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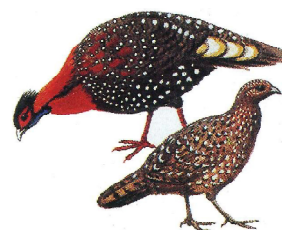
Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India



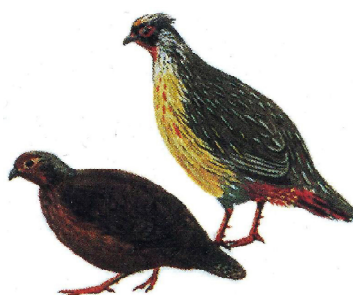
Indian Peafowl
Pavo cristatus
National Bird
&
Odisha State Bird



Himalayan Monal
Lophophorus impejanus
Uttarakhand State Bird



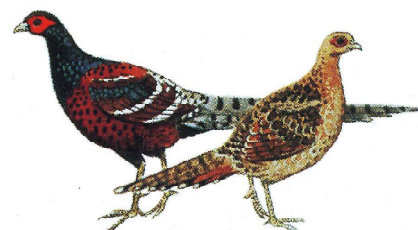
Western Tragopan
Tragopan melanocephalus
Himachal Pradesh State Bird



Blood Pheasant
Ithaginis cruentus
Sikkim State Bird



Blyth's Tragopan
Tragopan blythii
Nagaland State Bird



Hume's Pheasant
Syrnaticus humiae
Manipur and Mizoram
State Bird

***Pheasants as
National & State Birds***

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are happy to bring you yet another issue of MOR. Among other things this time we cover a quick reportage of a visit to Sultanpur National Park, Haryana, by our project team. A very interesting project initiative for promoting local community participation in the conservation of bird habitats in Himalaya is also reported on. An interesting roundup of the conservation status of the black francolin also features in this issue. There are as usual, interesting news items and other snippets related to galliformes conservation.

We would also like to make a renewed appeal to all our members to please renew their memberships and also introduce new members to the organization. A life membership costs only Rs 2000, and there are other categories to choose from, ranging from student membership to institutional membership. The activities and education, awareness work of WPA-India is mobilized largely through memberships and your support goes a long way. We are separately mailing you a membership form which you can fill up manually or electronically and send back to us along with your remittance. In case you wish to make an RTGS/NEFT transfer through your bank, the relevant details of WPA-India are being sent along with the form. Else you might just want to write out a cheque and post it to our office address.

Dr. M. Shah Hussain, Hon. General Secretary, WPA-India

Our National Bird

"The idea of each country designating a national bird for itself was recommended by the XIIth World conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation held in Tokyo in May 1960. Its purpose was to pinpoint public interest and attention to some particular bird species that stood in the greatest need of protection in each country, especially where it was threatened with extinction owing to public apathy or direct human persecution... I submit that the selection of the Peacock by the Indian Board of Wildlife is totally misconceived and meaningless. It was not all obligatory for India, as a member of the International Council, to adopt a 'national' bird, but if it is conceded that doing so may further the ends for which the step was recommended, then it is obvious that the Great Indian Bustard is a species that merits this distinction. This bustard is a large and spectacular bird, indigenous to India, whose numbers, in spite of the legislative ban on its killing, are dwindling at an alarming rate due to poaching by vandalistic gunners and also encroachments upon its natural habitats. It needs an urgent nation-wide efforts to save this bird from its impending doom."

(Salim Ali, Chairman, Indian National Section, ICBP)

*Source: The Song of the Magpie Robin – a memoir - , Zafar Futehally
with Shanthi Chandola and Ashish Chandola.*

A Brief Report On A Visit To Sultanpur National Park

The morning of January 30, 2015 was clear and there was chill in the air when we, the WPA-India team members (Shri Parkash Sheriya and I) entered the 1.42 square kilometer National Park in the Gurgaon District of Hariyana. The park is surrounded by vast crop-fields and situated right on the Farukh Nagar Road. Area around the main entrance and the adjacent lawn are beautifully decorated and well maintained. The park's territory is also fenced.



The scrub and wooded area of Sultanpur National park



The large waterbody of Sultanpur National Park

Habitat of the National Park can be divided into three distinct habitat types: (a) The grassy and scrub covered area dotted with scattered trees, (b) a wooded area and (c) a centrally placed large waterbody that homes a variety of migratory waterbirds during the winter months. A good number of residential birds can also be found round the year. There are a few islands and reed beds inside the shallow waterbody. Depth of water ranges from 6 inches to 5 feet from place to place. We spent about 5 hours (from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.) walking along the bank of the waterbody. Within this time we could cover almost two-third of the trail encircling the waterbody and recorded 78 species of birds. Most of the migratory birds were species of ducks and geese, along with herons, storks, cormorants, cranes, spoonbill, ibises, lapwings, waders and few raptors. We sighted raptors such as Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) within the park's territory. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) were the most common Galliformes that could be seen. The presence of Bush Quails (*Perdica sp.*) and Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) are also reported from the park.



