

Mor

Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India



Pheasants as National & State Birds

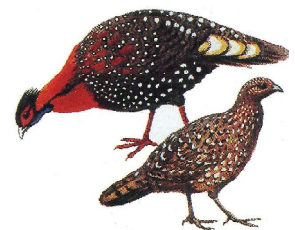


Indian Peafowl
Pavo cristatus
National Bird

&
Odisha State Bird



Himalayan Monal
Lophophorus impejanus
Uttarakhand State Bird



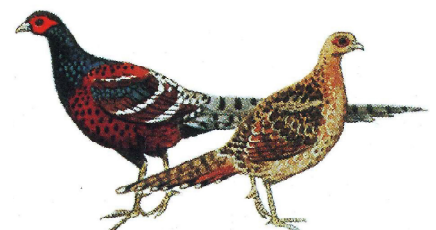
Western Tragopan
Tragopan melanocephalus
Himachal Pradesh State Bird



Blyth's Tragopan
Tragopan blythii
Nagaland State Bird



Blood Pheasant
Ithaginis cruentus
Sikkim State Bird



Hume's Pheasant
Syrmaticus humiae
Manipur and Mizoram
State Bird

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Welcome to July issue of Mor.

*As you all are aware about the importance of Citizen Science during these days. The concept of sharing information of any species, any time, any where is the biggest strength of it. The **eBird** and **iNaturalist** have become very popular among citizens who allow students, scientists, amateur nature lover etc. to share their observations with the world. Users are growing on these platforms and on the other hand they are providing very useful information about the species to academicians. Especially in ornithology, citizen scientists are making great contributions to conservation. In this type of first effort more than 1000 volunteers have made Kerala Bird Atlas by systematic bird sampling in whole Kerala. Congratulations to Kerala bird watchers or we can call them scientists.*

In this issue of Mor we are presenting interesting articles on Status of Galliformes of Kerala, sighting story of Blood pheasant in Sikkim, West Bengal forest department released endangered Kaleej pheasant and Red Jungle fowl in Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary-a success story.

WPA-India is thankful to Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust for funding the publication of Mor.

Enjoy reading and as always, Mor requests the feedback on this new issue and articles for the next new issue.

Dr. M. Shah Hussain, Hon. General Secretary

Kerala has taken the lead to prepare a State Bird Atlas through a significant citizen-science initiative coordinated by the College of Climate Change and Environmental Science, Kerala Agriculture University, Thrissur, and the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore, and funded by the Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust. The above article gives an idea of the status of Galliformes in Kerala. This is the first time such a report has become available for Kerala State. A noteworthy feature is the rather common sighting of the National Bird, which was not recorded earlier by the Dr. Salim Ali during his survey in 1990s.

Status of Galliformes in Kerala: findings from the Kerala Bird Atlas

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Kerala is a biodiverse state hosting 539 avian species from 90 families (Chandran et al. 2020). Hemmed between the Arabian Sea and the southern Western Ghats, Kerala enjoys a tropical climate with abundant rainfall (1800-3600mm) and high humidity. Total forest cover is 28%; most dominant forest type is tropical evergreen, while open scrub forests are restricted mostly to the Palakkad gap and foothills. Eight species of Galliformes belonging to six genera are found in Kerala namely: Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii*, Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*, Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix lunulata*, Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*, Jungle Bush Quail *Perdica asiatica*, Painted Bush Quail *Perdica erythrorhyncha* and Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*, (Sashikumar et al. 2011, Chandran et al. 2020,).

