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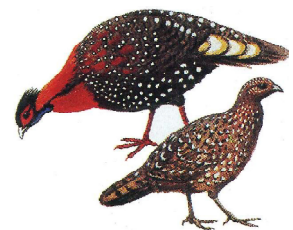
Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India



Indian Peafowl
Pavo cristatus
National Bird
&
Odisha State Bird



Himalayan Monal
Lophophorus impejanus
Uttarakhand State Bird



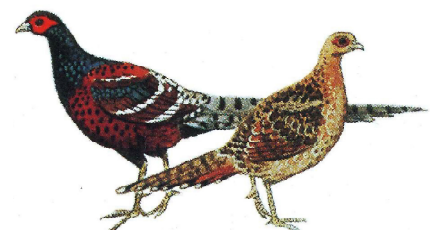
Western Tragopan
Tragopan melanocephalus
Himachal Pradesh State Bird



Blood Pheasant
Ithaginis cruentus
Sikkim State Bird



Blyth's Tragopan
Tragopan blythii
Nagaland State Bird



Hume's Pheasant
Syrmaticus humiae
Manipur and Mizoram
State Bird

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

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the new issue of 'MOR'.

The last month was recorded as the warmest June ever in many parts of the world. Last year, 2016, was the warmest year in the modern temperature record. Our planet is constantly heating up. This poses direct threats to humans, like extreme weather events and global sea-level rise, but scientists are concerned that it may also affect our well-being indirectly via changes in biodiversity. The variety of life, from plants and animals to microorganisms, is the basis of many services ecosystems provide to us, for example clean drinking water or food. Today, ecologists are challenged by the question: What does a warmer world mean for biodiversity? More species, less species or no change? Time will give the answer and of course pheasants are an integral part of biodiversity. BNHS has already started a Climate Change program and the first study will be on pheasants and finches in Central Himalayas. The same study with taking up the local issues can be conducted in Eastern Himalayas as maximum species of pheasants are found here.

This issue mainly focuses on Peafowl, its mention in history, conservation, related myths, poaching reports etc. Awareness is very much needed regarding myths associated with wildlife species. WPA – India welcomes and invites students or common man who can work as a volunteer for the organisation and spread awareness among local people and in schools and colleges. The investigators of our Arunachal project are conducting meetings and workshops for this cause. Kudos to them. Working on grass root level for spreading conservation awareness is much required while conducting a scientific study on the species.

As your newsletter editor and secretary, WPA-India, I welcome your articles, photographs and input to help keep the newsletter entertaining and informative. Please send your information to: wpaindia@gmail.com. Please do share your views.

Hon. General Secretary, WPA-India

Rajasthan High Court Judge's wisdom: National bird Peacock has a quality – they don't indulge in physical sex, yet produce babies

Financial Express, May 31, 2017, New Delhi.



Mahesh Chandra Sharma, Rajasthan High Court Judge, who took many by surprise by recommending cow to be named as country's national animal, has now said something utterly amusing. Speaking to news channel CNN-News 18, Sharma said that the peacock is a lifelong celibate, it does not have sex with peahen. The peahen gives birth after it gets impregnated with the tears of the peacock. A peacock or a peahen is then born, Sharma said. He was telling the media about qualities of the Peacock, the national bird of India.

The factual position is quite different. Peacocks are typically polygynous birds, meaning that a dominant male will mate with several females in a season. Wild peahens can become aggressive with one another when competing for the chance to mate with a dominant male, sometimes repeatedly mating with the peacock to stave off mating attempts by other females.

Beginning in mid to late spring, peacocks establish small territories in close proximity to one another in an arrangement known as a 'lek'. They begin their courtship displays to attract the peahens, spreading their iridescent tail feathers in a fan shape, strutting back and forth and shaking their feathers to produce a rattling noise to get the peahens' attention. A peahen will walk through several territories of different males, examining their displays and feathers closely, before selecting a mate.

