Mor

Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India

This second issue of **Mor** for the current year is in accordance with the decision taken in the Annual General Meeting held on 1 October 2004 to revive the newsletter and to bring out two issues per year.

The past six months have been devoted mainly to consolidating the gains made earlier and to following up on the outcome of the International Galliformes Symposium held in India during April 2004. In addition, some new initiatives have been taken, such as forging partnership with the Indian Army and strengthening the collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India and the Centre for Environment Education, on one hand, and State-level Government Agencies in Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, etc., on the other. The main aim is to promote networking and partnerships, which is a major plank of WPA-India's strategy for the future.

Meanwhile, the sad news relates to the passing away of Vice President Dr. A. H. Musavi on 9 March 2005. He had been ailing for some time and unfortunately the end came too soon. His contributions in support of the organization and the cause of galliformes conservation in India can never be forgotten. An obituary on him is included herein.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that efforts to further improve this newsletter are continuing. Readers are welcome to send ideas and suggestions in this regard and also to send contributions by way of short articles or newsitems on relevant topics.

Samar Singh, President

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Dr. A.H. Musavi

Born: 27 June 1934
Died: 9 March 2005

Dr. A.H. Musavi earned a high reputation as a teacher and academician at the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). He pioneered the establishment of the Centre of Wildlife and Orthinology at AMU (now known as the Department of Wildlife Sciences) and was its founder Chairman from 1986 to 1994. He was also the first Professor of Wildlife Science in India.

Apart from teaching, Dr. Musavi was involved with several conservation causes and bodies. In particular, he had a very close association with WPA-India (World Pheasant Association – India), the only national body in the country wholly devoted to the conservation of Pheasants and other Galliformes.

Before becoming Vice President of WPA-India in 2002, Dr. Musavi managed the organization almost singlehandedly as Hon. Secretary and Treasurer for over 13 years continuously. His passing away is a great loss to WPA-India and to the community of conservationists and wildlife scientists all over the country.

WORLD PHEASANT ASSOCIATION
INDIA

Join WPA-India

only national organization wholly devoted to the cause of galliformes conservation in India.

Contribute to the cause by joining in our efforts. Membership involves a nominal fee. Application form is available from the WPA-India Office atK-5, First Floor, Green Park,
New Delhi - 110016 (Telefax: 011-26563871)

Himachal leads in Pheasant Conservation

Himachal Pradesh is the home of seven out of a total of seventeen Pheasants found in India. As a group, Pheasants are among the most colourful and attractive birds. These include the spectacular Indian Peafowl, which is India's National Bird, and the glamorous Himalayan Monal, the State Bird of Himachal as well as Uttaranchal.

In a significant recent initiative, the Wildlife Wing of Himachal Forest Department has undertaken to conduct a statewide estimation and monitoring of the population of Pheasants during this summer season. No other State has done such work before and hence this initiative clearly puts Himachal in the lead.

With a view to train the field personnel for this rapid exercise, the State authorities contacted the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the World Pheasant Association – India (WPA-India). Both the organizations responded positively and made available selected experts for the purpose. Dr. S. Sathyakumar and Dr. Rajiv Kalsi led the team. The training was conducted at 16 different locations in the State from 28 April to 5 May and a total of over 700 field personnel and some supervisory staff attended the training.

The training included an introduction on the seven species of Pheasants found in Himachal, their conservation values and the need for long-term conservation and management. Simple techniques for recording presence/absence, encounter rate estimation and call counts were explained to the participants using visual aids. A write up in Hindi explaining these and other methods was provided along with data sheets in Hindi and English. The emphasis during the training has been on monitoring the pheasant populations rather than trying to obtain exact figures for individual species.

As mentioned before, this is the first such exercise being conducted in the country and hence its great significance. It is hoped that the outcome would provide a realistic and useful picture of the distribution and abundance of the seven pheasants in Himachal Pradesh, which would also serve as a baseline or benchmark for future monitoring. No doubt, this would also become an example for the other concerned States in the country to emulate.

Himachal Pradesh has also pioneered an innovative programme of conservation breeding of endangered pheasants, such as the Western Tragopan and Cheer Pheasant. This work is being carried out at Sarahan Bushahr, where an excellent pheasantry has been developed Conservation breeding of the Himalayan Monal (State Bird of Himachal Pradesn and Uttaranchal) is also in progress.