A male Indian Peafowl (Pavo cristatus) in the wooded area of Sultanpur National Park

We sighted four mammalian species in SNP. Smallest one was Five-striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus pennantii*) and the largest one was the Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*). Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*) and Indian Jackal (*Canis aureus*) were also observed in the long grass covered edges of the waterbody.

Though protected, it was really tough to approach the birds whether on land or in water. Birds were flying away from a fairly good distance (approximately 50-60 meters) when we approached them. There is a population of domestic cattle which are breeding freely. A good number of feral dogs are also present, though there is no such report claiming that any wild animal has been killed by these dogs. There are three watchtowers, but general visitors prefer to roam around on foot. More awareness and monitoring are needed to stop the visitors approach to the wild animals freely within the park. Shouting and disturbing the wild habitants are common by the visitors though the forest staff put their best effort to prevent such activities.

by: Ayan Banerjee, WPA-India Member



Grey Francolin (Francolinus pondicerianus) in Sultanpur National Park

Engaging local communities in conserving habitats of Himalayan birds - With special reference to Galliformes

Himalayan ranges are abode for nature lovers, bird watchers, wildlife enthusiasts and environmentalists. From time immemorial, these mountain ranges have attracted people from all walks of life. The varied physiographic and climatic features have resulted into different types of landforms in Himalayas. One can easily observe change in vegetation from subtropical to alpine as we move from bottom to top of the mountain. The diversity of landforms has provided suitable habitats for birds. Order Galliformes of Class Aves need special mention, Himalayas is known to inhabit some endemic and endangered bird species that belongs to Galliformes. These birds are comparatively large in body size, limited flight capabilities with ground foraging habits have made them vulnerable to anthropogenic pressure. Palatability of their flesh and eggs make them prone to hunting and poaching.

The habitats of Galliformes are under threat due to increasing human population, development projects (Hydro power projects), road building and land use change. For sustainable development, we must find ways to protect and conserve habitats of birds without impeding the ongoing economic growth and development.

Parvati Hydro-electric project is under construction in Sainj Valley. I have shown elsewhere that it has affected the habitats of Himalayan birds especially pheasants (Jolli 2014). Sainj valley is remotely situated in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh. Large area of Sainj valley falls within the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA) which recently has got prestigious UNESCO World Heritage Site tag. Thus, it is an important region from biodiversity conservation point of view.



a) Satellite map of India showing the location of Sainj Valley.

In an attempt to educate rural communities regarding the rich biological diversity of their region, a project is launched with the funding of The Rufford Foundation, United Kingdom. The project aims to establish community based monitoring network in the valley. This include engaging local school students in activities like bird counting and vegetation sampling along with distribution of education awareness material.

Students were selected from different Government Schools of the Sainj Valley. During winters, students were given pre training in bird identification, bird counting and vegetation sampling. Later in spring season, students were asked to count and identify bird independently. The bird counting was conducted in Sainj, Raila, Sharan, Shansher, Shanghar, Deohri and Kanon villages of the valley. In total 22 students participated as project volunteers. The students participated in the project with great interest and have shown full enthusiasm. They have started observing birds of their backyard. During the bird surveys students recorded Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*), White crested Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*) and Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*). However, this region has remaining population of Cheer pheasant (*Catreus wallichii*), Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*) and Koklass Pheasant (*Pucrasia macrolopha*). Students were exposed to identify Galliformes based on calls. It is a positive outcome of this project as students now are appreciating rich biological diversity of their region.



b) Students learn to identify birds



c) A pair of White-crested Kalij Pheasant

One such student named Meena Thakur of Govt Sen Sec School, Sainj shared her experience with audience gathered in one such meeting. She said that since the beginning of this project, we get to know many new facts and information about our birds and environment. Before this project we were only familiar with crow, sparrow and pigeon and even if we knew or had seen the bird we know only its vernacular name. But under the guidance of Dr Virat we were able to identify more than 25 bird species of our backyard. It was totally a new experience for us. Students like her now wish to learn more about environment and want to work for the protection of GHNP.

To educate local rural communities we installed exhibition at Sainj Fair. A famous local fair, where people from adjoining villages bring their deities for worship, it was four day fair starting every first week of May.