Once a female selects a mate, the male perches on her back and aligns his tail over top of her own. Both peacock and peahen have the avian reproductive organ known as a cloaca, which transfers sperm in between partners. The peafowl align their cloacas and the male's sperm is transferred to the female, where it travels up the uterus to fertilize her egg through a series of muscular spasms. Peahens will lay anywhere from two to six eggs in a shallow nest at ground level, which incubate for 28 to 30 days before hatching.

Save the National Bird

WPA-India has been campaigning for the protection of the National Bird for a long time. In 2005-06 a specific proposal was put forward by WPA-India before the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) headed by the Prime Minister. The action points included in the proposal were:

- (1) A rapid survey to assess the current status of the species, followed by periodic monitoring.
- (2) Special attention to cases of mortality at all stages – detection, investigation and prosecution – and enlisting the support of all concerned for this purpose.
- (3) An awareness campaign to spread the message widely and to mobilise public support.
- (4) Removal of the legal loophole in respect of dealing in peacock tail feathers.

The National Board for Wildlife recommended a rapid survey to assess the current status of the species, to be followed by periodic monitoring and appropriate protection measures. However, further action by the Ministry of Environment and Forests was very tardy and it was not until 2014 that a committee headed by the IGF (WL) was formed to look into matters concerning the better protection of Peafowl in the country. WPA-India was a member of the committee and in the first meeting held on 15 April 2014 the specific suggestions made earlier to the NBWL were reiterated. The committee suggested the following urgent action:

1. It is important to get information on poaching related to Peacock Tail Feather (PTF) collection and extent of trade in raw and value added artefacts. Study of TRAFFIC-India and Wildlife Institute of India will be helpful in this. Any case study/data/information with other members be provided to MoEF & CC for assessment of the situation.
2. As the status in Schedule-I provides specific protection to Peafowl, State/UT Governments will be sensitized on enforcement of the laws/rules in vogue and to periodically check the stocks with dealers for plucked feathers and take action based on forensic evidence.
3. States/UT Governments will be advised to identify the location of high volume trade and keep an eye on the trafficking of feathers using forensic evidence as Schedule-I status of the birds for violation of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
4. Border enforcement agencies/customs etc. will be approached for a vigil on illegal trafficking of PTF as export is banned.
5. A strategy for awareness and sensitization of stakeholders will be formulated and implemented in this respect.

The study carried out recently by TRAFFIC-India is a follow-up in the matter.

Peafowl Feather Trade in India

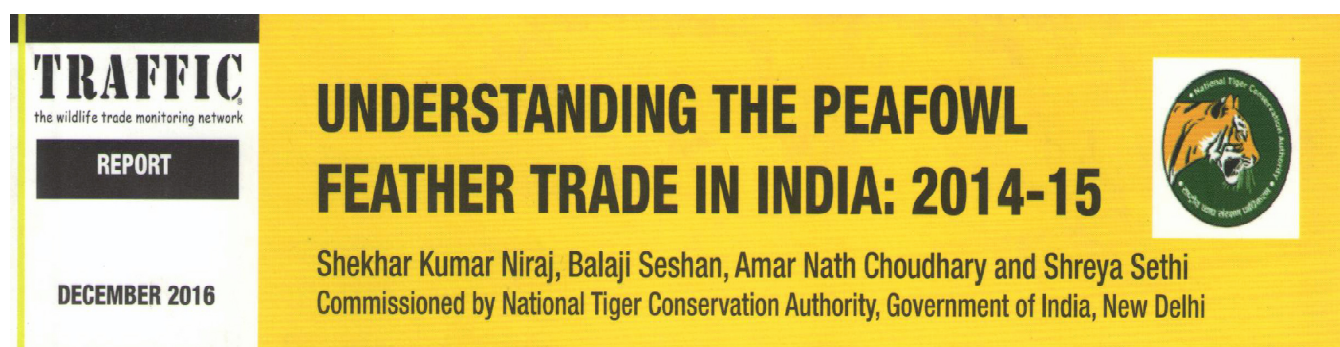
TRAFFIC India, a division in WWF-India, has recently brought out an important report on killing of peafowl and trade in peafowl feathers in India. The report is based on an extensive survey conducted in about 18 states and union territories. Some notable conclusions given in the report are reproduced below:

