

Mor

Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India



Editorial

This issue of **Mor** is largely focussed on the highly attractive Tragopans in India. As mentioned in the article titled 'The Tragopan Quartet' of the President, WPA-India, our country is endowed with four out of only five Tragopan species in the world. It is noteworthy that WPA-India is actively involved in field activities in Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh, which are rich in Pheasants and other Galliformes. We also bring the exciting news that the rather rare and endangered Western Tragopan has been recently re-discovered in Uttaranchal under the Key Areas Project about which also a brief report is included in this issue. **This means that Uttaranchal has 8 pheasant species and is now ahead of J&K and Himachal Pradesh with 7 species each.**

We are still hampered by inadequate inputs and feedback from members and readers. Hence, all interested persons are requested once again to contribute material for this newsletter, which is the only one of its type in the country.

A. J. Urfi
(e-mail: wpaindia@hathway.com)

The National Board for Wildlife, the apex national body for wildlife conservation chaired by the Prime Minister, met on 19 June 2006 in New Delhi. In the meeting, the following proposals put forward by Shri Samar Singh, President, WPA-India, were approved:-

Action for protecting Indian Peafowl (National Bird)

As part of the nation-wide campaign **Save the National Bird**, the following was proposed:-

a) Rapid survey to assess current status of the species, followed by periodic monitoring; b) special attention to cases of mortality at all stages – detection, investigation and prosecution – and enlisting the support of all concerned for this purpose; c) awareness campaign to spread the message widely and to mobilise public support; and d) removal of the legal loophole in respect of dealing in peacock tail feathers.

NBWL approved a rapid survey to assess the current status of the species and periodic monitoring and appropriate protection measures.

Conservation of Red Junglefowl

The following was proposed:-

i) Awareness campaign to generate proper appreciation and understanding of the special importance of the species; ii) rapid scientific surveys to determine the current status of the species in the country and also to identify prime areas likely to have pure wild birds; iii) molecular genetic studies to assess purity of the gene stock in the identified habitats - on a selective basis; iv) field action to ensure utmost protection to the remaining population of the species and its natural habitats, alongwith regular monitoring of the prime areas; and v) further research and studies to address the gap areas, specially distribution and ecology of the species.

NBWL approved the constitution of a specialist group to prepare an action plan for the conservation of the Red Junglefowl.

Community based conservation of Galliformes in the Gori Basin

The Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat (Village Forest Council) is located near Munsiri in Pithoragarh district of Uttaranchal, close to the trijunction of India, Nepal and Tibet. A self-initiated effort by the Van Panchayat to conserve the great diversity of Galliformes within the village forest and the adjoining reserve forest began in 2004. The village forest has about 34 hectares for a population of over 300 households. An underlying objective is to attract wilderness bound tourists, which should bring enhanced income to the community through non-extractive uses, like employment as trekking and nature guides and through a home-stay programme run by the Van Panchayat. Conservation of the habitat would also result in more stable water supply to the villagers through the springs charged within the village forest and the adjoining forest area.

A project proposal to support this initiative was put forward jointly by the World Pheasant Association - India and the Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and received approval in April 2006. An update on the activities undertaken by the Van Panchayat under the project in the past two months is given below:

First of all, the partnership of the State Forest Department was solicited for the project. The Chief Wildlife Warden of Uttaranchal was approached by the President, WPA-India, and the necessary consent letter was obtained. Simultaneously, concerned the local officials have been contacted for their help and support.

The more notable development is the establishment of the Nature Interpretation Centre in Sarmoli village, which was formally inaugurated by the Chief Conservator of Forests, Kumaon. While the Centre will build up its displays and resources gradually, presently it has literature on galliformes conservation efforts in Himachal Pradesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, other useful material including some posters created by the project as well as those from WPA-India, and some objects of interest from the area, such as feathers of various galliformes, fossils and medicinal plants.