Successful Breeding of Western Tragopan at Sarahan

The Western Trgopan *(Tragopan melanocephalus)* is a highly endangered species. Its breeding in captivity is very rare. Recently, some chicks of the species have been hatched at Sarahan Pheasantry in Himachal Pradesh. This is a significant achievement under the Conservation Breeding Programme undertaken in the State.

Key Areas Project initiated in Uttaranchal

A collaborative research project titled "Key Areas Project" has just started in Uttaranchal, with the approval of the State Government. The collaboration is essentially between WPA, WPA-India and Wildlife Institute of India. The State Forest Department is facilitating project implementation.

The project aims to map distribution of Galliform species (Pheasants, Partridges and Quails) and to identify key areas for their conservation in north-west India based on extensive field surveys, remote sensing and GIS. The outcome of the project, besides providing latest information on species, is expected to give valuable insights on the role of Protected Areas and other aspects specific to galliformes conservation. It is also intended to identify new areas of conservation significance for special atention. The project objectives are:

1. To develop a spatial database on the distribution of Galliform species in North West India covering the states of Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

2. To evaluate the role of the existing protected areas network in Galliformes conservation and delineate key areas of conservation significance for these species in the landscape.

3. To prepare conservation plans for key areas and species for each State covered under the project, describing necessary management and conservation inputs.

While the project will be implemented separately for each state, the outcome would be combined to represent the status of Galliformes in the whole study area (northwest India). To start with, the focus is on Uttaranchal, which is certainly rich in Galliformes, with 21 species, including eight pheasant species. Besides, Uttaranchal is the distribution limit for several bird species and both Satyr Tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*) and Rufous-throated Partridge (*Arborophila rufogularis*) have their western limits in the state, while the Western Tragopan has its eastern limit here. In the past, some attempts were made to establish distribution of Galliformes, including the Himalayan Quail. But, these surveys were restricted to a few localities around Musoorie and Nainital hills (for Himalayan Quail), and in Tons catchment (for Western Tragopan), and the surveys were inconclusive. The distribution status of most of the Galliformes in the State is virtually unknown, and even for the common species (e.g. Himalayan Monal and Red Junglefowl) precise information is lacking. The 3rd International Galliformes Symposium held in the State during April 2004 recommended a comprehensive status assessment of Galliformes, followed by a conservation action plan for the State. The new project is in line with the resolution.

The Project Investigators are Dr. K. Ramesh, Researcher, Dr. Qamar Qureshi, WII Faculty Member, and Dr. Philip McGowan, Director, WPA.

Save the National Bird

The Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) – a pheasant species - is **India's National Bird** and rightly so. The species has been provided the highest degree of legal protection under the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972, having been placed in Schedule I of the Act. However, in recent years several cases of the mortality of peafowl have been reported from certain parts of the country. The latest reports are from Indore in Madhya Pradesh. The matter is certainly of serious concern, especially because it relates to the National Bird, which also plays an important ecological role by feeding on insects and pests, thereby maintaining a balance in nature as well as aiding agriculture.

Hence, it is essential that all necessary steps are taken to protect the peafowl wherever it is found and also to examine the cases of mortality very carefully, with a view to determine the root causes and to take prompt and effective measures to address the same. Needless to add that in any case of killing or poaching, the case must be investigated quickly and the culprits prosecuted under the relevant legal provisions, with proper follow up in the court to ensure that a deterrent penalty is meted out.

It is also necessary to take note of the concern that the mortality of the birds is caused by the intake of pesticides used in agricultural operations. This can be determined in each case by conducting a proper post mortem of the carcass immediately after the incident. If it is established that pesticides are indeed the cause of mortality, it is essential to take the help of the Agriculture Department to create awareness among the farmers about the ill effects of such pesticides and to build support for the use of more benign pesticides, including bio-pesticides, for which some efforts are being made through the good offices of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The need for an awareness campaign is self-evident: to make the people aware of the fact that the Peafowl is the National Bird and its killing is a serious offence for which no one will be spared. Relevant publicity material on the subject has to be prepared and disseminated widely and the assistance of the local press should be enlisted also to spread the word. For this purpose, financial assistance from the Ministry of Environment & Forests should be forthcoming, considering the cause and the fact that this has never been done in the past.