During 2015-2020 Kerala birders systematically surveyed avian biodiversity of the entire state. Close to 1000 volunteers contributed to this citizen-science initiative termed ‘The Kerala Bird Atlas’ (KBA) and recorded species presence at over 3266 sites across the state. For the survey, Kerala was divided into cells of size 6.6 km x 6.6 km, each cell was further divided into four quadrants of size 3.3 km x 3.3 km and each quadrant was then sub-divided into 9 sub-cells of size 1.1 km x 1.1 km. A single, randomly

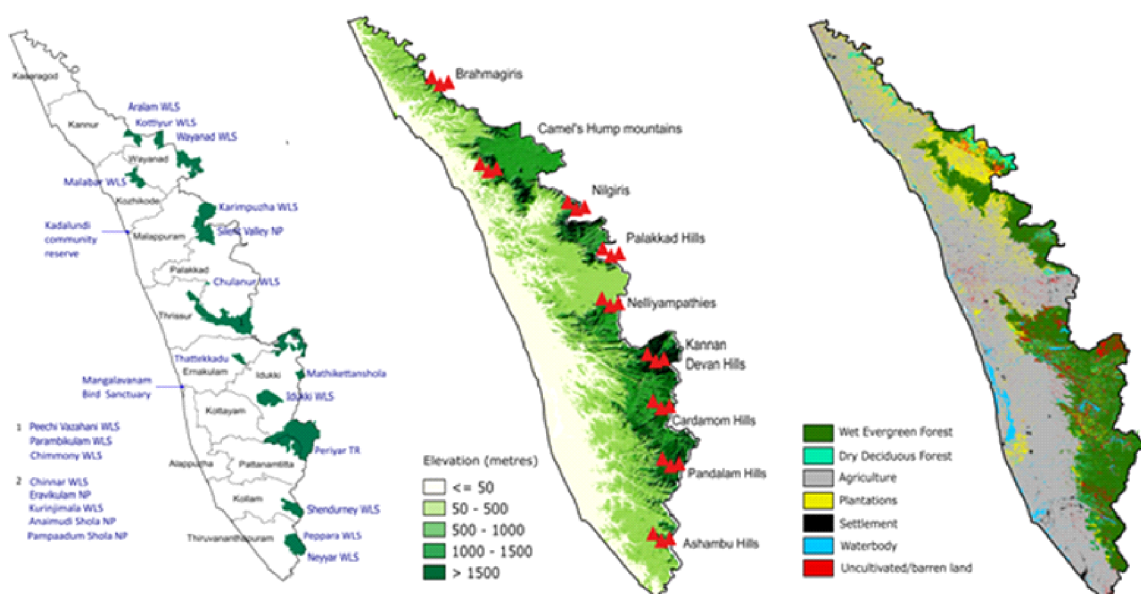


Figure 1: Outline of Kerala depicting districts, protected areas, topography and Land-use land-cover. Figures taken from Praveen et al. 2022i.

selected sub-cell in every quadrant was surveyed for two seasons; dry (mid-Jan. to mid-Mar.) and wet (mid-July to mid-Sep.). Four 15-minute checklists were made per sub-cell per season by a team consisting of 2-5 birders and every bird species seen or heard during the survey was noted (details in Praveen & Nameer 2021, Praveen et al. 2022i, Praveen et al. 2022ii).

Excluding nocturnal and pelagic species, 361 species (76 families) were detected, 353 species (75 families) in the dry season and 298 species (72 families) in the wet season (Praveen et al. 2022i). All eight Galliformes recorded from Kerala were sighted during the KBA surveys. With records from 651 sites Indian Peafowl was the most abundant pheasant in Kerala followed by Grey Junglefowl (645 sites). As for: Red Spurfowl (321 sites) and Grey Francolin (70 sites), and the other four species were very rare: Painted Bush-Quail (10 sites), Jungle Bush-Quail (6 sites), Painted Spurfowl (2 sites) and Rain Quail (1 site). Interestingly, Salim Ali did not record Indian Peafowl and Grey Francolin during the 1933 surveys of the erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Cochin, Jungle Bush-Quail, Painted Spurfowl and Rain Quail were not recorded either (Ali & Whistler 1937).