"This study succeeded in assessing the volume of trade in peafowl tail feathers, extent of other threats to its conservation and approximated the illegal killing of the birds. Further study should attempt to correlate the volumes of traded feathers with poaching threats, thus improving understanding about the peafowl poaching and tail feather trade and its socio-economic implications with respect to its conservation.

The study would clearly help in providing policy recommendations for improved protection of the species by augmenting the existing conservation laws in India. While trade in the naturally shed tail feathers of the peafowl collected outside Protected Areas (PAs) is allowed, export of feathers is prohibited under Sections 1, 35[6], 43[3(a)], 44[i], 49A[b] of the WPA 1972 and Section 42 and 43 of Chapter V of the DGFT Export Policy. IUCN listing of Indian Peafowl is "least concerned", which is not a true reflector of the threats to the species, recorded in this report and in previous reports. Free exemption of collection of peafowl feathers and free domestic trade is not sustainable in view of extremely large volumes of feathers in trade and use of peafowl body parts and derivatives in a plethora of traditional medicinal systems in India.

The volume of peafowl feathers in trade is extremely high. In some places, feathers with blood stains were encountered. We have listed numerous practices which involve peafowl feathers. We have also recorded deaths of peafowl poached or killed by poisoning, which is substantially high. Poaching of peafowl in several regions in India is ascribed to demand for meat of the bird. Although, for want of population data it may not be possible to assess impact of the loss of peafowl to the population, decline population have been recorded in many places. In several instances, the tail feathers were found mixed with the abdomen feathers which do not shed.

Extensive use of peafowl feathers in India's traditional medicines, e.g., Sidha and Unani, and their growing importance in public life, indicates the fact of unlimiting demands of peafowl



feathers in traditional consumptive uses. Since there is no indication of any population rise of the birds, an increase in demand of the feathers and other body parts could only mean greater stress on the peafowl. Such demand would potentially be met with feathers obtained through illegal means, e.g., from the birds that die in poisoning incidences and poaching. The fat of the peafowl is considered panacea for stiff joints and necks. It is believed that application of the Mayilenna (oil obtained from the fat of the Peafowl) on the body makes the limbs viable and flexible and acrobats who show their feats in circus are believed to apply them regularly during their training period (Nair 1974).

One way to approach systematizing collection and sale of peafowl tail feathers would be through formation of community cooperatives under the purview of the Biodiversity Act 2002 (BDA 2002). Developing consolidated guidelines and rules regarding collection and disposal of Peafowl tail feathers could be followed up. Since we have now fair idea about the extent of collection and use of the feathers, guidelines could aim at access, equity and benefit sharing by attempts at removing middlemen, hoarders, and traders. It is possible to make the process community driven and community regulated with adequate checks and balances.

Cases of poaching are reported from many states -- Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. For want of systemic data, it is not possible to predict whether the poaching is rising. But, an environment of growing insecurity can be predicted for the peafowl. With the traders and collectors cutting the ends of the feathers to remove the stains of blood, it is not possible to look at the blood DNA. Hence, other methods of drawing DNA from seized or detected poached derivatives and parts needs to be worked on. The lab techniques for development of investigative protocols would require further attention and investment in terms of scientific research and research work. The existing work at the WII forensic and DNA lab need to be diversified and taken to other institutions, e.g., Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and Gujarat Forensic University.

Monetary profit make a primary driver for large scale trade in peafowl feathers across India. We found that the non-source states showed higher profit margins compared with the source states, e.g., Rajasthan and Gujarat. The differential profit margin in non-profit source states could be ascribed to less availability of peafowl feathers in retail sector. States such as Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttarakhand, which have less collection source for the peafowl feathers, top the raking in terms of average retail profit index.