Another issue concerning this matter that needs urgent attention relates to the exemption provided under sections 43 and 44 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act in respect of peacock tail feathers. This is a serious loophole that is surely contributing to the killing of the National Bird in various parts of the country. In effect, we have a highly contradictory situation in which, on one side, there is a legal provision of severe punishment for the killing of peafowl, and, on the other side, there are provisions which make it possible to acquire and deal in the tail feathers of the bird without any restrictions. As a result, the culprits responsible for the killing of the birds to acquire the tail feathers are thriving. The solution lies in removing this loophole by deleting specially the exemption for dealing in peacock tail feathers and the articles made therefrom under section 44 of the aforesaid Act.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that a scientific status survey of the Indian Peafowl has not been carried out so far. This is again unfortunate, considering that this concerns the National Bird about which authentic data must exist and there should be regular monitoring as well. Hence the need for a time-bound exercise to determine the current status of the species and to institute a proper arrangement for periodic monitoring.

Thus, there is ample justification for a nation-wide campaign to save the National Bird, which should include the following action points:

(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 nodal role in all this certainly lies with the Ministry of Environment & Forests at the Centre and the Forest Departments in the States. However, for ensuring proper results, the involvement and support of other government agencies, specially the Police, Revenue and Agriculture Departments in the States, is crucial. The active participation of concerned institutions and organizations, more specially the Wildlife Institute of India, WPA-India, Bombay Natural History Society, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History, is also necessary for this important initiative.

by Samar Singh, President, WPA-India

Indian Peafowl
Pavo cristatus

- Endemic/Indian Species.
- Prominent place in Indian art, culture and tradition (including music) for centuries.
- Helps in maintaining balance of nature.
- Hunting, killing, poisoning or trapping is punishable under Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 with imprisonment (minimum 3 years) alongwith fine (at least Rs. 10,000/-).

The Chicken genome

The **Red Junglefowl** is probably the most widespread and economically indispensable domesticated animal in the world. It now joins a worm, a fly, a fish, a mouse, a chimpanzee and us in an elite group of animal species that have had their innermost genetic secrets exposed for all to see. Its genome – its complete DNA sequence – has been read.

This will not have a direct effect on either chicken farming or scientific research, but it will have an indirect effect, for now it will be possible to investigate everything from chicken diseases or the evolution of sexual behaviour in animals to human migration patterns by checking sequences in the chicken genome.

In each of their cells, chickens have less than one-third as much DNA as we do, but suppress any temptation to crow. This almost certainly marks them out as superior, more genetically efficient creatures than mammals. They have only slightly fewer actual genes than us (20,000 – 23,000), but much less parasitic junk. Like hard discs that have not been running anti-virus software, our genomes are clogged with repetitive gibberish dumped there by ancient retroviruses (though not as bad as lungfishes or salamanders, which have far more). Chickens have markedly fewer duplicated or broken copies of genes. Their DNA is much tidier.

On its own, a chicken genome is fairly meaningless: a text written in a four letter alphabet about as long as 250 bibles. The real interest comes from comparing it with others and for geneticists this is the most exciting chance to compare genomes they have yet had. As a cousin to us, a chicken is half way between a fish and a mouse, which makes it sufficiently similar to a person – the common ancestor was already a four legged reptile – to have most of its genes in common, but sufficiently different – the ancestral lines diverged about 310 million years ago – to reveal subtle effects. Unsurprisingly, chickens

have genes for making feathers, but none for making tooth enamel or milk. More surprisingly, they have lots more genes for scent detection than expected – given that birds generally are thought to have a poor sense of smell.

However, geneticists are a bit bored of genes three days. Since discovering a few years ago that genetically we are just mice with our genes switched on and off in different patterns, they have been more intrigued by the non-gene sequences that control the ‘expression’ of genes. But finding these sequences has been difficult. Comparing a human genome to a fish genome does not help much, because everything is too dissimilar. Comparing it to a mouse does not help either because even the junk is too similar. But a chicken, like Mama Bear’s porridge, is just right. Geneticists have found a treasure trove of control sequences already. This will help them to hunt down why some people get iller, behave worse or live longer than others. In other words, the chicken will once again prove an invaluable servant to its human master.