A field survey was undertaken in the spring of 2006 to collect data on the presence-absence, as well as species distribution, of the Galliformes in the project area. This was done in three forays in April and May 2006. In view of various constraints, the whole project area could not be sampled and surveyed in one season. Also, in view of some prior knowledge of the terrain and bird distribution, a stratified sample design was preferred, weighting those portions known to be relatively richer in species and those for population concentrations, and also providing for representation of altitude and aspect gradients. The areas more intensively used by humans and their livestock were included. The estimations are planned to be done progressively over successive seasons in the entire project area in phases.

The objective of the survey was to get a baseline estimate of which species of pheasants and partridges inhabit sections of the project area, where they are to be found, and the present description and status of their habitat. Also, a reliable list of the other avian co-inhabitants of the landscape has been attempted. The methods employed were dawn call counts for three galliformes species, namely *Tragopan satyra*, *Pucrasia macrolopha* and *Arborophila torqueola*, since the males of these species, *inter alia*, call at dawn during the mating season. Walk transects were also undertaken for sightings and other signs, such as droppings for the other species seen earlier in the project area namely, *Tetraugallus himalayensis*, *Lerwa lerwa*, *Lophophorus impejanus*, *Catreus wallichii*, *Lophura leucomelanos*, *Alectoris chukar* and *Francolinus francolinus*.

Efforts to identify and quantify the disturbing factors have also been made. The human induced disturbance ranges from depredation of brooding hens and eggs to seasonal hunting, collection of *Chimnobambusa jaunsarensis* bamboo, which *Tragopan satyra* and *Lophophorus impejanus* depend on critically in winter. Heavy seasonal grazing by buffaloes in the sub-alpine forest as well as by sheep and goats in the alpine pastures, as well as the collection of lichens, are the other major factors.

- **Malika Viridi, Sarpanch, Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat**

Western Tragopan in Uttaranchal

Western tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) is among the rarest pheasants in the world, with a world population of less than 5000 individuals. It is known to occur from northwest Pakistan through Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and eastern part of Uttaranchal. However the exact position of the eastern limit is quite unclear, with no recent records east of Govind National Park in the Tons river catchment. Hume and Marshall mentioned that this species was found till Tehri District, particularly the ridge dividing Balganga and Bhilingna valleys, while Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley placed the distribution limit through the entire Garhwal region and doubtfully also into Kumaon. The general perception so far has been that the species does not range east of Alaknanda river, beyond which its congener Satyr tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*) is found. It is to be noted that there are unconfirmed reports of sympatric occurrence of both the species in some localities. The latest confirmed record of the Western Tragopan east of Tons catchments and these observations correspond somewhat to the historical treatment of the species distribution limit. Further survey to be carried out in the Kumaon region next year, combined with GIS based analysis, would hopefully provide a clearer idea on the distribution status of these two species in Uttaranchal.

(K. Ramesh)

Key Areas Project: recent surveys in Garhwal region of Uttarakhand

A collaborative research project titled “Key Areas Project” was initiated in Uttarakhand last year. The collaboration is between WPA, WPA-India and the Wildlife Institute of India. The State Forest Department is facilitating project implementation.

The project aims to map distribution of Galliform species (Pheasants, Partridges and Quails) and to identify key areas for their conservation in north-west India based on extensive field surveys, remote sensing and GIS. The outcome of the project, besides providing latest information on species, is expected to give valuable insights on the role of Protected Areas and other aspects specific to galliformes conservation. It is also intended to identify new areas of conservation significance for special attention.

Under this project, I surveyed the Garhwal region this summer, primarily in the upper temperate zone and the alpine meadows. I set off from Bhilingna valley (Tehri District), which is said to be the eastern-most limit of the Western Tragopan. There have been no recent reports of the species beyond the Tons river bordering Himachal Pradesh. Moving westwards through Balganga, Dharamganga and Bhagirathi valleys, I surveyed till Hanumanchatti in the Yamuna catchments, covering ca. 300km on foot. It was a revelation that regardless of protection status, several sites in the higher areas of Garhwal region contain substantial populations of pheasants and partridges.

