

# Mor



*Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India*

## **Editorial:**

Climate change provides conditions suitable to the spread of non-native plants, animals and insects, potentially upsetting the delicate ecological balance and disrupting the food web. **Will pheasants be able to adapt to these climate change impacts?** We do know that pheasants are highly resilient and adaptable. The unknown is whether or not they can adapt to higher magnitudes and pace of change in future as our climate continues its current trend of bringing higher degrees of intensity to weather events across our earth.

Among birds, climate change is linked with early breeding and even a one or two degree temperature rise or a change in ground cover status and composition at the nest site can have negative impacts on hatching rates. While writing project proposals, one can think in this direction, though it would be a long term study. Apart from climate change, habitat destruction and disappearance is a major threat for pheasants. Why can't we engage ourselves practically in creation and restoration of their home on wastelands and in degraded areas so that not only will this provide scope for study but virtually they can get something from us?

*Let's hope in future some more areas can be conserved practically for the whole ecosystem in general and for pheasants in particular.*

*Dr. M. Shah Hussain*

## **WPA-India Governing Board**

Shekhar Singh - President  
D.K. Chetsingh - Vice President & Hon. Treasurer  
Nita Shah - Hon. Gen. Secretary

Samar Singh      S. Sathyakumar  
Sharad Gaur      Himanshu Malhotra  
M. Shah Hussain      Raghuvansh Saxena  
Naim Akhtar

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## ANNUAL REVIEW - 2009-10

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The highlights of the year are given below:

- The General Body reconstituted the Governing Board for next three years and Shri Shekhar Singh is the new President of WPA-India.
- New partnership established with the Samrakshan Charitable Trust, Meghalaya.
- Technical Committee of specialists established to aid and advise on technical matters, especially for preparing fresh project proposals.
- Under the ongoing *Save the National Bird Campaign*, further progress was made, especially by the declaration of more Peafowl Reserves in certain States and new field projects in the National Capital, including a field study in the President's Estate.

**General Body & Governing Board:** During the year, the WPA-India Governing Board met twice and the Annual General Meeting was held on 26 September 2009. In that meeting, the General Body reconstituted the Governing Board for the next three years as given below:

Shri Shekhar Singh – President

Shri D.K. Chetsingh – Vice President and Hon. Treasurer (till a new Treasurer took over).

Dr. Nita Shah – Hon. General Secretary

Shri Samar Singh	-	Member
Shri Sharad Gaur	-	-do-
Dr. S. Sathyakumar	-	-do-
Shri Himanshu Malhotra	-	-do-
Dr. M. Shah Hussain	-	-do-
Shri Raghuvansh Saxena	-	-do-
Dr. Naim Akhtar	-	-do-

**Membership & Newsletter:** There has been a slight increase in the enrolment of new members. At the end of the year, the position is as follows: Life Members (52), Institutional Members (7) and Annual Members (47).

During the reporting period, issues of the newsletter *Mor* were brought out in July 2009 and January 2010. July 2009 issue included the bibliography on Indian Galliformes, an interesting field study on the status of Galliformes in the agricultural landscape of Uttar Pradesh, Galliformes of Jammu & Kashmir and Priorities for future Research and Monitoring. January 2010 issue carried the Annual Review of WPA-India for 2008-09 and covered the project on Mobilizing Grassroots Action for the Conservation of Galliformes in the Gori river basin of Pithoragarh District in Uttarakhand.

**Partnerships & Networking:** Collaboration with other partner institutions, such as the Bombay History Natural Society, Centre for Environment Education, Central Zoo Authority, National Zoological Park and others was continued and further strengthened. During the year, new partnership was established with the Samrakshan Charitable Trust in Meghalaya. On the suggestion of the WPA-India President the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), Anand (Gujarat) agreed to undertake a study on the distribution and population status of the Grey Junglefowl in the Protected Areas of the southern Aravalis in Udaipur District of Rajasthan. The study by FES commenced in 2010-11.

**Save the National Bird Campaign:** The campaign was continued during the year with further gains. As a result of awareness, cases of peafowl mortality are being reported and getting covered by the media. A project for WPA-India to study the status of the Indian Peafowl in selected parks of Delhi was sanctioned by the Department of Environment, Government of NCT Delhi. WPA-India was also commissioned by the President's Secretariat to undertake a study of the National Bird in the President's Estate.

