

# Mor

*Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India*



**Indian Peafowl**  
*Pavo cristatus*  
**National Bird**  
&  
Odisha State Bird



**Himalayan Monal**  
*Lophophorus impejanus*  
Uttarakhand State Bird



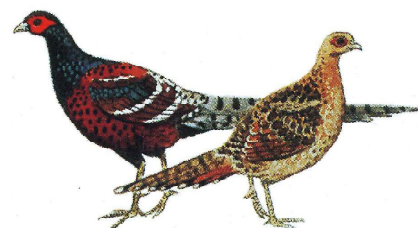
**Western Tragopan**  
*Tragopan melanocephalus*  
Himachal Pradesh State Bird



**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,

*As you are aware in a few of our previous issues we have been covering the work under the project titled “Long Term Conservation of Pheasants in Western Arunachal Pradesh”, supported by the Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust (DMNCT). In the current issue we bring you highlights of a recent field visit of the team to the Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal, especially the exciting sightings of the elusive Chestnut-breasted Partridge. Another exciting “first” reported in this issue is the sighting of the Jungle Bush Quail in the Aravalli Biodiversity Park of Delhi.*

*We also report on the alarming instances of unnatural mortality among peafowls from across the country. Recently a conservation success has been achieved – the first ever artificial hatching of the Western Tragopan – and it is a happy coincidence that it was achieved by the Sarahan based Conservation Breeding Centre in Himachal Pradesh, whose State Bird it is! Our news reportage covers this achievement.*

*Please continue sending your feedback and comments, as well as write ups and photos for forthcoming issues.*

**Hon. General Secretary, WPA-India**



Habitat Chestnut-breasted Partridge

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## Finding Louis Mandelli's Partridge

Quiet a few times I've heard their 'Idle school boy'-like whistles piercing the air in the hilly forests of West Bengal, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh as the Chestnut-breasted Partridge (*Arborophila mandellii*) is vocal almost round the year. But all through my birding years, it seemed near impossible to get a clear glimpse of the elusive whistler amidst the dense undergrowth.

The forest of Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary was slowly getting active as the first light from the sun came peeping through the mist and dense canopy cover. The forest road was still dark. Only a few streaks of light here and there created a magical ambience. We were set on our usual daily field trip in search of pheasants and other birds for the 'Long Term Conservation Of Pheasants In Western Arunachal Pradesh' project. Our base camp was at Bompou and we were heading towards Sesni. On way, about two kilometers away from Bompou, we came across two male Kalij (*Lophura leucomelanos lathami*). They were foraging right on the forest road. Our vehicle came to a halt immediately and before the glossy black pheasants disappeared into the roadside bushes, we managed to click a few snaps of the duo. A series of alarm calls from these two Kalij kept the forest awake for a while. These individuals were not that shy and left the road only after we tried to open the doors of our vehicle to get down. We kept on driving for a few more minutes and stopped at a place where we got calls and scratching sounds of Hill Partridge previous evening. We left the vehicle and started walking. Suddenly we heard the call of Chestnut-breasted Partridge (*Arborophila mandellii*) from the road above us. We were a couple of turns below them. Calls were coming from the same place and we began to walk back. By the time we reached the place there was silence again. Our guide Domba Pradhan began to play back the call of the Chestnut-breasted Partridge (we had necessary permission from the Forest Department for playing back bird calls as we were on a research project). After a little while, the birds responded from the forest below. We took to hides quickly as the calls and sounds of their movements were coming up fast. But all of a sudden everything stopped only a few feet below the road. We were waiting motionless holding the cameras and our breath held! But nothing happened. After a few tensed minutes Domba got up from the bush in which he was hiding and went to check the slope whether the birds were there or not. We also got out of our hides and came to the edge of the road to look for the presence of partridges. There was nothing we could detect. So we decided to move on and started walking. But as soon as we started, much awaited sound came again from below and after another round of play-back-call the elusive Chestnut-breasted Partridge appeared from the roadside bushes, crossed the road for about half the width and flew away into the forest above. It happened so fast that we hardly got any chance of clicking it. But immediately after the first one, another partridge appeared from almost the same place walked a few steps on the road and repeated almost the same movement pattern. This time we were in a better position and managed to get a few snaps and a short video clip. What a moment it was! After shaking hands



