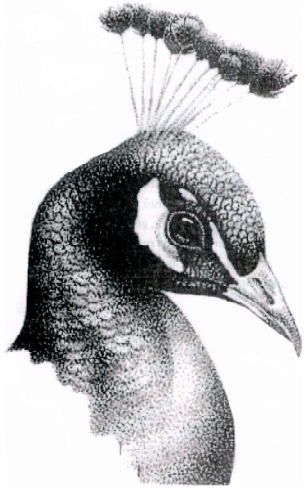
Mor

Newsletter of World Pheasant Association - India



Indian Peafowl
Pavo cristatus
National Bird
&
Odisha State Bird

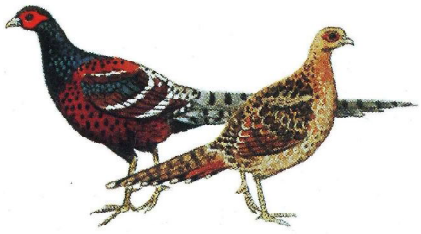
Himalayan Monal
Lophophorus impejanus
Uttarakhand State Bird

Western Tragopan
Tragopan melanocephalus
Himachal Pradesh State Bird

Blood Pheasant
Ithaginis cruentus
Sikkim State Bird

Blyth's Tragopan
Tragopan blythii
Nagaland State Bird

Pheasants as National & State Birds



Hume's Pheasant
Syrmaticus humiae
Manipur and Mizoram
State Bird

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Global warming and climate change is causing habitat loss, due to sea level rise, more frequent and severe wildfires, flooding and droughts, invasive species, changes in vegetation and precipitation, loss of snow cover and particularly affecting birdlife. To compensate for the warmer temperatures, the ranges of different habitats may shift to higher elevations. Habitat types that cannot colonize new areas may rapidly decline or cease to exist. Pheasants are highly adapted to particular vegetation and habitat types. Since climate change will affect different species differently, pheasant's behaviour may no longer be in sync with their food sources and other habitat needs. It has been witnessed by many surveys and long term studies on Himalayan Biodiversity that global warming and climate change have altered the distribution of many pheasant species in their distribution ranges due to change in the weather pattern and vegetation composition due to climate change. Endangered species like Cheer pheasant and Western tragopan with limited habitat availability or small gene pools may also not be able to adapt quickly enough to avoid extinction.

This issue of Mor is presenting information on position rather unique Rooster in Goa. The Red Jungle fowl, is well known as the progenitor of all forms of domesticated chicken. The bird has very ancient cultural and religious association with many civilizations across the globe. The issue also has an article on the status and conservation efforts for the National Bird. Efforts mentioning how mythology and religious beliefs of different faiths can save our national bird would be interesting for readers.

Please save Nature with all possible efforts. Wishing a Happy New year 2019 to all.

Dr. M.Shah Hussain, Hon. General Secretary

The Rooster in Goa

by Samar Singh, former President, WPA-India

Goa is the only Indian state where the Rooster in colourful image form is on public display, prominently and profusely atop old public buildings, especially churches, and even residential houses as well as in shops selling gifts and souvenirs. In fact, this is a unique feature of Goa and is actually a legacy of Portuguese rule spread over more than four centuries. The Portuguese occupied Goa around 1510 and were finally ousted from there only in 1961.

A 'Rooster' is an adult male chicken bird known for its typical habit of roosting on tree branches and crowing at dawn. It is not so well known that the principal progenitor of all forms of domesticated chicken throughout the world is the Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), commonly called *Jungli murgi,* an endemic bird of India and south-east Asia. Most probably, the domestication of the wild junglefowl took place in India about five thousand years ago and around the time of the Indus Valley civilization. The seals and clay figurines found at Harappa and Mohenjodaro bear testimony to this fact. The Chinese claim that their ancestors domesticated the species earlier. In any case, it is known that around 1500 BC *Gallus gallus* had reached central Europe and it was well established there in domesticated form during the Roman times. Earlier, in ancient Greece the Rooster was considered a solar emblem and taken as a sacred sign. In Egypt also, the bird caught the fancy of the people and received the patronage of the Pharaoh rulers. In due course, its early morning wake-up call came to be regarded as the herald of dawn and liberation from darkness. In some Christian religious art, the crowing cock became a symbol of the resurrection of Christ and the Zoroastrians considered the bird a guardian of good over evil and even forbade the eating of fowl.

Giant Rooster during a Goa Carnival.

As for Portugal, the Rooster has been a prominent national symbol of the country for a long time and there is an interesting legend relating to the *Galo de Barcelos* (Rooster of Barcelos). The legend tells the story of a dead rooster's miraculous intervention in proving the innocence of a man who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death.