In the Bhilingna valley from Ghuttu village and up to Rajkhark (above Panwali Kantha), I counted over a dozen Himalayan Monal, including two individuals of dark form on two different occasions (these are a variant of the Himalayan Monal known previously in Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh)*. Further west in Dharmganga, Pilang and Bhagirathi valleys, these birds were more numerous, but the area between Dhayara and Shiyari (towards Gidara) meadows had the maximum of ca. 20, dominated by males feeding on the meadows. Females were more secretive as most of them were likely on brood. I also spotted a female with four chicks in the forest below Manji (which is on way to Dodi Tal).

Cheer pheasant was heard in two places in Pilang valley, where extensive suitable habitat is available to the species. According to local people, this species survives in good numbers in several localities, including some interior areas in Genwali (above Budha Kedar), an unknown locality for this bird. The slopes along the Yamuna river between Hanumanchatti and Jankichatti are also reported to contain this species. With the help of sporadic records and empirical data available, other areas of distribution could be identified based on species-habitat association analysis.

Koklass and Common Hill Partridge were heard all along the surveyed areas. However, there was a settled difference in the abundance and habitat association of these species. Abundance of Hill Partridge was relatively high in mixed broadleaf forest dominated by Maple, Prunus and Kharsu Oak, and quite a few of them called even through the day-time.

In the lower areas, it was intriguing to observe the variation in the distribution patterns of Black Francolin and Kalij Pheasant. Agriculture expansion along the valley is common in the hills, and this has been impacting Kalij habitat. However, the modified areas still contain scattered bushes that which attract the Black Francolin which I could hear in most places above 2000m. These species were observed to be quite common all along the lower areas.

The highlight of the survey has been the virtual re-discovery of the Western Tragopan in areas where it was not reported for several decades. I sighted a male of the species in the mixed broadleaf forest in Panwali Kantha (Bhilingna valley), Tehri District, and heard typical breeding and alarm calls of the bird in Uttarkashi Forest Division, specifically in Genwali, Belak forest, Pilang valley and the forest above Dodi Tal. This should provide a new insight to the distribution limit of the species and would help clear uncertainty over its occurrence east of the Tons river catchment. Local people also confirmed its occurrence in most places and called this species variously as *Jungle monal*, *Jud Monal* (Snowcock is also known by this name), *Jeyar*, etc.

It is necessary that the Forest Department instruct all its field staff in Tehri, Uttarkashi, Yamuna, and Tons Forest Divisions, as well as the management of Govind Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park to make careful observations and to gather all necessary information about the bird, specially by interviewing the local people and targeted field surveys. This would serve the dual purpose of assessing population status and creating awareness among the staff as well as the local people of the significance of this globally important species.

- K. Ramesh

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* Individual variation is seen in some males, which lack white on the lower back, replaced by black feathers and the upper part is extensively green, which apparently in some individuals is purple. They are not known to form a distinct population, but individuals of this variant has been recorded in some Himalayan Monal populations in Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh.

The Tragopan Quartet

Pheasants are easily among the most spectacular birds of the world. Altogether, there are about 50 pheasant species, out of which 17 are found in India. Hence, India is very rich in this respect and certainly highly important for the conservation of this aspect of biological diversity.

An added dimension, not well known and understood, is the fact that India is the home of four out of five *Tragopans*, which makes it the only country in the world with such amazing natural endowment. These birds are essentially Asian pheasants of the genus *Tragopan* having five distinctive species. They are all stockily built, have short and stout bills, blunt tails and look quite neat and compact. The males sport fleshy horns on their heads that become fully erect during courtship displays. For this reason, these birds are also known as 'Horned Pheasants'. In the Greek language, *Tragos* means the male goat, and *Pan* stands for a Roman mythical figure half-man / half-goat. So, the Tragopan name is derived by combining these two words. Overall, the Tragopan males are pretty looking birds, very striking in appearance, mainly on account of the bright red, scarlet or flaming orange colours that dominate the plumage and the distinct white spots that cover most parts of their bodies.

The four Tragopan species found in India are the Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*), Satyr Tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*), Blyth's Tragopan (*Tragopan blythii*) and Temminck's Tragopan (*Tragopan temminckii*). The fifth species of the genus is called the Cabot's Tragopan (*Tragopan caboti*), which is found only in southeast China. It is not as attractive as the four species mentioned above. Besides, while these four are essentially Himalayan birds that inhabit high altitudes ranging from about 2000 to 4000 meters, the Cabot's Tragopan prefers evergreen and mixed forests at much lower altitudes around 1400-1500 meters.