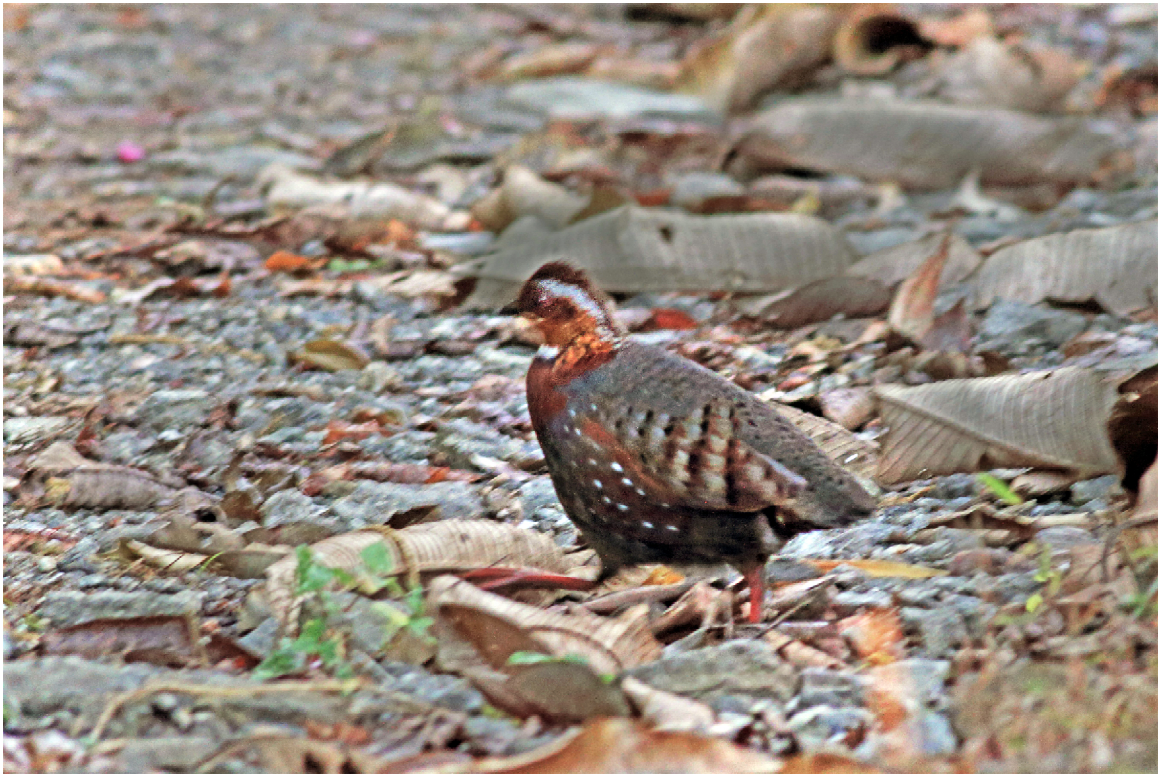


Photo: Ayan Banerjee

and congratulating each other we checked the photos and videos. The light condition was not enough and the images I got were blurred but our videographer Mr. Tapas Ghosh got a lovely footage of the partridge coming out of the bushes and flying away. It was success after 5 long years of wait to see and capture images of the threatened and rare Chestnut-breasted Partridge. Though a few more photographers have already captured good photographs of the species earlier, yet it was a joyful moment for all of us. At Singalila National Park, West Bengal, in 2010, while we were searching for Chestnut-breasted Partridge, I came across with this shy bird for the first time. A couple of them were foraging on forest trail and as we reached the place they dashed into bamboo thickets allowing only a glimpse. It was hardly enough to indentify the species. But we were certain as their typical call could be heard everywhere around the place. During our lookout for this super skulker in the summer of 2011 in the hills of Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, a few sightings took place. But our frustration was increasing as they were not providing us any chance of capturing their photographs. To find them we were busy in detecting their calls and the scratching sound of dried leaves they make in search of food on the forest floor. But the dried leaves played dual roles. The coloration of the dorsal part of the bird has surprising similarity with dried leaves and the low profile of them was helping them to blend with the surroundings. However on my second visit to the Buxa Tiger Reserve, I managed to see four of them and was able to get a few snaps too. Unfortunately due to lack of proper light, the photographs were blurry and only the dorsal part of two individuals were captured in the photos. After this I made another visit to the place in February, 2014. Combed the places where they used to forage and



where we had sightings. But this time too it was futile. Only twice I saw partridges running hastily for shelter but couldn't identify the species. As both Chestnut-breasted Partridge and Rufous-throated Partridge (*Arborophila rufogularis*) share the same habitat around that location in Buxa Hills .