The legend dates back to the middle ages and relates to the town of Barcelos in north-west Portugal. Once a serious crime was committed in this town; the local people got much agitated and started looking for the culprit. At that time, a Galician, who claimed to be a pilgrim, turned up and somehow got accused of the crime. The Galician was arrested, tried summarily and sentenced to be hanged, even though he continued pleading his innocence. Somehow, he managed to persuade the authorities to take him before the judge who had sentenced him. So, he was taken to the house of the judge, who was then having a feast with some friends. The Galician again affirmed his innocence to the judge, but when he got no favourable response, he pointed to a roasted rooster on the dining table and exclaimed: "It is as certain that I am innocent as it is certain that this rooster will crow when I am hanged." The judge and his friends mocked at the accused and he was led away to be hanged. However, a miracle, it is believed, did happen, for while he was being hanged, the roasted rooster came alive and crowed loudly as the Galician had predicted. The judge was shocked and realising his mistake, he rushed to the place of hanging to free the Galician. There, he found that the hanging had not worked on account of a loosely tied knot. So, the man was immediately set free and sent off in peace. Some years later, the Galician returned to Barcelos and got a stone monument erected there with a Crucifix or Cross to the Lord of the Rooster in praise of Virgin Mary and St James. The monument is presently located in the Archaeological Museum of Barcelos.

Famous Barcelos Rooster statue in Lisbon, capital of Portugal

The above-mentioned legend, despite minor variations that one may encounter, has so caught the fancy of the Portuguese people that the Rooster is now a commonly recognised emblem in Portugal and it is even referred to as a national symbol. Considered as a bird that stands for truth, integrity, honour and brings luck and happiness, the Rooster has earned an indelible place in the life and ethos of the Portuguese people. In Portugal, Rooster statues in stone or ceramic can be seen in several towns and all kinds of souvenirs depicting the bird are available in abundance in shops everywhere. Besides, it is very common to have a Rooster image in one's home. No wonder much of this was carried across to Goa during Portuguese rule in that region over more than four centuries and it is still much in evidence there, especially in old Goa.

It is ironic that a bird carried far away from the land of its origin for its poultry potential – essentially eggs and meat – was returned to a part of its original home in a much transformed and rather hallowed form. The first occurrence dates back to ancient times, the second occurred much later in the modern period, which makes the story more amazing. That this has received virtually no attention in other parts of India is even more ironical.

Barcelos Rooster - typical souvenirs.

Rooster on top of a traditional home in Goa.

Rooster on a well in Goa.

On the current status of Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (Aves: Galliformes: Phasianidae): keeping the common species common

by: K. Ramesh, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, Uttarakhand & Philip McGowan, World Pheasant Association, United Kingdom. (source: Journal of Threatened Taxa, February 2009).

Photo: Dr. John Corder

Introduction: The Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), also called Blue or Common Peafowl, is the largest of the pheasants. It was justifiably declared as the National Bird of India in 1963 due to its 'flagship' value founded on its glorious position in mythology and its widespread distribution and grandeur. The peacock's large body size, brilliantly ornamented plumage and long train-feathers are surely attractive to predators, and it remains a puzzle why such an extravagant trait has developed despite being a handicap to escape predation pressure, among other things. One explanation is that of Zahavi's (1975) 'handicap hypothesis' which suggests that a peacock's long train-feathers are an honest signal of fitness as the individual has demonstrated its survival ability even with the disadvantage of having to carry around such a heavy and conspicuous burden. Consequently, females would consciously choose the male to mate with precisely because of its 'handicap', rather than in spite of it (Gadagkar 2003) and thus pass on the genes to the next generation. Though the peafowl's physical appearance and behaviour have always interested and intrigued naturalists, there are very few studies of its ecology, population status and conservation threats. The aim of this note is to highlight this huge gap in our understanding of this species and to suggest some action plans.

Distribution: The natural range of Indian Peafowl is essentially the Indian subcontinent, with India covering a vast majority of its range from the outer Himalaya (up to 2000m) through much of the country including the peninsula. Other countries where the species still survives in good numbers are Nepal and Sri Lanka; while there are only two populations in Pakistan, it is rare in Bhutan and possibly extinct in Bangladesh. It has been introduced in Andaman Islands (Ali & Ripley 1980). Peafowls have been maintained in captivity for centuries across the world and there are introduced populations in USA, Europe, Hawaii Islands, West Indies, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia etc. (Madge & McGowan 2002).

Habitat and behaviour: It is a bird of scrub-jungles and forest edges, showing affinity to moist and dry deciduous and semiarid biomes. It is also found in agriculture fields, along streams with good vegetation

and close to human habitations in a semi-feral condition (Johnsgard 1986). It roosts on trees and also uses tall buildings where trees are scarce. It generally prefers a habitat mosaic of scrub and open areas, with adequate sites for 'dust bathing' and 'lekking', a phenomenon where males are known to congregate in open areas for displaying to attract females (Yasmin & Yahya 1996). Dust bathing is critical as this bird has to condition its feathers and remove feather-degrading bacteria and other external parasites. It is likely that the availability of such habitats partly explains the relatively high abundance of this species in semi arid and flood plains.