Source: Matt Ridley in WPA International Newsletter No. 74/2005

For more details see Nature Vol 432 (9 December 2004)

Project Update

The progress of ongoing projects is briefly given below:

* **Wildlife and Floristic Studies in Allain-Duhangan Catchments, HP.**

The project aims to assess the important biological attributes of the two catchments near Manali where a hydro electric power plant is planned. The Floristic Study is being done in association with GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development and is well underway. The Wildlife related studies are focussed on mammals, birds and butterflies. Two field trips for this purpose have been completed and the findings are being analysed. The project is funded by ERM India and is expected to be completed by end of this year.

* **Survey of animal use extraction pattern in some areas of Indian Himalaya.**

The project is funded by the British High Commission in Delhi. As planned, field work has been completed in Uttaranchal, Sikkim, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Reports of the Project Investigators have been received and are under examination. The findings will be synthesised in a single consolidated report within a month for submission to the sponsor.

* **Effect of pesticide use on Blue Peafowl and Grey Fancolin in Central India.**

The project is funded by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, and is to be carried out over three years. Research Fellows have been recruited and field work has commenced, initially in and around Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur, with the permission of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Rajasthan.

* Apart from the above mentioned ongoing projects, it is expected that the proposed **Himachal Pheasant Conservation Project** will be approved soon by the State Government. This project will have a significant role for WPA-India.

Another project titled "**Community based conservation of Galliformes in the Gori Basin, Uttaranchal**" has been submitted to the Ministry of Environment and approval is expected soon.

Other News

Collaboration with WII: The President, WPA-India, visited the WII at Dehradun on 11-12 May 2005 and held discussions with the Director and faculty members, specially to take forward the MOU concluded in February 2005 between the WII and WPA-India. The following items have been identified for urgent action:

* Training on field techniques for the field personnel.

* Compilation of a Bibliography on all relevant research and studies in India on Galliformes, specially Pheasants.

* WII Library to have a separate section of books and publications on Galliformes, specially Pheasants.

Collaboration with Indian Army: In a recent initiative, the President, WPA-India, approached the Chief of Army Staff soliciting the help of Armed Forces in promoting the conservation of Pheasants and other Galliformes. The response from Army Hqts. has been quick and positive and now the details of collaboration are being worked out with the Environment and Ecology Cell in Army Hqts. Assistance of WPA-India has been specially requested for educational activities and training materials. It is also agreed to collaborate on conservation work relating to endanged species.

More recently, on 15-16 June the Western Command organized a seminar at Ambala and invited the President, WPA-India, to make a presentation on the Indian Pheasants and the role of the Armed Forces in their conservation. Accordingly, the President accompanied by Shri Sharad Gaur, WPA-India Governing Board Member, participated in the seminar on 15 June and the President gave a presentation on the above mentioned subject.

Collaboration with Paryavaran Edutech: WPA-India has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Paryavaran Edutech of the CEE, Ahmedabad, to collaborate in bringing out educational material and products, specially on Pheasants and other Galliform species.

SAFO Merger: The WPA-run South Asia Field Office (SAFO) based at Gurgaon has ceased to exist and all work is being handled in the WPA-India Office located at K-5, Green Park, New Delhi – 110016 (Phone: 011 – 26563871, e-mail: wpaindia@hathway.com).

WPA-India Website: The website at www.wpaindia.org is funcational and can be accessed for information on relavant topics, with special reference to Indian Pheasants.

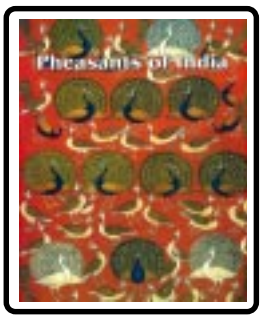
Resource Material - *available on request*

Posters

- Himalayan Monal
- Pheasants of India
- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Uttaranchal
- Pheasants of Assam
- Pheasants of J&K
- Pheasants of Sikkim
- Pheasants of Nagaland
- Pheasants of West Bengal


Booklets

- Pheasants of India
- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Third International Galliformes Symposium (Abstracts)
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh



Ceramic Mugs with WPA-India logo and picture of Himalayan Monal - *also available*

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