On two more occasions, we came close to the Chestnut-breasted Partridge during our stay at Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary. But we could not manage to take photograph or video clip of this elusive and shy bird again. On one occasion the bird came out within a few feet from me but didn't allow me to do anything barring having a good look at it. The second occasion was a little more interesting as two species responded to the same call but none came out of their hides. This time also we got calls of the Chestnut-breasted Partridge and began playing back. The response was prompt and within 4/5 minutes the bird was at the edge of the road. As we were expecting it to come out on the road a Hill Partridge (*Arborophila torqueola*) began calling from a bush little above us. The Chestnut-breasted Partridge stood still, started giving alarm calls from inside a dense bush and then moved away to the direction it came from. The Hill Partridge was silent for a while and after a while began giving a different call. By now our guide Dombé started replying by mimicking its call. Surprisingly the call and response went for 5/6 long minutes before everything came to silence. We also heard Rufous-throated Partridges calling from a little lower altitude near Khelong Camp too. But they were not responding to our call play. So we had to be happy with whatever we have got, the single video footage and a few snaps of the partridge of Louis Mandelli!

by: Ayan Banerjee, Member Project Team, WPA-India

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### **Peacocks found dead near Koila-Alipur village**

Mathura, 2018.02.09 Vrindavan Today (VT) Residents have alerted the Forestry Department after several dead peacocks were found in the area near Mathura Refinery. Around 15 dead peacocks have been found in the area in the last two months.

The cause of the death is not known, however, residents say that vicious dogs in the area have been seen attacking peacocks. SDM Sadar Krantishekhar said that the Forestry Department will launch an investigation to discover the cause of the deaths.

Divisional Forest Officer, Arvind Kumar, said that they were not aware of increase in peacock deaths in recent months, however the Forestry Department takes such reports seriously and will act immediately.

As well as being loved by Lord Krishna for their service of providing beautiful feathers to decorate his turban, Peacocks are India's National bird. Formerly, peacocks were common in Braj, however, the urban sprawl in recent years has significantly reduced peacock numbers and they are now rarely seen.

Source: February 9, 2018, by Vrindavan Today (VT).

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## Jungle Bush Quail - a new jewel in Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Delhi

It was Big Bird Day on 18th February 2018 in Delhi. Our team had to survey Aravalli Biodiversity Park (ABP), Delhi and Neela Hauz Biodiversity Park for making a checklist of the birds.

We started birding from suggested area by our team leader and encountered some common and also some rare birds from the area. After walking through the moist deciduous forest in ABP, we turned towards the unrestored area of the park; it was scrub forest with *Adathoda vasica*, *Zizyphus*, scattered tree of *Acacia leucophloea* and some grass clumps of *Sacarrum munja*. We sighted Paddy field pipit (*Anthus richardi*), Indian bush lark (*Mirafra erythroptera*), Grey francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), moving further there was a big depression with scattered grass clump and few *Prosopis* tree. We were trying to take a snap of Indian hare but bumped on seeing a quail on the other end however unable to identify the species. It was about 50 m away from me, before it flushed inside the grasses and bushes. We managed to get some pictures and a small video clip as these days cameras are well equipped with still photos and video, we both saw the bird for more than a minute. We were excited to see the quail till than our checklist has reached up to 35 birds.



Photo: Yasser Arafat

At once we shared photo of quail to our colleagues and it was identified as male Jungle bush quail (*Perdica asiatica*). We were very happy and excited as it was the first sighting of this bird in Aravalli Biodiversity Park.





Photo: Yasser Arafat

Jungle bush quail is a resident bird of India and distributed in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and in some more peninsular areas of India. Its main habitat is grass and scrub jungle and open deciduous forest. We have sighted this bird at exactly in the same habitat. According to *Atlas of the Birds of Delhi and Haryana*, it was sighted in Asola wildlife sanctuary and somewhere in southern ridge in Delhi. It's presence in Aravalli Biodiversity Park shows that the area is becoming friendly and safe sanctuary for quails also. This park is surrounded by densely populated residential colonies of Vasant Vihar and Vasant Kunj so the only refuge for the animal species is Biodiversity Park. The restoration work of the degraded areas in park has attracted many faunal species in past, now Jungle bush quail is the latest one. This bird mainly feeds on grass, weed seeds, small insects especially termites and sometimes on grits also. The sighting area was full of weed seeds, grass, sandstone and other bushes of *Zizyphus* and *Adhatoda vasica*. As mentioned by Dr. Salim Ali and other authors that this bird remains in small group of 6-20 individuals but interestingly we sighted only one solitary bird in Biodiversity Park.