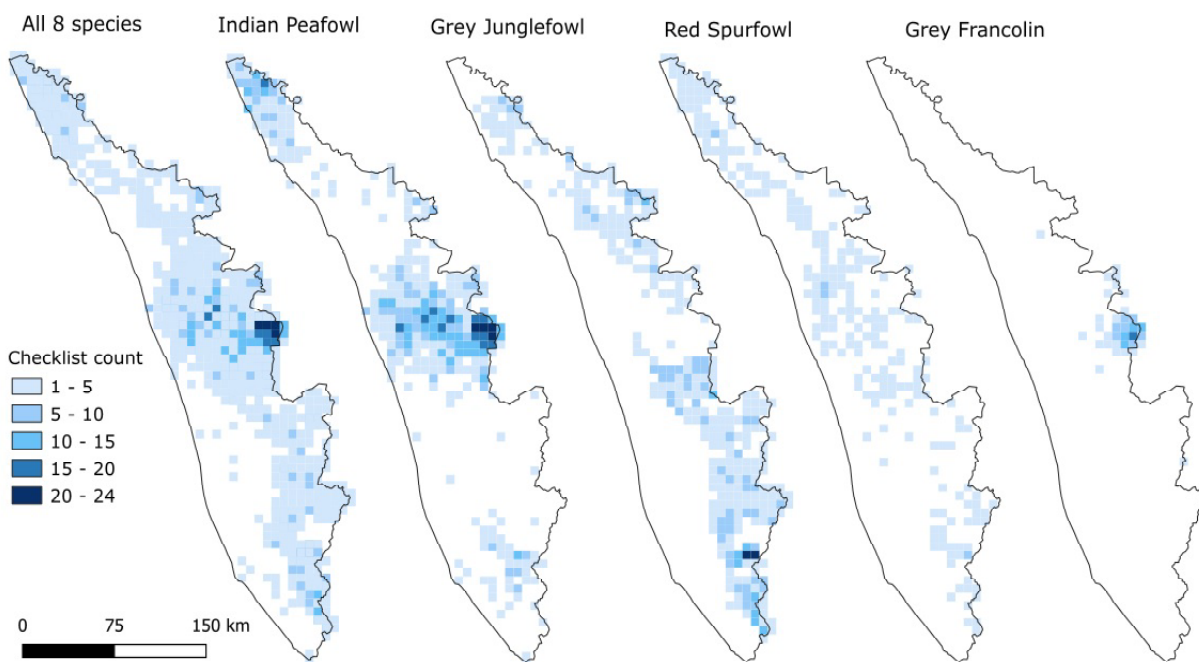


Figure 2: Total number of checklists reported from across Kerala. Each pixel is one cell (6.6 x 6.6 sq.km).

It must be noted that during the KBA surveys all species were detected by birders via sight and sound during a 15-minute survey period and eight such surveys were conducted at a site (sub-cell). Total number of records may not be an accurate estimation of species abundance since species vary in terms of detectability. Data from the four abundant Galliformes were further analyzed.

Rare till a few decades ago, Indian Peafowl is now seen across Kerala and was reported in highest densities around the Palakkad gap. Grey Junglefowl is a forest bird and hence most records were from higher altitudes (above 150 m). Red Spurfowl was well distributed in the villages of northern and

central Kerala, while it was restricted to forests in southern Kerala. Grey Francolin appears restricted to the Palakkad gap and certain eastern corners of Idukki (Chinnar) and Wayanad districts (Figure 2).

There were season-wise differences in species records. Percentage split for the dry and wet season records was as follows – Indian Peafowl (Dry: 37.6, Wet: 62.4), Grey Junglefowl (Dry: 72.2, Wet: 27.8), Red Spurfowl (Dry: 63.3, Wet: 36.7), Grey Francolin (Dry: 48.2, Wet: 51.8). Except for Grey Francolin, other three species showed stark seasonal differences in detections. These are resident species and seasonal differences in detection could be attributed to their breeding cycle. During breeding season, species vocalize and display, making them more detectable. Nesting of Indian Peafowl in Kerala coincides with the onset of north-east monsoon (Sep.-Oct.) (Sashikumar et al. 2011). Red Spurfowl avoids breeding during wet months (McGowan & Kirwan 2020). Grey Junglefowl breeds more or less throughout the year; most records in Feb.-Mar.; in West Nilgiris, probably Oct-Dec; in Travancore, Mar.-Jul., sometimes Aug. (Ali & Whistler 1937).

