

# Mor

*Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India*



## Editorial

First of all, I extend best wishes for the New Year to all WPA-India members and readers of **Mor**.

As reported in the July issue, one of the rarest Galliformes - the Manipur Bush Quail - was sighted in June 2006 after a very long time. Efforts are being made to confirm the sighting during the open season. Meanwhile, this issue of **Mor** provides relevant information about the bird. This is in keeping with the effort to focus each issue of **Mor** on specific species.

As mentioned earlier, the success of our newsletter depends on the support and feedback received from the members and readers. Hence, I request all concerned to send news and articles for the future issues.

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Eminent Scientist

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## **Fourth International Galliformes Symspoium**

Third International Galliformes Symposium was held in India during April 2004. Fourth International Galliformes Symspoium will be held at Chengdu and Wolong National Nature Reserve, Sichuan, China, on 14-21 October 2007. Further details are awaited from the WPA Hqts. in UK.

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### **Roster of Scientists**

A roster of scientists who have done substantive work on Indian Galliformes is under preparation. All concerned are requested to provide details to WPA-India Office at the earliest (wpaindia@hathway.com, Phone No.: 011 - 26963082).

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### **Arunachal Pradesh**

Addl. PCCF (Wildlife), Arunachal Pradesh, Shri K.D. Singh, visited WPA-India office on 11 November 2006 and met the President, WPA-India. The discussion related to reviving the Pheasant Conservation Programme in Arunachal Pradesh, which was launched in 2002 at the initiative of WPA-India. Another matter discussed was regarding the reintroduction of the Blue Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), the National Bird, in Arunachal Pradesh. It is note worthy that Arunachal Pradesh is the only region in the world having 11 pheasant species out of a total of about 50 species in the world. The reintroduction of Blue Peafowl would bring further credit to Arunachal Pradesh.

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### **Peacock Conservation Reserve in Ganjam (Orissa)**

A new Peacock Conservation Reserve has been proposed by the Ganjam Mayur Suraksha Samiti (GMSS) near Aska in Ganjam district of Orissa State. The GMSS is a local NGO which has been playing a key role in the protection of the National Bird.

*Source: The Pioneer, 12 October 2006.*

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## ANNUAL REPORT 2005-06

The past year was devoted mainly to consolidating the work and initiatives undertaken in the previous two years. The year also witnessed some changes in the composition of the WPA-India Governing Board at the election conducted during the meeting of the WPA-India General Body held on 1 October 2005. While Shri Samar Singh and Shri D.K. Chetsingh were re-elected as President and Hon. Treasurer respectively, the vacant position of General Secretary was filled by the appointment of Dr. A. J. Urfi, Reader & Head of the Department of Environmental Biology, University of Delhi. The full composition of the newly elected Governing Board is given at the end of the report.

The General Body approved some changes regarding membership fee structure etc. to facilitate the membership drive and wider participation. This has resulted in some increase in both the individual and institutional categories. With a view of improve communication and dissemination of information, regularity in bringing out the newsletter titled **Mor** has been ensured.

With a view to focus on important conservation issues, proposals for revision of schedules to the Wildlife Protection Act for certain pheasant species and conservation of the Indian Peafowl (National Bird) and the Red Junglefowl were put forward to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the National Board for Wildlife chaired by the Prime Minister. The President, WPA-India is member of the Board and it is hoped that these matters will receive support of the apex national body at the next meeting to be held very soon.

### Networking & Partnerships

Collaboration with partner institutions, viz. the Wildlife Institute of India, Bombay History Natural Society, Centre for Environment Education, Central Zoo Authority, National Zoological Park and others has been strengthened. During the year, support of the Power Grid Corporation of India, the largest public utility of its type in the country,

was enlisted for the campaign 'Save the National Bird'. Likewise, efforts to enlist the support of the Indian Army are continuing.

In pursuance of the MoU concluded between the WPA-India and Wildlife Institute of India, the progress made is given below:

### 1. Training Programme for field researchers/ front line staff

In the Annual Work Programme of the WII for the current year (2006-07), a training programme for field researchers/front line staff on techniques relevant to galliform abundance estimation, monitoring and captive management in collaboration with the State Forest Departments (Jammu & Kashmir /Himachal Pradesh /Uttaranchal /Sikkim /Arunchal Pradesh), Central Zoo Authority (CZA) and WPA-India, has been proposed. This programme will be conducted on receiving funding support. In WII's regular training courses (Diploma, Certificate & M.Sc.), sensitizing of officer trainees and students on galliforme conservation and providing teaching/training inputs on techniques related to galliform conservation and management has been a regular feature.