The Western Tragopan, as the name denotes, is a bird of the Western Himalaya and is also known as the Western Horned Pheasant. Its current range extends from the northern parts of Pakistan to Kashmir, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh in India. Earlier it may have occurred further east up to the Kumaon region in Uttaranchal State. During summer, the bird moves up to altitudes as high as 3600 meters and in winter it descends to areas at even 1400-1500 meters. It prefers well-wooded areas having Oak and Conifer trees, along with heavy undercover, in and near precipitous mountainsides. In view of this and also because of its very wary nature, sighting of the bird

is indeed a difficult proposition. The female of the species is mottled brown, streaked, with white spots, and very dull as compared to the highly attractive male having blackish under- and upper-parts, contrasting with a scarlet nape, an orange-red breast, a prominent red patch around each eye, bluish horns and white spots all over the body. Another distinguishing feature of the male is its pink and purple blue bib-like throat skin that gets inflated during courtship display. Overall, the Western Tragopan is much darker than the other Tragopan species and has a very striking appearance. No wonder it is fondly called 'Jujurana' in Himachal Pradesh, which means 'King among Birds'.

There is, as yet, no definite estimate of the total population of the Western Tragopan. Rough calculations place the total figure at less than five thousand birds and it is fairly clear that the population has been declining due to habitat loss and other factors. In view of this and also because of the restricted range of the species, it is listed by the experts as 'vulnerable' and hence deserves very special attention. It is also noteworthy that efforts to breed the species in captivity in India and elsewhere have, so far, met with very limited success.

The Satyr Tragopan, also called the Crimson Horned Pheasant or Crimson Tragopan, is essentially located in the Central Himalaya, but also extends into the Eastern Himalaya. Thus, it has a fairly wide range covering the States of Uttaranchal, Sikkim, West Bengal (northern region) and Arunachal Pradesh in India as well as Nepal and Bhutan. According to seasons, it moves from around 2000 meters in winter to about 4000 meters during summer. It is considered more numerous than the other Tragopans in the country, though exact estimates of the total population are not available. The male of the species is again very attractive and distinctive in its habitat. Its neck and under-parts are bright red or crimson, the upper-parts are brownish and the numerous round white spots extend up to the tail. The bluish fleshy horns and the bib-like throat skin also stand out. The female is smaller, largely rufous-brown and lacklustre, except for the whitish spotting on the under-parts and the blue orbital skin. Captive breeding of the species has been undertaken in some European countries with some success.

The Blyth's Tragopan is known to have two subspecies: *Tragopan blythii blythii* found in India (Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram), China and Myanmar, and *Tragopan blythii molesworthi*

found in Bhutan and perhaps some adjoining parts of Arunachal Pradesh. Both sub-species inhabit areas at altitudes ranging from 1500 to 3000 meters depending on the season and prefer steep, well-wooded terrain. However, with the habitats having shrunk or becoming fragmented over the years, the species as such has certainly become rare. Hence, it is also placed by the experts in the 'vulnerable' category and merits special attention. As with the other Tragopans, the male of the species stands out, mainly on account of its typical white-spotted orange-red plumage and bright yellow facial skin and bib-like lappets (throat skin). Another distinguishing feature is that the under-parts are largely plain grey, which has given the bird the name of the Grey-bellied Tragopan also. The female is mostly grey brown, mottled and also has white spots and yellow orbital skin.

Nagaland has declared the Blyth's Tragopan as its State Bird. It is also noteworthy that a few local communities in the State have taken the initiative of setting aside specific forest areas for the conservation of this species and these have been declared as Tragopan Sanctuaries. This is commendable and deserves all possible encouragement and support. Earlier, Nagaland was also able to achieve some success in captive breeding of these birds, but these efforts have not been sustained. The same applies to efforts made elsewhere, mostly in Europe.