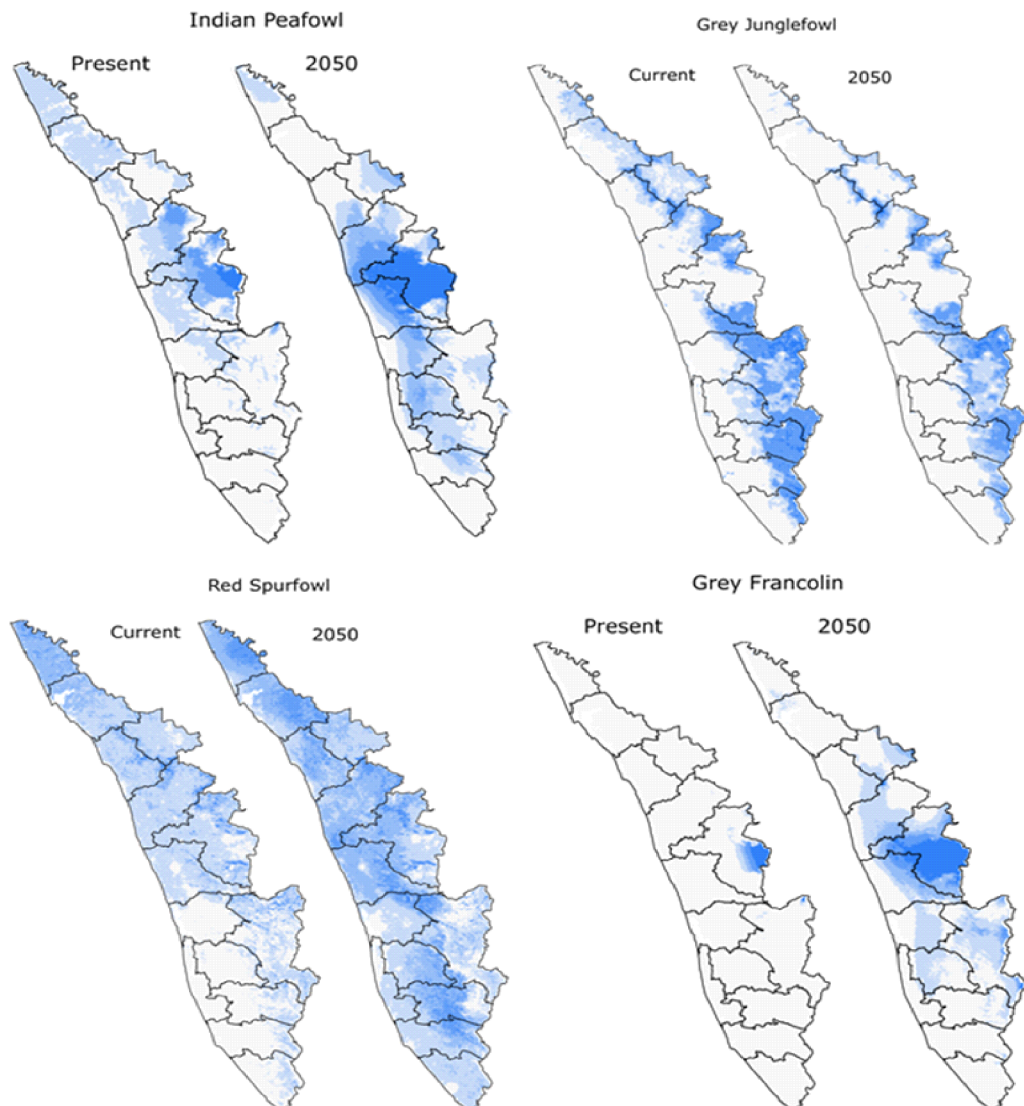


Figure 3: Current and future distribution of Galliformes of Kerala. Figures taken from Praveen et al. 2022i.