### 2. Bibliography on Galliformes

Over 250 references with abstracts on Galliformes have been compiled at the WII Library and Documentation Centre in a software and indexing is currently underway. This bibliography will be completed soon.

### 3. Separate Section in WII Library on Galliformes

This arrangement already exists in the WII Library and the books/reports related to Galliformes are placed in a separate section under the Ornithology and Birds Section.

### 4. ENVIS Issue on Galliformes

WII will be bringing out its next special issue of ENVIS exclusively on Galliformes Conservation in India. This issue will cover all aspects of galliformes conservation in India, including reports from concerned states.

## Field Projects

As regards field projects, the progress is briefly given below:

1). **Wildlife and Floristic Studies in Allain-Duhangan catchments, Himachal Pradesh (Funded by ERM India).** All field work has been completed and reports are in hand. The final report is under compilation.

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

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

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

5). **Key Areas Project (Funded by WPA International)** 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.

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

## New Project Proposals

The following 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 the Blood Pheasant (*Ithaginis cruentus*)

\* Study on the status, distribution & conservation issues of the Pheasants in Districts in Western Arunachal Pradesh (East Kameng, West Kameng & Tawang Districts).

Efforts are also being made to mobilize funding support from other sources, such as the CEPF.

## Membership

At the start of the year, the total membership of WPA-India stood at 80. The break-up is given below:

Life Members	: 38
Institutional Members	: 4
Annual Members	: 38

Efforts to enrol new members are continuing and it is expected that with the recent changes in the membership structure and fees, there will be improvement in the future.

Following the closure of the South Asia Field Office (SAFO), the office of WPA-India was located at K-5, Green Park, New Delhi. However, from January 2006 this office has been shifted to another suitable central location at D-2, Hauz Khas, New Delhi

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*(The Annual Report was presented at the Annual Meeting of WPA-India General Body held in New Delhi on 14 October 2006)*

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## Manipur Bush-Quail spotted in Manas – a rare rediscovery

Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury

Deputy Commissioner, Baksa (Assam) and Regional Representative of WPA-India

Manipur Bush-Quail (*Perdicula manipurensis*), one of the rarest galliformes, which is listed as a globally threatened species, was rediscovered in the little explored Panbari Range area of Manas National Park in Assam on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2006. I was on an official visit with Ritesh Bhattacharjee, Park Deputy Director, when we flushed a bird twice and then could observe it for a few seconds on a slightly clearer ground. The last authentic record of the Manipur Bush-Quail from Assam was from Mornoi, Goalpara (in present Kokrajhar district) in 1907, while in its entire range it has not been seen since 1932.

Due to the devastating floods of 2004, the Embankment & Drainage Department had to undertake some works along the Manas river, in and outside the Manas National Park, a world heritage. As Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate, I had to inspect the same. One such work had to be inspected in June when usually access to the interior areas in Assam is extremely difficult due to monsoon rain.

At 2.20 pm we left Gabhorukunda river and around 2.30 pm a quail was flushed, which flew in front of our vehicle for about 15-16 metres and again dropped among the grass on the middle of the road (fortunately for us, as most birds flew either left or right). The bird took off again and flew for another 15-16 metres confirming that it was Manipur Bush-Quail. That time it did not drop on the middle of the road but on the track (small clearing) that was made by the wheels of vehicles and then turned right. It stopped for about 3-4 seconds giving me enough time to see its side view with contrasting grey and buff colour. Under-parts, from lower breast, was buff. The sex could not be determined as the first two views were from behind and the third time I concentrated on the body, thus missing the details of the head. It then quickly vanished among three m high grass. By July-August, these grasses would reach 4-5 m height. The elevation of the place was above 200 metres a.s.l.

My search for this rare and elusive bird mainly in the grasslands of Kaziranga and Dibru-Saikhowa ended in failure. The local villagers and fishermen call all the quails by the same general name as 'bota chorai'. Moreover, they could hardly see the birds in details. Hence, after seeing the visuals of Manipur Bush-Quail and other quails, they were confused. In Manipur valley, all the recent reports of capture of "Manipur Bush-Quail" through crude snares by the villagers were Rain Quails. The past recorded sites at Mornoi and Baladan indicated that the Manipur Bush-Quail prefers grassland on slightly higher grounds than those on the floodplains.

Efforts to confirm the rare sighting will be resumed in the open season with much excitement and expectation. The support of WPA is being sought.