Tamil Nadu is not a major source state of peafowl feathers, but there the price at source is highest in the country, which is largely ascribed to the multiple use of peacock feathers for cultural events, traditional medicinal system etc. Rajasthan having maximum stock of collected peafowl feathers is marked with lowest wholesale rate whereas Madhya Pradesh with moderate collection source has the maximum wholesale rate for natural reasons. Thus, Rajasthan being the largest source of peafowl feathers is marked with lowest price at collection whereas Jharkhand being low collection state marked with highest retail price and is matched closely by Odisha and Bihar."

The National Bird

Several countries have adopted the concept of a 'national bird'. In India and the United States of America (USA), apart from a national bird, each state of the federal union has a designated state bird. USA was the first to start this practice, coinciding with the growth of the conservation movement in that country. The idea was adopted for the states in India in the 1980s. Much before that in 1963, the Government of India had named the Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, also called the Blue Peafowl, as the National Bird of India. Renowned ornithologist, the Late Dr. Salim Ali, once told me that the choice for the national bird was between the Indian Peafowl and the Great Indian Bustard, both big and prominent birds and typically Indian. The matter was debated in the Indian Board for Wildlife and eventually the Peafowl was recommended to the Government, on account of its widespread distribution in the country and also because of its longstanding association with the life and culture of the Indian people. Somehow, it is generally not appreciated that in no other country of the world the bonds between the national bird and its people are as ancient and intimate as in India.

The Peafowl is considered a divine creature in Indian mythology, specially as the vahana of Kartikeya, son of Lord Shiva and army commander of the gods. It is also said that at one time when the gods took the form of various birds, Devraj Indra chose the finest form, that of a peacock; ever since whenever



Indra brings rain on earth, the peacocks dance in joy and merriment — a sight to behold. Lord Krishna's association with the peafowl is legendary: peacock feathers have always adorned his headgear, popularly known as the 'mor-mukut'. It is said that Krishna danced like a peacock to court his beloved Radha and when he played his mellifluous flute, the peacocks danced in unison with the gopis. Even now, the temples dedicated to Krishna display the peacock prominently on the entrance gates. The famous epic Ramayan has many references to these birds and there is even a folklore that traces the birth of Sita from a peahen egg. Likewise, one Buddhist Jataka folktale, called the 'Maha-mor', relates how Gautam Buddha was a golden peacock prior to his birth as a human being. In Buddhist mythology, the peacock is a symbol of compassion

and watchfulness. Buddhist and Jain legends and folklore contain numerous references to the role and importance of the peafowl.

As for recorded Indian history, the earliest findings relate to the Indus Valley Civilisation dating back to about five thousand years. The excavations at Harappa, Mohenjo-daro and some other sites have thrown up evidence not only of the existence of peafowl at that time but also, and more importantly, of the pre-eminent role accorded to the bird by the people in those days. There was a popular belief then that after death the human soul travels to its heavenly abode in the form of a peacock. Later, throughout India's history, the peafowl has received state recognition, one way or the other. The Maurya and Gupta rulers conferred special status to the species and even reared these birds in their palace gardens. Emperor Ashok in the second century BC forbade the killing of peafowl and some of his stone edicts displayed the peacock prominently. The famous Sanchi Stupa of around the same period also carries images of the peacock. During the Gupta period in the fifth century AD, coins depicting the peacock were issued and it was also a favourite subject for the art and architecture of that time. This trend continued in varying forms subsequently, even during the medieval period when the Muslim rulers



were dominant. For instance, the Tughlak kings were so fascinated by the peafowl feather that they adopted its design for the state emblem and prescribed its use in various ways, including the headgear of the soldiers. Moreover, fans made of peacock feathers were regularly used in the courtrooms of many rulers all across the country, including the imperial Mughals.