Future projections based on occupancy modeling (MacKenzie et al. 2006) suggests substantial increase in suitable habitat for the Indian Peafowl, Grey Francolin and Red Spurfowl, while slight decrease in suitable habitat for Grey Junglefowl (Figure 3). Expanding distribution of Indian Peafowl in Kerala in response to global warming, climate change and change in land-use pattern has already been documented (Sashikumar et al. 2014, Jose & Nameer 2020). We expect similar trends for other dry and open habitat adapted species such as the Grey Francolin. Regular monitoring via citizen-science exercises can help detect population changes in these species as a response to climate change, anthropogenic pressure or land-use alterations.



Praveen, J. And Nameer, P.O.,
An Atlas of the birds of Kerala.
Kerala, 2021, pp. 2019
ISBN978-93-5445-472-1.



Praveen, J., Nameer, P.O., and Jha, Ashish.
The Kerala Bird Atlas: Features and Insights,
Kerala, 2022, pp.100

Himalayan Monal display a striking multicoloured plumage

Source: Daksha Devnani, The Epoch Times, June 16, 2020.



(Dibyendu Ash/CC BY-SA 3.0)



The Himalayan monal is one of nature's stunningly beautiful birds. Known for its metallic multicolored iridescent plumage, this large-size mountain pheasant is a feast to birdwatchers' eyes.

This gentle species is the national bird of Nepal and the state bird of Uttarakhand, a state in the northern part of India. Among Nepalese citizens, the bird is often referred to as the 'Danphe.'

While the Himalayan monal is the common name for this distinctively coloured species, among ornithologists the bird is known as *Lophophorus impejanus*. Meanwhile, its alternative name 'Impeyan monal' comes from Lady Mary Impey, the wife of the British chief justice of Bengal, who first kept this pheasant in captivity, according to The Himalayan Times, a daily newspaper published and distributed in Nepal. It is the beautiful combination of hues in the male species of the Himalayan monal that has earned its name as the 'nine-colored bird.' The most striking features of the male Himalayan monal include a long metallic green crest that is very similar to a peacock and a reddish-brown neck.



(Sunil Onamkulam/Shutterstock)



(Wang LiQiang/Shutterstock)

The spoon-shaped feathers of the bird are a combination of black, green, blue, purple, light yellow, brown, and red colors. The copper-colored tail feathers, which are uniformly rufous, become darker toward the tips. In flight, these birds, which average 70 centimeters in size, display a white rump and light-brown wings.

While the male counterparts possess more beautiful colored plumage, the female Himalayan monals are a bit dull in comparison. They have a white neck, and the feathers of the upper part are brownish-black, while the tail feather consists of a mix of white feathers and a layer with a black and copper color. However, one common physical feature between both the male and female is that the eyes are ringed with a turquoise blue patch.

These birds are found in Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan, southern Tibet, and Burma, while many of them are also spotted in some Indian states such as Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. The Himalayan Times states that these birds can tolerate extreme winter, as they belong to the mountainous regions but depend on a lot of shelter and shade during the scorching sun of summer months and are unable to survive when faced with extreme heat.

The Himalayan monal is said to possess a curved beak and is known to be an excellent digger. They can dig up to 10 inches under the ground. According to the Sacramento Zoo (pdf), these pheasants spend most of their day foraging for food. Their diet includes a variety of seeds, buds, shoots, roots, and insects in the wild. While in the zoo, they feed on mixed vegetables, game bird chow, and insects.

The birds start their breeding season at the age of 2, and it begins at the end of April. Their extremely communicative nature both using body movements and vocalizations plays an important role during the mating season. The male Himalayan monal bobs its crest, fans the tail feathers, and indulges in various bodily displays to attract its female counterpart. Males not only call out in the morning but also during the entire day. After the male wins the female's heart, they build a simple nest, and the female lays two to five eggs that are white or dirty white in color with brown spots. The incubation period is about 28 days, and the male bird guards and protects the eggs throughout this time. After six months, the young ones start to search for their own food.