When we installed the exhibition we were not sure how the local visitors will respond to this. We were overwhelmed by the positive response of Sainj people. They not only visited our exhibition but also discussed with us various issues such as hunting, their rights for collection of non forest and timber produce etc. To further promote, encourage and engage local youth in nature conservation activities, we organize a program on World Environment Day i.e. on 5th June in GHNP Community Complex, Ropa. I invited village pradhans and their representatives along with social activist and leaders. The program was headed by GHNP DFO, Shri G S Chandel, he delivered lecture on “Current and Future challenges for GHNP biodiversity conservation”. After the lecture he interacted with local people and listen to their problems. He urged them to cooperate with GHNP in protecting forest and wildlife.



(d)



(e)

d) Exhibition stall at Sainj Fair e) Meeting organized to discuss conservation issues with local panchayats and GHNP.

Though it is a small scale project, however I have demonstrated that by engaging local communities (especially youth) in biodiversity conservation will ensure long term benefits to society. The participation of local people in the project will open new avenues of employment in the field of eco tourism and will also aid GHNP in monitoring of birds in the valleys. It is wisely said that no conservation work can be successful without the participation of local people. Therefore in upcoming years I will expand the project in other part of upper Beas Valley.

Acknowledgement: I express my gratitude to Himachal Pradesh Forest Department, PCCF Dr. Lalit Mohan, Great Himalayan National Park, CCF Mr Bhupinder Rana and DFO Mr. GS Chandel for necessary permissions to carry out this work. I like to thank my field assistants Mr Chuni Lal and Dabe Ram and all the students who participated in this project.

by: Dr. Virat Jolli^{A B}

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^B Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College, University of Delhi, New Delhi.

Black francolin- Magnificent beauty of a scrub and grassland

The black francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) belongs to the pheasant family, Phasianidae. It is found in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sikkim, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. There are six recognized subspecies of these birds, namely, *F. f. francolinus*, *F. f. arabistanicus*, *F. f. bogdanovi*, *F. f. henrici*, *F. f. asiae* and *F. f. melanonotus*. It is a widespread breeding resident in most of north and central India. The southern edge of its range extends eastwards from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa to Assam. In north it is seldom found above an altitude of 2700 m. Three geographical races are found in India; the western (paler) *F. francolinus henrici*, the central *F. francolinus asiae* and the eastern (darker) *F. francolinus melanonotus*. Black francolin is also the state bird of Haryana and it was represented as a leading animal species in the tableau of the state on the occasion of Republic day of India, 2015. These francolins have been introduced into USA, Hawaiian Islands, Caucasus and Guam.

Black francolin is a medium sized bird measuring from 30-35 cm in length and weighing from 400-500 grams. The male francolin is larger than the females. The male is black with a white cheek patch and brown neck. The black flanks have white spots and the back has golden brown stripes. The narrow tail has black and white bars. The legs are reddish brown. Black francolin is found near cultivation and scrub, bordering wetlands and also in scrubby habitats with plenty of cultivated crops tall enough to offer shelter and open beneath to provide escape routes and easy travel.

Black francolin is monogamous and normally nests in a bare ground scrape from late March to May. The male may be seen standing on a rock or low tree attracting attention with its extraordinary creaking call. It may be heard all day long in April, during nesting, and less persistently in March and May as well as the summer months. Both parents tend chicks after hatching. Young stay with parents through their first winter. The most likely breeding locations are grasslands and scrub vegetation areas under the cultivated crops. They have a loud call during the breeding season. Male may also become aggressive during the breeding season. The normal clutch size is between 10 to 14 eggs and only the hen incubates the eggs. The incubation period is 18 to 19 days and the breeding season is from April to June. The young ones appear in April through October. Food of black francolin consists mainly of grain, grass seeds, fallen berries, shoots, tubers, termites, ants and insects.

Its former range was more extensive than the present, but trapping and over-hunting has reduced its distribution and numbers. The population is decreasing owing to unfavourable alterations in habitat, its loss and hunting pressures. Though the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has categorized black francolin as “least concern” but according to Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, it is protected under Schedule IV. In addition, status surveys and studies in various states showed that the population is decreasing because of several factors. Conservation efforts such as ban on hunting may be helpful in recovering the populations but the species is rare in some parts of the range. The use of pesticides and chemical herbicides in agricultural fields is a major threat to the population of the species. Many of the common agricultural weeds support insects and produce seeds that are important

to species which are found near agricultural areas. When these weeds and associated insects are controlled the population of the species is negatively impacted. Other threats are zoos, large aviculture collections and travelling or mobile zoos. However; overall the population of the black francolin is not currently threatened.