The memoirs of the first Mughal Emperor called the Baburnamah, carries an interesting and perceptive account of the birds of India, which appropriately starts with the peafowl. Babur described the peacock as “a

beautifully coloured and splendid bird; its form is not equal to its colouring and beauty.” However, it was the fifth Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, who paid the greatest tribute to the bird, when he got the jewelled Peacock Throne made soon after assuming power, a unique and fabulous piece of artistic work which took seven years to complete and it is surmised that its cost was at least twice as much as that for the Taj Mahal. The dazzling structure, studded with precious gems and jewels, had a canopy supported on twelve emerald columns or pillars; on top were beautifully crafted large-sized peacocks facing each other and bedecked with gems – shining rubies, diamonds, emeralds and pearls. Shah Jahan was surely aware of the Islamic folklore that the peacock was the original guardian of the gates of Paradise and the Persian myth that two peacocks facing each other on either side of the ‘Tree of Life’ symbolise the duality of human nature. For a century or so, the Peacock Throne became the most prestigious symbol of Mughal power and authority, and around 1648 it was shifted from Agra to Delhi, when Shah Jahan changed his capital. Then in 1739, Nadir Shah invaded India, plundered Delhi and took away this marvellous throne to Persia, along with all the other booty. For more than two hundred years, it was known to be at Teheran, but then it disappeared mysteriously and has since not been found. Now, it is no more than a legend.



However, after being deprived of the original peacock throne, the later Mughal rulers, right till the deposition of Bahadur Shah in 1857, are said to have used a silver peacock throne, which was no doubt a mere shadow of the original one. Besides, in the time of Aurangzeb and, in fact, to honour him, a small exquisite peacock throne was made within a fabulous diorama built at Dresden in Austria. Much later in the 19th century, King Ludwig of Germany got a peacock throne, embellished with three life-size enamelled peacocks, made for himself. It is noteworthy that the fascination for the Indian Peafowl spread to other parts of the world several centuries ago and it was taken to various countries in Asia, Africa and Europe at different times, mainly by the invaders and traders. There are reports of these birds in the palace gardens of the Egyptian Pharaohs, the Roman Emperors and even the legendary King Solomon, whose throne had attractive peacock images. When Alexander invaded India in the

third century BC, he took back with him several Indian peafowl. According to a Greek myth, Hera, wife of the mythical hero Zeus, was responsible for placing on the peacock tail the eyes of the hundred-eyed giant Argos, when the latter was slain in a battle. In early Christian art, two peacocks facing each other represented the souls of the faithful drinking from the Fountain of Life and there was a Christian belief, ascribed to St. Augustine, that the peacock symbolised immortality of the soul, since its flesh did not decay. Even in China, the peacock was considered a symbol of beauty, dignity and rank and was made the emblem of the Ming rulers. In modern times, the Indian Peafowl has been coveted by several zoological gardens in different countries and some of these birds were also kept in the premises of the Palais des Nations in Geneva. As a result of consistent royal patronage over the ages, in India the peafowl has managed to permeate numerous facets of the life and culture of the Indian people from the earliest times and it has literally adorned everything that has been associated with it. This is amply demonstrated in art, architecture, sculpture, painting, metalwork, glasswork, jewellery, ornaments, handicrafts, handloom, textile, literature, music, folklore and the traditions of almost all regions in the country. There are examples aplenty to show that humankind, over the ages, has been greatly fascinated and inspired by this gorgeous bird to give expression to highest levels of creativity in multifarious ways and forms.