According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Himalayan monal is listed as of "least concern," indicating that its population is healthy and stable. However, according to the Hindustan Times, the monal is under threat of large-scale poaching in the Himalayan regions. Hunting of monals was banned in Himachal in 1982, but there has been very little check on poaching, and its colorful plumes were still available in the market.

In January 2020, the Himachal Pradesh state government imposed a complete ban on the use of the monal's crest to be fitted into caps. These caps were considered traditionally auspicious and were gifted during various occasions, especially marriages.

In Search of Elusive Blood Pheasant

Source: Dr. Nabamita Ray, info@travellersworldonline.com, December 15, 2020.



Photo : Nabamita Ray

“Chuck kzeeeeeuuuuuk cheeu cheeu cheeu”

The ear splitting long high-pitched sound broken the silence of the dawn at the high mountain made our hearts jump. A long wait was about to end. We grabbed each other's hand tight in excitement. I held my breath but could feel the heart beats faster. My eyelashes were heavier with the tiny drops of mist and eyes were fixed in the direction from where the sound came. I was about to see it for the first time. I was excited, I was anxious...almost flying with excitement . It was too hard to jump inside and keep myself unmoved. Please please please! I was mumbling to myself. Nothing should come in between. We shouldn't make a single wrong move. The view shouldn't be covered with fog. I was just praying for a glance of it. And then without making us wait for any longer he appeared ... came out of the dense forest of the mountain of North Sikkim. The “Blood pheasant”! Yes!! Truly a Blood pheasant. With a look like blood scattered on his forehead neck breast & belly. A magnificent beauty. An elegant beauty worth waiting for. *‘kzeeeeeuuuuuk cheeu cheeeeu cheeeu’* he kept calling standing on a boulder in open with his head high up.

Me and my friend and our driver cum guide , started in the early morning from our hotel at Lachen when it was still dark, in search of illusive Blood pheasant. The state bird of Sikkim. Once it was the national bird of the independent Kingdom of Sikkim. Out of twelve recognized subspecies the *‘Ithaginis cruentus affinis’* is found in Sikkim region. Recognized by the plumage of the male, especially the amount of blood like spots. With a hope to find this gem we headed towards Thangu which is

almost an hour's driving. Thangu is also the last village at an elevation of 12800 ft, towards indo-tibet border. Just the previous night we had come back from Thangu to Lachen after a session of high-altitude photography of mammals & birds at the high plateau area which is connected to the Tibetan plateau the Roof of the World, beyond the Gurudongmar lake, 17800 ft elevation, no vegetation, thin air. We were all but exhausted after such a hard session of 3 days photography at that challenging cold desert area.

Relieved after coming down at lachen at an elevation of 8500 ft to find ourselves in the middle of greenery everywhere. Next morning we woke up refreshed. All ready for the new venture. Driving all way back along the Lachen chu, one of the two main tributaries of river Teesta, flowing in the opposite direction to converge with the other one, Lachung chu. Somewhere just before reaching Thangu we stopped. We stretched our body & took a look around. Words fall short to describe such beauty. It was a foggy morning in the month of May, bone piercing cold wind. Heavenly scenery all around. The roar of Lachen chu was diminishing as we started climbing up the mountain. Alpine trees were whispering with the wind. Climbing up carrying our heavy weight cameras was a hard job. But we had to reach there before sunrise. On reaching at the spot I was blown away with the stunning view. It always makes us feel good if we can convince ourselves that we have done a tough job. So I convinced myself that we must have climbed almost a thousand ft. Far below the Lachen chu flowing silently. A huge steep scary wall of silvery black rock emerged from behind the thick dwarf vegetation and disappeared beyond the sky, the floor was covered with a carpet of green grass and purple pink primulas. Hide and seek of all of them behind the mist. A perfect habitat for the Blood pheasant. On the first sight of this unbelievably beautiful bird amidst a dreamy land I's feeling like I was the happiest & luckiest person in the world. Watching them coming out one after another. For a moment I was standing still in astonishment. Coming back to senses we hid ourselves behind boulders trees whatever we found between the birds and us and clicked clicked clicked. We knew they wouldn't give us endless time but only few moments.