## MANIPUR BUSH-QUAIL *Perdicula manipurensis*

Extracts from: *Threatened Birds of Asia: The BirdLife International Red Data Book*(2001)

*This poorly known species's specialised habitat is undergoing a continuing rapid decline and severe fragmentation, pressures that are assumed to be causing a decline. In addition, there have been no confirmed records of the bird since 1932, indicating it may have a small population. These factors, combined with ongoing hunting pressures across its range, qualify it as **Vulnerable**.*

**DISTRIBUTION** - The Manipur Bush-quail is distributed in the duars from West Bengal to Assam north of the Brahmaputra river (*inglisi*), and the hills south of the Brahmaputra from Assam (in Cachar) to Manipur. It has been speculated that it occurs in Bangladesh, in Sylhet district, and north Mymensingh, Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. There is no confirmed record for Bangladesh, and the species is best treated as an Indian endemic.

Acceptable records are from West Bengal, Assam and Manipur. It was also listed for the Khasi hills (Meghalaya) and Naga hills (Nagaland), although there is no firm evidence for this assertion. It has been recorded from the eastern foothills of Manipur.

**POPULATION** - Estimation of the Manipur Bush-quail's population is hampered by an absence of data. Early hunting records give some indication of its historical abundance, but the cessation of these published hunting reports and the infrequency with which fieldwork is now undertaken in its range has resulted in a total lack of confirmed records since 1932.

On the Mornai tea estate, Assam, the species was "the commonest quail", albeit "seldom seen" and "excessively local"; in March it was apparently sometimes "exceedingly plentiful", with up to eight shot in a morning (Ogilvie-Grant 1909). However, there have been no records of the race *inglisi* since the nineteenth century in West Bengal and since 1907 in Assam, and its current status is unknown.

The nominate race was originally believed to be scarce in Manipur (and possibly an "accidental straggler from further east") as only two coveys of 5-6 were found (and these in one 3 km<sup>2</sup> patch of grass on one day) during many months spent in the state, including much effort targeting similar patches of habitat in search of the species; moreover, local people were reported to be unfamiliar with it (*Stray Feathers* 9 [1881]: 461-471). Subsequently, however, a report of 80 birds shot in seven years (Wood 1899), and then 190 shot between 1910 and 1932, including 14 in March 1917, and 42 in 1918-1919 (Higgins 1933-1934), suggested that the species was native to Manipur and indeed locally fairly common. Of the 190 birds reported by Higgins (1933-1934), 93 were shot in 13 years (1920—1933) (including, however, 17 shot in one day, March 1926, and 13 shot in one day, March 1929), while the same total number was shot in only four years from 1915-1919, suggesting that the species was "getting scarcer". This decline was thought to have been a result of agricultural intensification (Higgins 1933-1934), although hunting would also seem a plausible contributory cause. Baker (1922-1930) stated that it was "not uncommon" in eastern Cachar, near the border with Manipur. There have been no reports of the nominate race since 1932, although previous strongholds have received very little study.

**ECOLOGY** – Habitat: The ecology of the Manipur Bush-quail is poorly known, with all information from historical sources. It inhabits damp grasslands up to c.1,000 m (Ripley, 1982) and has been encountered in large stretches of dense elephant grass up to 5 m tall, in grassland dominated by *Erianthus ravaneae*. Birds were often found close to water, especially in grassland adjoining small streams and bogs, moving to grassland on higher ground when these swampy valleys became inundated during the wet season (Wood 1899, Ogilvie-Grant 1909, Higgins 1933-1934). In Manipur the species apparently shared habitat preferences with the Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*, Wood (1899) going as far as to state that "where one is found the other is in the locality". Coveys have been recorded feeding in the open, particularly on burnt grasslands early in the day or throughout the day in overcast weather (Turner 1899, Wood 1899, Inglis 1910). The species appears to be shy and extremely reluctant to fly generally remaining inside dense patches of tall elephant grass ("elephant grass" being a generic term for tall grassland) (*Stray Feathers* 9 [1881]: 461-471). For these reasons it was "very, very seldom seen" and then normally at daybreak when it ventured into shorter grass at the edges of tall grass, quickly scuttling into cover

when disturbed (*Stray Feathers* 9 [1881]: 461-471). The species was usually found in groups, with group-size recorded as 4-6 birds, rising to 6-12 during March and April in the Bhutan duars (Inglis 1910), and as 6-8 birds in Manipur (Wood 1899). Females possibly outnumbered males (Inglis 1910).

**Food:** The diet includes seeds (or “grass seeds”) and berries, roots and small insects such as ants (Inglis 1910. Baker 1922-1930). The stomachs of birds taken in Manipur contained grass seeds, wild lentils and ants along with what appeared to be the wing-cases of a beetle? (*Stray Feathers* 9 [1881]: 461-47L). A female kept in captivity ate various small seeds and spiders, flies, caterpillars and wasp larvae, but avoided beetles and cockroaches (Powell Connor 1908).