It is this remarkable attribute of ‘adding value’ that makes the Indian Peafowl very special in India. Added to it is the fact that this is one bird that is known in every household throughout India and even the children get to know about it quite early in life. Perhaps one reason is that Indian literature in virtually all languages and dialects, starting from Sanskrit, is replete with references to the peafowl, particularly the peacock, in adorable terms and in a manner that no other bird or animal has been able to equal. The same applies to the folklore, songs and music of different regions across the country. However, it is noteworthy that even the English language has not escaped its sweep and impact. The expressions ‘peacockish’ and ‘proud as a peacock’ are often used, but there are several other ways in which the peacock has invaded the English dictionary and again ‘added value’ in meaningful terms. Hence, we have colours that are called ‘peacock blue’ and ‘peacock green’, birds that are called ‘peacock bittern’, ‘peacock heron’ and ‘peacock pheasant’, flowers called ‘peacock flower’ and ‘peacock iris’, a ‘peacock butterfly’, a ‘peacock beetle’, a ‘peacock moth’, and even a kind of ‘peacock ore’ and a type of ‘peacock coal’. Then, there is the well known ‘peacock dance’, essentially a courtship display but also signifying the role of a dependable weatherman, heralding the onset of the monsoon.

Another remarkable attribute of the Indian Peafowl is its amazing adaptability. It belongs to the Pheasant family, of which there are 17 species in India, which means one-third of the world’s total number of 50 pheasant species. All of them are essentially birds of the jungles and mountains. While the Indian Peafowl prefers scrub forest for its habitat and is distributed widely through the country, it is the only pheasant species that is able to adjust easily to human beings and is at home near habitations and even in urban areas. This is another factor that has facilitated its long and intimate association with the people in India. For sheer attractiveness, adorning ability and adaptability, the Indian Peafowl is clearly unsurpassable and incomparable. No other bird can claim such a triple ‘A’ standing. Regal and resplendent, yet common and plebian, it stands in a class of its own, a true symbol of India in all its beauty and colorful splendour. It is rightly the National Bird of India.

by: Samar Singh, former President, World Pheasant Association - India.

Peafowl recent mortalities around the country

Five peacocks found dead in Hayathnagar of Hyderabad

Hyderabad: Five peacocks were found dead in Hayathnagar. Police registered a case. An autopsy was conducted on the dead birds. The samples were sent for forensic analysis. Police suspects the birds could have died due to food poisoning or by drinking contaminated water. "It could be an act of poachers who poison them and later after death sell the meat and feathers," another official said.

Locals said there were around 100 peacocks moving around in the nearby forests but the number has come down to less than 50 due to poaching and migration.

Source: Deccan Chronicle, January, 18, 2017.

Mystery death of 20 peacocks baffle forest officials in Villupuram

VILLUPURAM: You may call it poaching, hunting or mass elimination of a vermin. But forest and police officials are yet to come to a conclusion on the mystery deaths of 20 peacocks near Vanur here though they have begun a probe. A team of forest department officials led by Range Officer, M Arumugam, rushed to the spot and inspected the carcasses. Later, veterinarians from Nemili were summoned and they conducted an autopsy on the spot, and subsequently the carcasses were buried in a nearby forest area. Forest officials inspected the spot, and found some groundnuts in the paddy fields, and have taken them for lab test. Meantime, forest welfare activist Sakthivel from Puduchery, told Express that they suspect that it could be the handiwork of some farmers who placed poison-mixed groundnuts in the farm lands, as there had been complaints of peacocks feeding on paddy grains in crops cultivated in the locality. The activists also lodged a complaint with the Puducherry police seeking action against the sale of products made using peacock feathers, as the bird is the country's national bird.

Source: Bagalavan Perier B, The Indian Express, March, 20, 2017.

Six peacocks killed using poisonous seeds in UP, poacher arrested

Six peacocks were killed using poisonous seeds at Kapsethi village in Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. Another peacock who consumed the seeds is currently under treatment, reported news agency ANI. One poacher has been arrested in relation to the incident.

Source: Express Web Desk, New Delhi, May, 17, 2017.

11 Peahens and 4 Peafowl cocks found dead near Osmanabad

In a gruesome incident, 15 peafowls, including four peacocks and 11 peahens were found dead near Osmanabad in Marathwada. Two more peacocks are serious but are out of danger and local activists have alleged that these fatalities could be a result of poaching. A forest department official said preliminary investigations by a five-member team of veterinarians had ruled out the chances of poisoning. "They seem to have died of a heat-stroke due to the rising temperature. We have sent their body parts, the grain found near these carcasses and the water from the nearby water body for laboratory tests," the official said, adding that the two peacocks were recovering.