Finally, the Temminck's Tragopan, which is found only in Arunachal Pradesh in India but has a fairly wide distribution in China and also occurs in Myanmar. It is also called the Chinese Crimson Horned Pheasant. Among the Tragopans, it is the most widespread and numerous, though its status in India is indeterminate and not much is known about the species. This is mainly on account of the remote and inaccessible terrain as well as the high altitudes where the species occurs. Its range varies from around 4200 meters during summer to about 2000 meters in winter. In appearance, Temminck's is much like the Satyr Tragopan and, in a sense, its eastern counterpart. However, the male of Temminck's is brighter red in the upper-parts, apart from having a distinct orange collar and pale grey streak-spots from the breast downwards. Besides, its facial skin is more cobalt blue and the lappets are larger than those of other Tragopans. No doubt, the dominant feature is the white-spotted red plumage, as in most Tragopan males.

It is worth mentioning that Arunachal Pradesh has the unique distinction of being the home of three Tragopan species: Blyth's, Satyr and Temminck's. No other region in the world, the size of this State, can claim this distinction. Another totally unique feature is that within

Arunachal Pradesh there is an area in the West Kameng District bordering Bhutan from where all these three species have been reported.

The Tragopan species have some common characteristics that are worth mentioning. For instance, they are largely arboreal, which means that they frequent trees and even nest there. Sometimes they even use the nests of other birds. In this respect, the Tragopans are rather different from the other pheasants. Another common trait relates to their diet preference. The Tragopans are essentially vegetarian and clearly prefer seeds, grasses, leaves, berries, fruits, and other green stuff, though occasionally they also partake of small insects. Perhaps the most interesting feature concerns the courtship displays of the Tragopan males. As already mentioned, the males of all the species have fleshy erectile horns on their heads and colourful bib-like throat skin or lappets. These get greatly inflated during the courtship display of the male, when the bird looks somewhat like a knight in armour. The sight of the fully enlarged lappets and the horns fully erect is truly amazing and has to be seen to be believed. Interestingly, the male has to get behind some small structure, such as a small rock or boulder or a log of wood, at some distance from the female, and then, from behind that structure, the amazing show is put on to attract the female. The existence of such conditions is crucial for the successful breeding of these birds, according to Dr. John Corder, International Vice President of WPA, whose expertise in the subject is well recognised.

Undoubtedly, the Tragopans are very special creatures that stand in a class of their own. And, India is certainly fortunate to have four out of a possible five species of this group of birds. All the more reason to devote the fullest care and attention to ensure their conservation for posterity.

- Samar Singh, President,
World Pheasant Association – India.

Mr. Mir Inayet Ullah, former Principal Chief Conservator and CWLW of J&K, visited the office of WPA-India in Delhi on 28 April 2006 and had discussions with the President, WPA-India. He has agreed to be the Senior Advisor to WPA-India specially for J&K matters.

Tragopans and Tribals - A Naga Transformation

Nestled within one of the most beautiful mountain landscapes in Kohima district of Nagaland is a settlement of *Angami* tribals. This region was till recently subject to intense hunting pressure. In the mid-1990s, a local resident Tsilie Sakhrie, and a forest officer by the name of T. Angami (originally from the village) came up with the idea of protecting some forests that still contained significant wildlife. In particular, they hoped to protect the threatened Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*.

After a series of consultations, the Village Council in 1998 declared 20 sq. km. of forest and grassland as the **Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary**. Rules were formulated to ban hunting and to stop all resource use in the sanctuary area. The idea was to use the buffer area for community needs. A Trust was set up and over the past few years, with help from a local NGO and others, a tourism master plan was written to earn income without causing ecological damage. This also resulted in a village clean up that ushered in better sanitation and hygiene. A proposal is now being mooted to extend the sanctuary area and discussions are being held with neighbouring villages to protect the entire Dzukou Valley. This would conserve 200 sq. km. of a very unique habitat, along with several endemic and threatened species.