The status and distribution of Jungle Bush Quail is still unknown in the Delhi and nearby areas. Last year it was sighted in Sultanpur National Park and Manger Bani forest in Haryana but still the population and status is not known. A pilot project on the status, distribution and abundance on all quail species of Delhi and Haryana can be initiated by World Pheasant Association, India. The data will provide the baseline information for further ecological and conservation studies on these quails in the capital and NCR areas.

By: Yasser Arafat\* and Huda Siddiqui# (\* Aravalli Biodiversity Park, CEMDE, University of Delhi, Delhi. # Department of Wildlife Sciences, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh).



## State bird of Himachal artificially hatched for first time



New Delhi, Dec 25 (UNI) The first ever known record of successful artificial hatching and assisted rearing of Western Tragopan chicks has taken place this breeding season in Himachal Pradesh at the Conservation Breeding Centre for the Western Tragopan at Sarahan, Shimla.

In a remarkable feat the rare and vulnerable Himachal Pradesh's state bird Western Tragopan has been artificially hatched in captivity for the first time, Dr Sushil Kapta, Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) Forest Department, Himachal Pradesh said.

He said this was the second attempt to artificially incubate the bird's eggs, the first attempt (during mid-2000) having produced no successful result. The eggs were incubated in advance incubator using standardized settings of temperature and humidity over a period of 30 days. The chicks were reared in specialized thermo-regulated brooder cages for a period of six-eight weeks before being transferred to outdoor enclosures. Of the 13 eggs that were incubated artificially, four chicks hatched of which three survived. In total, 11 chicks were born during the 2017 breeding season — seven naturally hatched and reared by Tragopan hens and four incubator-hatched but three died leaving eight surviving chicks. Thus the total Western Tragopans at Sarahan has gone up from 25 to 33, he added.

Recent estimates by Bird Life International (2017) suggest fewer than 3500 Western Tragopan world wide though the figure may be on the lower side. The bird is found in Pakistan administered Jammu and Kashmir regions, Chamba and Garhwal regions of HP and Uttarakhand respectively. Because of the small and sparsely distributed population which is probably declining and

becoming increasingly fragmented, the species has been categorized as ‘Vulnerable’ by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). The species inhabits the high-altitude temperate forests at elevations between 2400- 3200m. It is declining due to habitat loss and an overall reduction in the quality of the available habitat.

In 2003-04, the Central Zoo Authority approved Rs 493.90 lac conservation breeding project for the Western Tragopan submitted by the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD). The first attempts and keeping and breeding Western Tragopan in captivity were carried out in the early 1990’s at a small rescue center, Sarahan pheasantry, situated in Sarahan Bushahr, Shimla, HP.

The first captive breeding of the species was reported in 1993, from a pair of wild-born rescued birds. In the eventual years, additional attempts were made at breeding the species with sporadic success. The goal of the conservation breeding program was to captive breed and establish a ‘reserve’ population of the species in captivity.

The conservation breeding centre lies within the natural distributional range of the species and wild tragopans have been sighted. The centre is located adjacent to Daranghati Wildlife Sanctuary and the birds could be re introduced into the sanctuary from the breeding centre.

In March 2017, prior to the onset of the breeding season, the captive population at Sarahan comprised of 25 birds with 14 males and 11 females.

During the 2017 breeding season, a total of 32 eggs were laid by nine breeding females. All the eggs were normal and no instance of abnormal eggs (thin-shelled, under-sized eggs) were reported. The success was clearly due to variety of innovative steps taken to create and provide the best and most secure natural surrounding to the birds, Dr Kapta added.

A total of 33 cane basket nests were offered to all the breeding females in 11 different enclosures with a minimum of three different nest sites to provide females multiple nesting options to choose from. These baskets were mounted at different locations and heights inside the enclosure, using tripods or wooden perches. Dried moss and fern were used as nesting material. Additionally, bundles of dry grass, twigs and bamboo leaves were placed near the nest for the female to use in nest building. The nests were camouflaged using liana and other creepers from the sides and the top. All nests were monitored using CCTV cameras.

The diet offered to the captive birds was specially chosen principally consisting of vegetative matters in the form of a mixture of fruits, vegetables, greens and sprouts and a small quantity of hard-boiled egg as a substitute for animal protein.