Source: Dhaval Kulkarni, DNA webdesk (Daily News and Analysis), May, 15 2017.

Lhagyala monastery sets aside forest for wildlife coseration

The Lhagyala monastery located in the West Kameng district has declared its forest as a community conservation area. The 7th century monastery, among the oldest in Arunachal Pradesh, owns large swathes of a forest bordering Bhutan and has decided to set aside 85 sq.km of this forest as the Mon-Lhagyala Community Conservation Area (MLCCA). The forest is home to a number of rare and endangered species that includes among others the Red Panda, Musk Deer and high-altitude pheasants*.

The local-Lhagyala Buddhist Cultural Society and the Kalaktang Tsokpa, a confederation of more than 20 Monpa villages, recently authorised the monastery to create the MLCCA for biodiversity conservation. The society is entrusted with managing the community conservation area where hunting and commercial extraction of forest resources are banned. Those found violating the an 'order' will be punished under the provisions of customary laws of the Tsokpa besides the Wildlife (Protection) Act – 1972.

Source: Rahul Karmarkar. 'Arunachal monstery declares forest near Bhutan as protected zone for red pandas', Hindustan Times, April, 28, 2017.

***Arunachal Pradesh high-altitude pheasants are Satyr Tragopan, Temminck's Tragopan, Blyth's Tragopan, Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal, Sclater's Monal, Kalij Pheasant and Tibetan Eared Pheasant.**

Captive breeding of Himalayan Monal in Himachal Pradesh

The Himachal Pradesh Wildlife Department is attempting captive breeding of the Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*) in an effort to revive its population. The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) had approved a conservation breeding centre for the bird in 2011. A large breeding centre in Manali has been built which is being equipped with cameras and other equipment. Monals, which have been rescued from many places and are kept in the Monal Rescue Centre, will be transferred to the new breeding centre.

The Himalayan monal breeds between April to August and officials aim to make the breeding centre functional before April.

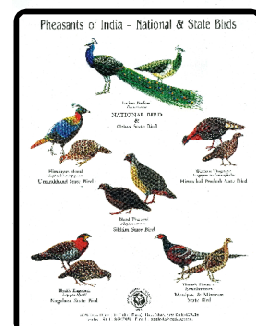
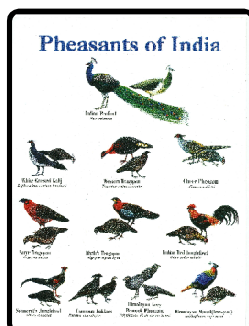


Source: HP wildlife department to try monal breeding in captivity, The Times of India, December, 6, 2016.

Resource Material - available on request

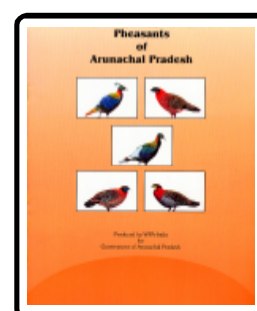
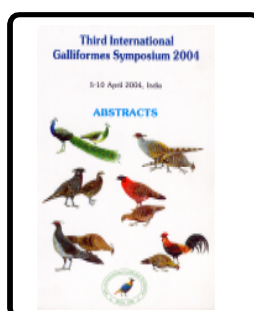
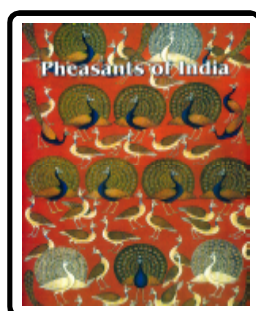
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- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Uttarakhand
- Pheasants of Assam
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- National and State Birds
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