Tableau of Haryana State during the Republic Day Parade, 2015 (Source: PTI Photo).

by: Dr. M. Shah Hussain, Aravalli Biodiversity Park, CEMDE, University of Delhi

Peahens Flying Up with Young

"Once Mr. Mateen was returning from a country walk. It was 7.30 pm in the month of August. He suddenly saw a peahen sitting under a tree with four chicks. Being interested in birds, he observed them unnoticed for some time.

He saw to his utter amazement the two chicks quickly hopping on to the peahen's shoulder while the other two waited patiently. He saw the peahen slowly take off vertically with the two chicks on her shoulder, she did this by flapping her wings vertically with powerful strokes. She rose in the air slowly like a helicopter and then perched on a branch of the tree. The chicks then quickly hopped off her back and the process was repeated for the second time, (and) all the four chicks were safe on the tree."

(Hitendra Singh, Age 15 years, National History Society, Mayo College, Ajmer)

*Source: The Song of the Magpie Robin – a memoir - , Zafar Futehally
with Shanthi Chandola and Ashish Chandola.*

Interesting observation about Peafowl chicks riding their mother

Our family home called the Bhojpur Kothi in Dumraon near Buxar in Bihar has a compound of about 64 acres. In my childhood days, there were about a hundred Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) in the area. Gradually, with the expansion of agriculture and horticulture activities, the peafowl population declined and by the late 1980s only one male of the species remained. Then, my father, Maharaja Kamal Singhji, former MP, got two young peahens from somewhere and asked me to release them in the compound. However, at first I kept them in an enclosure in our house for a couple of months to get them settled and after that I put them in a portable cage in our Tennis Court, which was frequented by the solitary resident peacock, who used to strut about in the manner of the Old Patriarch. The cage was also meant to protect the peahens from predators, like Jackals, Jungle Cats and Civets, that abound in the area. Within two days, the old fellow showed his liking for the peahens and then I opened the cage to set free the birds. It was a very exciting moment to witness the peahens join the peacock and disappear into the bushes.

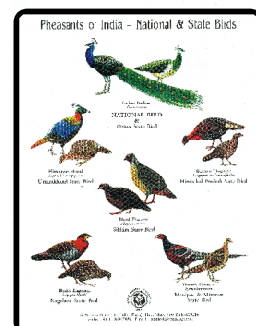
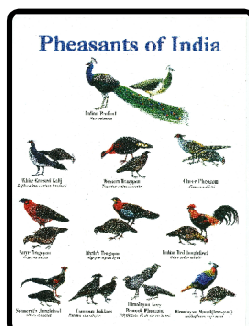
Ever since, I have been keeping a strict watch on these birds, especially during the breeding season, followed by egg-laying, hatching and the rearing of chicks. In this connection, a very interesting and unusual episode took place in the autumn of 2003, when the jackal menace was at its peak in our area. One clever peahen decided to move camp to the premises of our nearby guest house by flying over the high compound wall. She laid her eggs on the asbestos roof of the gardener's tool room at a height of 7-8 ft and incubated the eggs in that safe hideout. In due course, four chicks were born and the mother peahen stayed put till the chicks were a little bigger than a quail. Then, one day the mother led her four chicks on the ground all the way to our compound wall, which at the point she chose to cross over is about 8 ft high. The technique she used is quite common with the Sloth Bears, but not associated with peafowl. The mother peahen lowered herself by sitting down with her wings half spread and encouraged the chicks to crawl on to her back and then she took a hopping flight to gently land on top of the wall and then land on the other side. It took 5-6 attempts to achieve her goal of getting all four chicks across. With the chicks slipping off her back, it was quite tedious and laborious, but the mother's instincts, patience and relentless efforts paid and she finally got all her children back home!! For me, it was simply fascinating to witness the whole drama as it was enacted. Currently, despite all the odds, there is a resident population of about 15 Peafowl in our compound and all possible efforts are being made to protect them. About an equal number must have ventured out over the years.

by: Manvijay Singh, Bhojpur Kothi, Dumraon (Bihar)

Resource Material - available on request

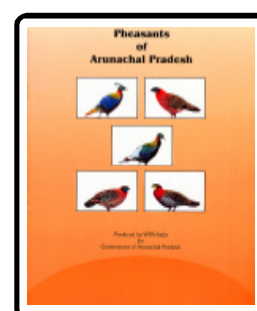
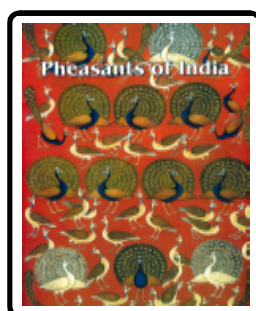
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