Grain and seed mix and sometimes wild berries collected from the natural habitat were also offered to the birds. The health of birds are regularly checked and strict hygiene was maintained, Dr Kapta said.

*Source: United News of India, 25 December 2017, By Satyen Mohapatra.*

## Incidences of mortality of Indian peafowl *Pavo cristatus* due to pesticide poisoning in India and accumulation pattern of chlorinated pesticides in tissues of the same species collected from Ahmedabad and Coimbatore

**Abstract:** Incidences of mortality of Indian peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, the national bird (Schedule I Indian Wild Life Protection Act 1972), are rampant in India. Between January 2011 and March 2017, around 550 peafowl in 35 incidences were reported dead across the country. Due to the non-availability of fresh carcasses, poisoning could not be confirmed. Birds which died due to kite string injuries in Ahmedabad (15) and accidents in Coimbatore (5) were tested for residues of chlorinated pesticides, namely hexachlorocyclohexane (HCH), dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT), endosulfan, heptachlor, dicofol, dieldrin and cholinergic pesticides. The liver, kidney and muscle were the tissues considered to document pesticide load. Total load ranged from BDL to 388.2 ng/g. DDT (95%) and HCH (80%) were detected more frequently. DDT (40%) and endosulfan (26%) contributed maximum to the total pesticide load followed by HCH (21%). Pesticide accumulation pattern among the organs was in the order of liver (123.9 ng/g) > kidney (91.9 ng/g) > muscle (19.5 ng/g) with significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ). Peafowl from Ahmedabad had significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher level of total pesticide (149.0 ng/g) than birds from Coimbatore (47.8 ng/g). Although varying levels of chlorinated pesticide were detected, they were below reported toxic limits. Nevertheless, persistence of chlorinated pesticides and poisoning due to modern pesticides across the entire distribution range of Peafowl in India is a cause for concern.

Source: *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, March 2018, by Kanthan Nambirajan Email author Subramanian Muralidharan Subbian Manonmani Venkatachalam Kirubhanandhini Kitisamy Ganesan.



Photo: Dr. John Corder



## 10 peacocks found dead



One of the birds that was found dead at Juna Ghatila village of Maliya-Miyana taluka in Morbi district on Sunday morning

**RAJKOT:** A total of 10 peacocks including five chicks, three peahens and two peacocks were found dead at JunaGhatila village of Maliya-Miyana taluka in Morbi district on Sunday morning.

JunaGhatila village sarpanch Chandu Patel informed the forest department. Forest guard B. C. Barolia rushed to the site and collected bodies of the dead birds.

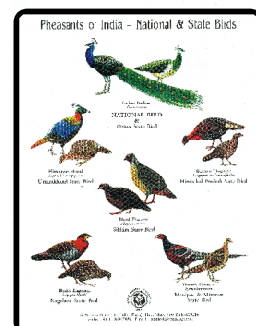
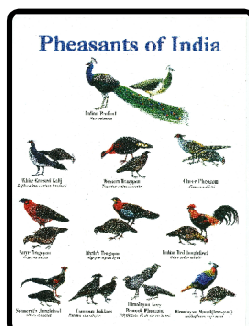
“We have sent bodies of the dead birds to Morbi Wildlife Conservation Centre where their postmortem has been conducted. Seeds of wheat were extracted from the birds’ stomachs. It is suspected that the seeds were poisonous and that the birds had died of food poisoning. However, the exact picture will be clearer after we get the FSL report,” said Barolia.

*Source: Times of India City, February 5, 2018.*

## Resource Material - available on request

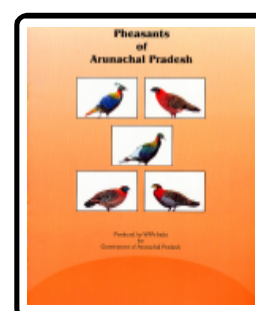
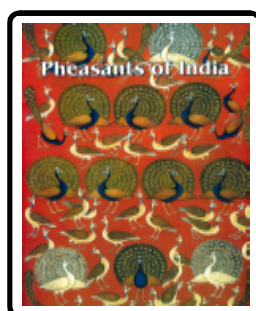
### Posters

- Pheasants of India
- Pheasants of Arunachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Himachal Pradesh
- Pheasants of Uttarakhand
- Pheasants of Assam
- Pheasants of J&K
- Pheasants of Sikkim
- Pheasants of Nagaland
- Pheasants of West Bengal
- National and State Birds
- Save the National Bird
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