**Field Projects:** The progress in regard to the ongoing field projects is briefly given below:

**Effect of pesticide use on the Blue Peafowl and Grey Francolin in Central India (Funded by the Ministry of Environment and Forests)** – The Final Technical Report was submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India.

**Community based conservation of Galliformes in the Gori Basin, Uttarakhand (Funded by the Ministry of Environment and Forests)** – This was the final year of the project and the field work was completed. The Final Technical Report is under preparation.

**Field Study of Indian Peafowl in selected parks of Delhi (Funded by Delhi Government)** – The field work was completed during the year. A number of recommendations were made to the Delhi Government based on an appraisal of the Peafowl in the urban parks keeping in view the constraints of conservation in such an environment.

**Study of the National Bird in the President's Estate (Funded by President's Secretariat)-**

The field work was completed during the year. Four sites were selected for intensive study and 100 monitoring were made during the course of the study. The Final Technical Report is under preparation.

**Survey of Manipur Bush-Quail in western Assam (Funded by the Ministry of Environment and Forests)** – This project was commenced on 1 June 2009 and field work is expected to be completed by the end of May 2010. The bird is extremely shy. Despite use of mist nets and making transects through the grasses only one unconfirmed sighting could be made. However, local villagers and Forest Department staff could identify the bird from colour illustrations.

**Study on the status, distribution, key threats & related conservation aspects of Red-breasted Hill-Partridge (*Arborophila mandellii* Hume) in West Bengal** – The project was commenced in October 2009 and field work will continue into the next financial year.

**Himachal Pradesh Pheasant Conservation Project** is still pending with the State Government. Efforts are continuing to get the project approved.

The new project proposals being finalized are:

- Conservation of the Pheasants of western Arunachal Districts (East Kameng, West Kameng & Tawang).
- Study on the status, distribution and related conservation aspects of the Pheasants of Sikkim and western Arunachal Districts (Kameng, West Kameng and Tawang)

There is an urgent need to get further projects sanctioned to sustain the functioning of the organization.

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## Galliformes of West Bengal

West Bengal extends from the sea-shore to the middle hills of the Eastern Himalaya and as high as 3636 m. The State often receives heavy snowfall during winter. This gross variation in topography within a small area has given rise to the occurrence of significantly diverse flora and fauna. So far the presence of a little over 800 species of birds has been recorded within the geographical limits of the State. This is about two-third of the Indian avi-fauna. Expectedly, the number of Galliform species recorded in West Bengal is also quite high. Out of 48 Galliform species found in India, 20 species have been recorded in West Bengal. Of these records, some are old observations and some are recent. The Zoological Survey of India in its 'Fauna of West Bengal' published in 1992 mention of 9 recorded species of Order the Galliformes within West Bengal. Scattered observation reports and later compilations based on recent studies by amateur birdwatchers as well as ornithologists strongly suggest the occurrence of 11 more. Following is the account of Galliform species recorded in West Bengal with a brief note on the area of occurrence:

1. Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* (Linnaeus, 1766) – The species has been reported from the scrub forest areas of north Bengal Duars, forest areas of south-west West Bengal and places around the Damodar Valley adjoining Jharkhand. The species, once quite common, has now become rarer and not frequently heard or seen at is absent in the Sundarbans.
2. Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* (Gmelin, 1789) – This species has been reported from almost all the forest areas of West Bengal along North Bengal Duars and throughout south-west West Bengal (i.e. the forested parts of Puruliya, Bankura and West Medinipur districts) and places around the Damodar Valley. This is believed to be the commonest species of partridge found in the State. Not recorded from the Sundarbans.
3. Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* (Temminck, 1815) – Found along the foothills of the Duars and also reported from the Sundarbans and adjoining areas. Probably absent in the lateritic tract of south-west West Bengal, but present around the wetland areas of central West Bengal.
4. Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (Linnaeus, 1758) – Recorded from all over West Bengal.
5. Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica* (Gmelin, 1789) – Recorded from all over West Bengal.
6. Blue-breasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis* (Linnaeus, 1766) – Recorded from all over West Bengal.
7. Jungle Bush-Quail *Perdica asiatica* (Latham, 1790) – Recorded particularly from the forest areas of south-west West Bengal. Probably absent in the Sundarbans.
8. Painted Bush-Quail *Perdica erythrorhynchos* (Sykes, 1832) – Occurrence in the State from old records. Probably absent in the Sundarbans and north Bengal.
9. Manipur Bush-Quail *Perdica manipurensis* Hume, 1881 – Recorded from the riverine tract of north Bengal Duars. Present status unknown. Absent in central and southern parts of West Bengal.
10. Common Hill-Partridge *Arborophila torqueola* (Valenciennes, 1826) – Reported from Singalila National Park, and expected to occur in Neora Valley National Park and upper reaches of the Buxa Tiger Reserve. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
11. Rufous-throated Hill-Partridge *Arborophila rufogularis* (Blyth, 1849) – Reported from Darjeeling district. Expected to occur in Singalila National Park and Neora Valley National Park and also in the