We couldn't remove our eyes from them even for a moment and followed them until they slowly disappeared into the forest in the backdrop of that rocky wall. In a moment everything was vanished behind the mist. The curtain dropped after the fairy tale play was over. I was so absorbed with the thought that this world is such a beautiful place and nature never stops to amaze us. Happy we were, sad too. We waited for a while with anticipation looking towards their forlorn path, though inside, we knew they were not going to come back. With a deep sigh, we slowly started climbing down, where there was a café. One sweet little secluded wooden café, opened its door just when we came in front of it, hungry & thirsty. We had a cup of hot tea and cookies with a big smile and sparkling eyes. Though we were very happy & excited but no it can never be satisfying! We smiled & nodded our head as if promising that we are gonna come back soon again. ***Yes, very soon.***

5 endangered Kaleej pheasants, 10 red junglefowl released in Mahananda wildlife sanctuary in West Bengal

Source: ANI, November 27, 2020.



Authorities releasing Kaleej pheasants in the Mahananda wildlife sanctuary.
(Photo/ANI)

Sukna (West Bengal): The West Bengal forest department on Friday released five endangered Kaleej Pheasants in the Mahananda wildlife sanctuary, along with 10 Red Junglefowl.

Kaleej Pheasants are listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, while the Red Junglefowls are listed in Schedule 3.

“The Kaleej pheasants have been released after captive breeding at Dowhill in Kurseong. A bird festival will be held in the sanctuary to make people aware about the different bird species found in the region,” said Principal Chief Conservative of forest and wildlife Vinod Kumar Jadav.

Kaleej Pheasants (*Lophura leucomelana*) are mostly found in the Himalayan forest especially in the Himalayan foothills from Pakistan to Thailand and are most commonly seen near water and in dense undergrowth.

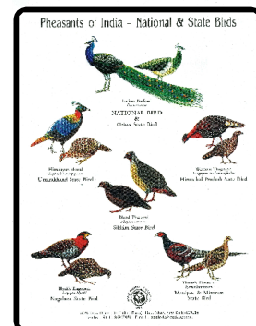
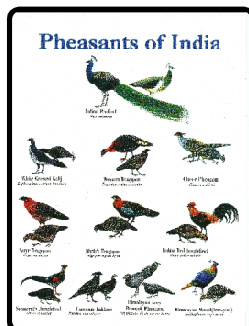
The Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) is a tropical member of the pheasant family, mostly found in the lower Himalaya from Jammu and Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, Shiwalik, Terai, the North East and Eastern India.

The Mahananda wildlife sanctuary is spread over 158 square kilometres and houses different types of animals. (ANI)

Resource Material - available on request

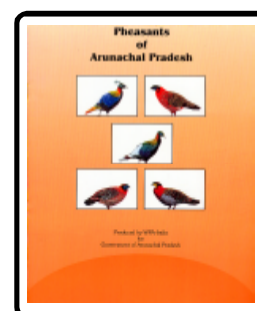
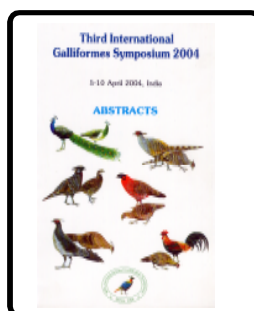
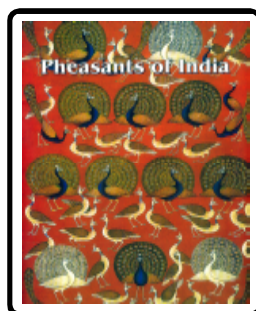
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