In 2004, the Chakhasang Public Organisation (CPO) comprising 80 villages in the Phek district of Nagaland, resolved to prevent indiscriminate forest fires and to ban hunting seasonally in their respective areas. Prior to this, 23 Chakhasang tribal villages had declared part of their lands as strictly protected for wildlife. In the nearby Kohima district, many *Angami* and *Rangma* tribal villages (such as Khonoma, Tuophema and Sendenui) instituted similar prohibitions. In Chishiling village in the Zonheboto district, residents banned hunting in a designated forest area in 1995, and stopped all use of explosives in the Tizu river to reverse fish declines. In the same district, the Ghosu Bird Reserve was among the first community Protected Area to be declared.

These are examples of a remarkable revolution taking place in this usually forgotten corner of India. Most of us believe that in the north-east everything that flies, walks, or crawls is hunted. This reputation is not entirely undeserved. In this context, community conservation initiatives in Nagaland are of tremendous significance since 88 per cent of Nagaland's forests belong to communities or individuals, rather than the government as in other parts of mainland India.

- Ashish Kothari and Neema Pathak (Full article in Sanctuary Asia - October 2005)

Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*)

Jujurana, King of the Birds, is what the locals call the Western Tragopan in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh (HP). According to the legend, God created this colorful pheasant with the help of the most beautiful feathers of each bird in the world. The name reflects the grandeur and beauty of Western Tragopan and the reverence it enjoys among the local villagers. It is known as Pyara in Kinnaur; Jyazi in Bushahr and Fulgar in Chamba and Kangra districts. The distribution of the Western Tragopan is limited to Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and parts of Pakistan. Its confirmed eastern limit of distribution is Himachal-Uttar Pradesh boundary at the junction of Kinnaur (HP) and Uttarkashi (UA) districts. This Western Tragopan has been well documented in the Great Himalayan National Park, Rupi-Bhaba and Daranghati Wildlife sanctuary in HP.

The latest reports of Western Tragopan sightings come from the surveys in Sutlaj and Beas river catchments. The Thar Jot site, near Drangahti Sanctuary, east of the Sutlej river, is the first definite site reporting Western Tragopan in over 30 years. The Thar Jot area has primeval forest of deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), fir (*Abies pindrow*), and spruce (*Picea smithiana*), with a thick under storey of ringal bamboo (*Arundinaria*

fulcata). This is a typical Western Tragopan habitat between 2500 and 3300m altitude which does not appear to tolerate outside disturbances. These habitats now primarily exist in very interior forests of HP, most of which are part of the protected areas. The local communities also know Western Tragopan as 'sing wals panchi' or the Western Horned Tragopan. The Sarahan Bushahr Pheasantry, in Shimla district, has the only existing breeding pair of Western Tragopan in captivity anywhere in the world. The Great Himalayan National Park offers a natural habitat to protect this rare and endangered species.

Source: Director, GHNP

The School of Environmental Studies in Delhi University organized a teachers training programme in March 2006. The President, WPA-India, was invited to take separate sessions - one on the Tiger crisis in the country and the other on the Pheasants of India. Both these talks evoked considerable interest among the participants.

Projects Update

* **Wildlife and Floristic Studies in Allain-Duhangan Catchments, HP (Funded by ERM India)**

All field work has been completed and reports are in hand. The final report is under compilation.

* **Survey of animal use extraction pattern in some areas of Indian Himalaya (Funded by BHC)** - The project was completed and final report submitted to the British High Commission in October 2005.

* **Effect of pesticide use on Blue Peafowl and Grey Francolin in Central India (Funded by MoEF)** - This is the second year of the project and field work is in progress. The report for the past year was submitted to Ministry of Environment and Forests. The next report is under preparation.

* **Community based conservation of Galliformes in the Gori Basin, Uttaranchal (Funded by MoEF)** - The project was sanctioned in September 2005, but the first instalment was received on 31 March 2006. Hence, project work has just commenced in collaboration with the Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat, Munsiri.

* **Key Areas Project (Funded by WPA)** - Field work in Uttaranchal is in progress. The project is being handled by the Investigator Dr. K. Ramesh based at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

* **Himachal Pradesh Pheasant Conservation Project** - There has been no progress regarding this project and the matter is pending with the State Government. Efforts continuing to get the project approved as early as possible.