upper reaches of Buxa Tiger Reserve in Jalpaiguri district. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.

12. Red-breasted Hill-Partridge *Arborophila mandellii* Hume, 1874 – A 'vulnerable' species, reported from Singalila National Park of Darjeeling district and upper reaches of Buxa Tiger Reserve in Jalpaiguri district. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
13. Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix lunulata* (Valenciennes, 1825) – Unconfirmed reports so far. Likely occurrence in drier parts of south-west adjoining Jharkhand and Orissa.
14. Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus* (Hardwicke, 1821) – Confirmed reports from Sandakphu-Gurdum area of Singalila National Park. Likely distribution in Neora Valley National park and also upper reaches of Buxa Tiger Reserve. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
15. Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra* (Linnaeus, 1758) – Confirmed reports from Gairibas area of Singalila National Park and Neora Valley National Park. Unconfirmed report from upper reaches of Buxa Tiger Reserve. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
16. Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* (Latham, 1790) – Unconfirmed reports. Likely distribution in the upper reaches of Singalila National Park, Neora Valley National Park and upper reaches of the Buxa Tiger Reserve. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
17. Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* (Linnaeus, 1758) – Found throughout the forest areas of north Bengal Duars, particularly in the dense foothill forests. Occurs in south-west forests, particularly in Bankura, Puruliya and Paschim Medinipur. In Sundarbans, very common, but it is said that most individuals of this population are hybrids and originated from country fowls released as ceremonial sacrifice on the occasion of worshipping of Bonbibi (the guardian deity of Sundarbans).
18. Kaleej Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* (Latham, 1790) – Quite common in the hill region of Darjeeling district almost throughout along the foothills up to an elevation of about 9,000 feet. The subspecies found here is Black-breasted Kaleej *L. l. melanota*. It has been reported from all the protected areas of Darjeeling district, namely Singalila National Park, Neora Valley National Park, Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary, Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary and also Buxa Tiger Reserve of Jalpaiguri District. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
19. Grey Peacock-Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum* (Linnaeus, 1758) – Unconfirmed reports from Neora Valley National Park and the upper reaches of Buxa Tiger Reserve. Absent in central and southern parts of the State.
20. Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* Linnaeus, 1758 – Found almost throughout the forest areas of north Bengal Duars, though it is not as common as it is through the north Indian plains or the forest areas of peninsular India. Sundarbans does not provide a suitable habitat for the Peafowl. Again in smaller number, Peafowl occur in the forest areas of south-west West Bengal, in the forest areas of Paschim Medinipur, Puruliya and Bankura. However, it is not common in the hill region of Darjeeling district, particularly above 3000 feet elevation. Interestingly, the species is almost absent in the alluvial plains of Hugli river, except an isolated small population surviving in a small village area near Bandel in Hugli district.

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## Search for the elusive Manipur Bush Quail

The Manipur Bush Quail *Perdica manipurensis* is endemic to north-east India and possibly Bangladesh. A bird of the grass and scrub, it is rather difficult to see and is known to be very shy. It has been listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN and BirdLife International. It was believed to be scarcely distributed in the foothills and hills, south of the Brahmaputra river. On the north bank, it used to be found in the *duars* and adjacent areas from Kokrajhar to Sadiya (Choudhury 2000). Higgins (1933) recorded the valley of Manipur State as one of its strongholds at that time. There was no recent record of the specie till 6 June 2006 when a lone bird was accidentally flushed in Assam's Manas National Park (Choudhury 2006). After that chance sighting of one bird, brief surveys in the area of sighting as well as its adjacent grasslands were carried out in 2007-08; but without success. The present study has further extended the work in the field and has covered all its historic sites in western Assam, mostly falling inside the Manas Tiger Reserve between June 2009 and May 2010 with mist-netting as one of the key methods. Mist netting was done for 64 hours (128 net hours as two nets were used). The nets were placed early in the morning, between 5.45 and 6.30 hrs, and continued for at least 3 hrs; then again 3 hrs in the afternoon. Colour visuals were used for identification while interviewing fringe villagers and Forest Department staff. A total number of 80 villagers and 35 forest staff were interviewed.