**Breeding:** The nest is a simple hollow scraped in the ground, lacking any structure and sometimes with a few “oddments of leaves and grass lying in it” (Wood 1899, Baker 1932--1935). Baker (1922-1930. 1932-1935) found a nest in May in a large area of short grass (0.6 m high) on the summit of a hill surrounded by evergreen forest in North Cachar. In the Bhutan duars adults showed signs of breeding at the beginning of March, and a fully fledged juvenile was obtained on 11 January (Ogilvie-Grant 1909).

Migration: Wood (1899) only saw birds “at certain times of the year, during the rains and before the jungle fires”; however, this probably relates to times when birds were more visible, rather than to migratory movements, and the view that the species is probably resident (Ripley 1982) seems sound.

**THREATS** - Although little is known about the status of the Manipur Bush-quail, it is undoubtedly threatened by the considerable declines in the extent and quality of grassland habitat throughout its small range, compounded by high levels of hunting. It is one of three threatened bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Assam. Plains Endemic Bird Area”.

Habitat destruction in Manipur has been extensive, presumably limiting the habitat available for this species to dangerously low levels. Grassland in the Logtak lake area of Manipur has for some time been heavily cleared, and the same fate has probably affected large areas of suitable habitat in the state. Grassland in the duars of West Bengal and Assam has been largely converted to tea cultivation and other agricultural land.

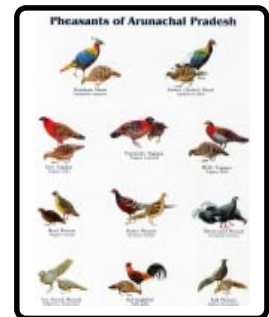
In the nineteenth century, the local Naga people were reported to trap this species in “nooses after the jungle fires”, for which reason it was known as the “Trap Quail” in the local language (Wood 1899). It was regarded as an “excellent little bird for the table” (Baker 1922-1930), a consideration which presumably increased the rate at which it was trapped and shot. It was also relatively easily hunted, as its habit of running in close groups when escaping disturbance allowed several to be killed with a single shot (Wood 1899). Hunting in its range has risen dramatically through the twentieth century in response to increases in the availability of firearms and the size of the human population. Moreover, Manipur is a troubled border area, beset by insurgency and military activities, circumstances that have made fieldwork difficult and surveys for the species impracticable.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** - The conservation requirements of the Manipur Bush-quail should be viewed in combination with the needs of a variety of other threatened grassland birds within its range so that a programme of habitat management and research can be implemented with benefits to each of these species. As so little is known of the distribution and status of this species, surveys are gently required. These should concentrate on former localities in Manipur (the south and east Manipur basin, areas around Phalel and Imphal), West Bengal and Assam. Surveys should focus on areas of tall damp grassland and involve interviews with local people. The call, described from a captive bird as a “loud, clear ringing ... beautifully clear, shrill and characteristic whistle ... Whit-it-it-it-t-t ... which could easily be heard a hundred yards off” (Powell Connor 1908), should be used to try and locate the species. After learning this call, Powell Connor (1908) heard it in Manipur “several times”, and there is little doubt that tracking down this vocalisation provides the best opportunity of locating the species. A “note” given by birds in Assam was described as “like that of the Painted Bush Quail *Perdicula erythrorhyncha*” (Inglis 1910), although this is perhaps a contact or alarm call as it was often uttered as a covey separated on being flushed. When areas of grassland holding this species are found they should be formally protected at the earliest opportunity.

## Resource Material - available on request

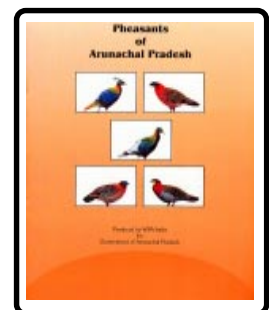
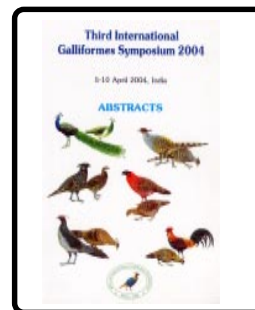
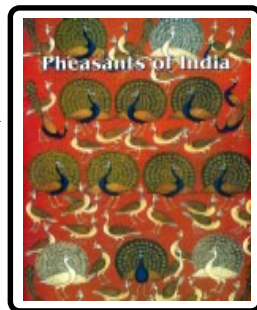
### Posters

- 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



*MOR is the biannual newsletter of WPA-India for private circulation.  
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New Stamp  
Department of Posts, Govt. of India.

After 74 years, the highly elusive and threatened Manipur Bush Quail (*Perdicula manipurensis*) was sighted in June 2006 in Panbari Range of Manas National Park in Assam.