that he gets to the bottom of everything. How? By spying on them. That's right: several of our guests have reported jumping out of their skin (and grabbing a towel) upon seeing Wiley peeping into a window, perched on a sloping roof outside of it. His favorite peeping spot seems to be the bridal suite bathroom. Look. It's not *really* criminal. A peacock's gotta do his job! And honestly, everyone seems to get a kick of his antics once the shock wears off!





Wiley came to us from LION, Long Island Orchestrating for Nature. They were able to rescue him, and President John Di Leonardo knew we would take him. The year before we'd taken in two peahens, Belle and Athena, found abandoned in a sump—an area that collects runoff and waste waters. It's not a nice place to live.

But Wiley was a slightly different story. A family on Long Island reported that a peacock had wandered into their yard. They have no idea where he came from, but he had obviously been tamed at some point, evidenced by his begging for food—and by the fact that he was a peacock, on Long Island. When the snow started, they knew they had to find him a good home where he could be cared for. That's where John stepped in. Still, "the peacock" as he was known then, eluded them for months. Peacocks can't fly long distances, but they roost in trees for protection at night. They can fly high. And that's how Wiley got his name. He eluded his rescuers for months on end, flying just out of reach every time. When they finally caught him, we couldn't wait to bring him home! And Wiley? Well, he walked in like he'd always been here.

Peacocks aren't who one thinks of when they think of birds farmed for profit. The question you may be asking is, why do peacocks get dumped? How do they end up in Long Island? There are a few possible reasons. Some people adopt them as pets. It's possible that Wiley was bred to be an exotic white peacock for use in the wedding industry. However, he wasn't a perfect white, and that may be why he was dumped.

Peacocks as pets are also on the rise, but many who take in peacocks don't know what they're getting into. They can be territorial and very vocal about danger. A new owner (or neighbor) might not be keen on a peacock screeching loudly at all hours of the night because a car beeped as it drove by. These birds may also wind up being abandoned in a sump, or worse.

Peacocks aren't native to the United States and cannot fend for themselves in this environment. When they're abandoned, they're left open to predator attacks or to getting hit by a car. And while peacocks aren't used for food in our country, many countries use them for eggs, and peafowl farms do exist in the United States. Of course, the most common reason for which peacocks are farmed is their magnificent feathers: their beautiful blessing...and their curse.

Peacock feathers have been coveted for centuries. Currently, most peacock feathers come from China. The animal welfare laws are, by far, worse there. On peacock farms, birds are denied their natural behaviors and forced to live in squalid conditions that cause illness and extreme stress. In India, peacocks are protected national birds. However, the demand for peacock feathers drives poachers to hunt and kill wild peacocks for their feathers.

Peacocks molt yearly, shedding on average 150 feathers a year. But even that isn't enough to fill the demand. Because of this, farms in China keep peacocks to pluck their feathers while still alive. It's an incredibly painful process, and forcing the feathers means they can be plucked 2-3 times a year. Because they're paid by volume, those who pluck peacocks are not motivated to be kind or gentle about the process. In fact, like other birds that are live plucked, peacocks are left bloody and traumatized. And although peacock feathers have been used in fashion and crafts for centuries, it took a big story to make people think about the cruelty involved in the process.

In 2013, Burberry came out with a trench coat that sold for about \$30,000. It was made of peacock feathers. Outrage erupted when it was discovered that the peacock feathers came from India, where the export of peacock feathers is highly illegal. Shortly after, Burberry made an announcement that they had made an error: they peacock feathers came from China.





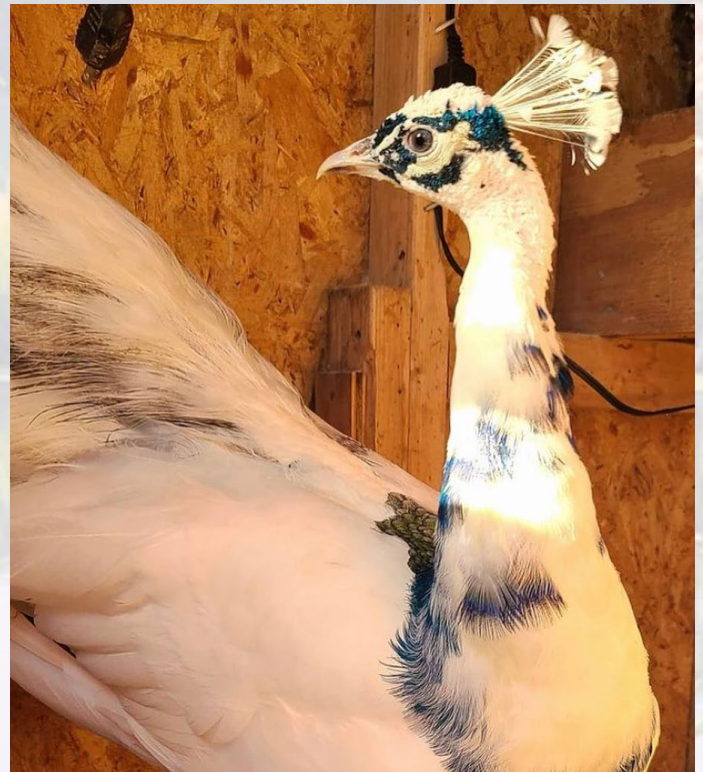
*“Haute couture” from Burberry drives the demand and cost for peacock feathers, leading poachers to kill them, and farms to breed and pluck their feathers while they live.*

Peacocks aren't the only birds that live years of horror being live-plucked and waiting for the next time. Boas, bedding, coats, and more are made from the feathers of various birds. However, peacocks have long had an aura of royalty around them, and in fashion, their feathers are synonymous with beauty and wealth. But the reality is, wearing their feathers supports cruelty and is anything but sophisticated or beautiful.

The only way to stop the abuse and give birds like Wiley the life they deserve is to stop buying feathers and supporting the use of birds in fashion or other industries where feathers are used. We don't need exotic animals at festivities to make our events seem more glamorous. We need to stop buying pets for their appeal as a status symbol when we cannot provide what's best for them. We don't need to decorate our bodies—or our homes—with products that promote abuse and death and doing so means that we play a role in the continuing suffering of another species, for a moment of aesthetic

satisfaction. What we buy and wear speaks to who we are as people. We can do better than just not buying these products. We can also speak up when we see someone else using them in some way.

It's impossible not to admire Wiley's beauty, or the beauty of any other peacock. But that's all we should do: appreciate them and be on our way. Let's use our power to ensure that peafowl like Wiley can roam free where they belong.



*Wiley, In a rare indoor sighting. Must have been a cold day, because otherwise, this man is out and about on the social scene.*