The species was not sighted both during mist netting as well as transects through the grass. The only instance when an unconfirmed sighting was made was near Samajhora in Bhuyanpara Range on 14 December 2009. However, a few villagers and Forest Department staff, who were interviewed, could identify the bush quail from colour illustrations. They reported that during the harvest of paddy, quails (including possibly Manipur Bush Quails) were observed in the fields fringing the Manas National Park and Manas Reserved Forest. However, as a flushed bird is not easy to identify, all such reports are treated as 'tentative'. Though no Manipur Bush Quail was sighted, a number of other galliformes and several other globally threatened species such-as the Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Jerdon's Babbler *Chrysomma altirostre*, Black-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis flavirostris*, Rufous-rumped Grassbird *Graminicola bengalensis*-were recorded.

Surveys for the Manipur Bush Quail have not so far succeeded in spotting the bird. Engagement of a large number of field workers (say 20+) with illustrations may be the last potential method for the future as very often some birds (may be other species as well) are snared by the villagers in the paddy fields. While trapping (any species of quail) is not encouraged, in reality it happens as enforcement is lax. The field workers may locate such birds caught by the villagers which may be photographed for subsequent identification, and also released through motivation.

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## Assessment of distribution and population status of Grey Jungle Fowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) in the Protected Areas of southern Aravallis, Udaipur District, Rajasthan

As reported in July 2010 issue of *Mor*, the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) based in Anand (Gujarat) has undertaken a field study on the Grey Jungle Fowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) in south Rajasthan. The progress reported under the project is given below:

A total of 67 and 15 sightings have been recorded in Kumbhalgarh and Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuaries respectively. The species prefers dense shrub cover as well as leaf-litter for feeding and hiding from predators. Also spotted around waterholes and streams. In this study, the bird was sighted less in moist deciduous forest (MDF) but abundance was high in this forest type. In this region, dry deciduous forest (DDF) is either mixed with Teak or Bamboo that do not allow shrubs to generate below the canopy. The abundance of the bird in MDF can be attributed to dense shrub layer in riverine forest areas.

In the survey during December 2010, females with juveniles and, in some places, males with females and juveniles were sighted and males were heard calling early in the mornings or late evenings.

Data on age, sex, group size, composition and breeding is limited and hence it is planned to layout permanent transects in different vegetation types along which monthly and seasonal information on the species and its habitat use would be collected.

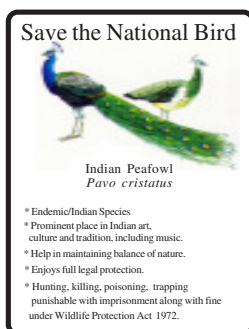
This study would aid in bringing out *Conservation Action Plan (CAP)* for GJF and the PAs, in addition to adjoining potential habitats, that would include Monitoring Protocol (BMP), Habitat Improvement and Restoration Plan (HIRP) and Connecting Corridor Development (CCD), where ever possible and necessary.



## Resource Material - available on request

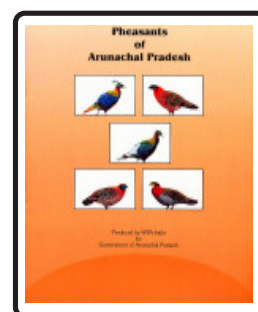
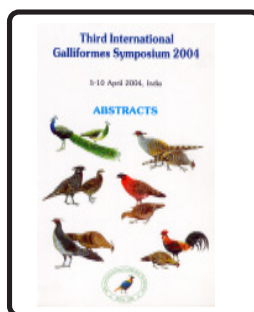
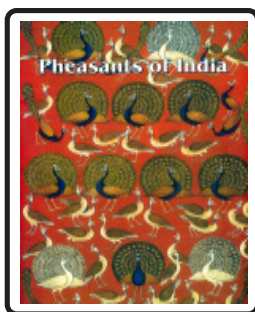
### Posters

- Pheasants of India
- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Uttarakhand
- Pheasants of Assam
- Pheasants of J&K
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- Pheasants of Nagaland
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- 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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