The following **new project proposals** have been prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the British High Commission (BHC):-

- * Development of Strategy and Conservation Action Plans for Key Areas.
- * Study on the status, distribution & related conservation aspects of the Pheasants of Sikkim with special reference to Blood Pheasant (*Ithaginis cruentus*)
- * Study on the status, distribution & conservation issues of the Pheasants of Western Arunachal Districts (East Kameng, West Kameng & Tawang)

The Nicobar Megapode

The Tsunami, which occurred on 26th December 2006, hit badly the Nicobar group of islands. As a result approximately 70% of the megapode population has declined and their current status was assessed as 788 breeding pairs in the coastal regions. It is assumed that the 20% of populations believed to be living in the interior forests were not affected by the tsunami. The total coastal population of *M. n. abbotti* was 594 breeding pairs and the population of *M. n. nicobariensis* was 194 breeding pairs. The Nicobar Megapode is locally extinct from the Megapode Island Wildlife Sanctuary and Trax island. It is believed that the tsunami waves could have killed or washed away majority of coastal mounds and birds of *M. n. abbotti*. However, the population of *M. n. nicobariensis* declined before the tsunami, most probably due to hunting and habitat destruction.

Post-tsunami rehabilitation process is also posing a major threat to the Nicobar Megapode, as most of their habitats are targeted for plantations and settlements. Regulation in the plantation programme, improving the wildlife protection methods and conservation awareness programme through the tribal captains should help the recovery of the species.

- Dr. K. Sivakumar, Scientist, Wildlife Institute of India
(The full article will appear in the next issue)

First Peafowl Reserve

The first Peafowl Reserve in the country has been declared in Dungarpur, Rajasthan. This reserve has area of about 300 hectares owned by the Dungarpur royal family. Work on estimation of birds and study of bird ecology is in progress.

Breaking News!

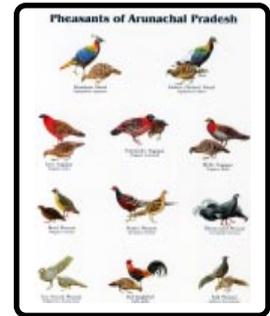
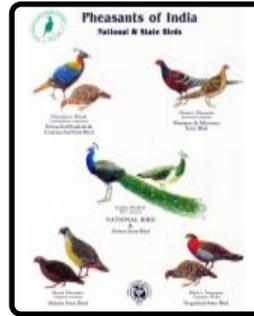
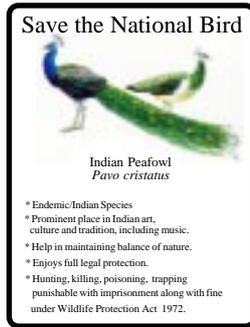
Just as this issue was going for publication, Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhary sent the exciting news of the very recent sighting of the highly elusive and vulnerable Manipur Bush Quail *Perdica manipurensis* in Manas National Park (Panbari Range area), Assam. It is noteworthy that the bird had not been sighted since 1932.

Full story will appear in the next issue.

Resource Material - available on request

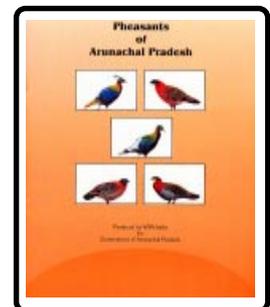
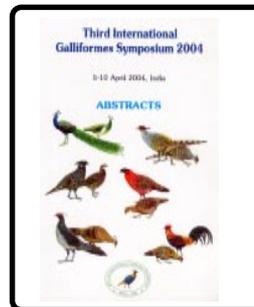
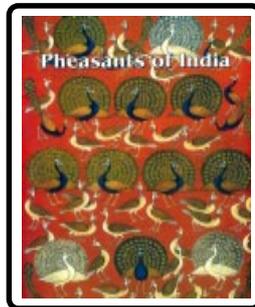
Posters

- Pheasants of India
- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Uttarakhand
- Pheasants of Assam
- Pheasants of J&K
- Pheasants of Sikkim
- Pheasants of Nagaland
- Pheasants of West Bengal
- National and State Birds
- Save the National Bird
- Himalayan Monal



Booklets

- Pheasants of India
- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Third International Galliformes Symposium Abstracts
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh



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