Population status: In the absence of reliable information and data, it is hard to place the current distribution status and population size of the species; although a conservative 'guesstimate' suggests that the population may exceed 100,000 (Madge & McGowan 2002). While the species is becoming locally extinct from several parts of its former range due to habitat conversion and changes in the cropping pattern (Imam 2005), poaching, and pesticide-related issues, there is no estimate of the size of surviving populations and the rate of loss from the entire country. Only recently the states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Gujarat have initiated statewide surveys for these birds, but the estimates are not yet available. These estimates would reflect only the minimum population size, requiring further investigation to fully understand the population status in these areas. Population estimates could also be derived from the recently-concluded tiger population estimation project, which gathered data on peafowl numbers as a part of prey estimation (Jhala et al. 2005). However, this was mostly carried out in the forested areas of tiger habitat and thus covered only a small portion of the actual peafowl habitat. The Wildlife Institute of India has conducted a questionnaire survey on population status of Indian peafowl (Choudhury & Sathyakumar 2007), and this again would only be a pointer for further investigation unless the estimates are substantiated with empirical data. Other sources of information could be the dissertation studies carried out by some universities and projects on carnivores and their prey estimation, wherein peafowl abundance also figures in terms of available prey densities and biomass. However, such efforts are not many, and have also been carried out over varying time scales making it difficult to draw general conclusions. Though compiling this data would be useful to understand the population size in given localities, it is certainly insufficient to make any extrapolation to population estimates for large regions of the country as a whole.

In short, there is no reliable estimate of the current population status of Indian Peafowl for the country, and it is important to carry out intensive field sampling if one is to arrive at a reliable estimate of the population.

Conservation status: The Indian Peafowl is listed as Least Concern species in the Red List of International Union for Conservation of Nature (BirdLife International 2008), probably owing to its widespread distribution, occurrence of locally abundant semi-feral populations, and protection from people on religious grounds. In India, it is given the utmost protection by inclusion in the Schedule I of Indian Wildlife Act, 1972. Although the train feathers of the Indian Peafowl are traded for various reasons, it is not included on any Appendix of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species perhaps on the claim that these feathers are naturally fallen ones during annual molt of the species, and also that the scale of trade across international border is still to be understood.

Threats: The Indian Peafowl is under threat from various quarters that include the demand for feathers and wild meat, conflict with farmers during cropping season, increased use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and habitat degradation. An adult peacock has about 200 tail feathers, which it sheds from August onwards; fully-developed new feathers appear in February (Sharma 1974; Ali & Ripley 1980). The fallen feathers are collected and sold in local markets and the birds are also reportedly killed to increase revenue return. Other threats include habitat degradation and loss - more significantly from conversion of their habitat to agriculture, habitation and industrial growth, poisoning to counter crop damage, consumption of eggs and fat extracts for alleged medicinal values, and killing for wild meat (del Hoyo et al. 1994; Chakkaravarthy 2002). Although these threats are believed to be causing an alarming decline in populations, the magnitude and pattern of the effects in different parts of the country are yet to be quantified.

What has to be done?: It is critical that urgent efforts are made to understand the habitat and population status of the species through field based research and *in situ* conservation projects. A meeting of the Indian Board for Wild Life (held on 19 June 2006) underlined the need for such efforts. The actions required are: (1) mapping of habitat and distribution status of the species across the country, inside and outside protected areas; (2) time series analysis of habitat change to quantify the rate of change and identify high-risk areas and potential sites for further affirmative action; (3) estimation of population size by established count methods such as line transect, call counts and roost counts; (4) intensive ecological investigations in representative sites in major biogeographic zones with focus on the effects of threats in relation to breeding success and survival probability; (5) quantification of trade, with details on source and people involved; and (6) undertaking outreach activities to sensitize local communities, which may be carried out by a network of 'student clubs' (e.g. National Green Corps) throughout the country. These people could be trained to collect population data and undertake monitoring within their localities, and the reliability of the results could be ensured by adopting rigorous protocols. These ambitious initiatives should be executed through consultative processes involving various research and conservation agencies in the country.

The reason for the precarious status of many species including peafowl is the consistent bias towards endangered species and conservation interventions that are based on restrictive models (protected area-centric conservation). This approach overlooks common species when planning and implementing research and conservation schemes. Though this policy was essentially triggered by limited resources and a desire to safeguard a few charismatic species thought to be highly threatened, it has remained the major conservation policy even though our understanding of biodiversity conservation issues has increased substantially. In practice, this does not encourage imaginative thinking about alternative options and mobilising resources for a broader plan. This myopic approach often results in common species becoming threatened, and thus requiring greater human and fiscal resources than would have been the case if some thought had been given to broader conservation issues. Therefore, while concentrating on threatened species management, efforts should simultaneously be made to mobilize resources and develop strategies for 'keeping the common species common'. The Indian Peafowl - the National Bird of India - is a clear case in this direction, and if full-fledged efforts are not taken up now it may soon follow the trail of the vanishing vultures of the subcontinent.

Keep the Faith – Re-Linking Religion as an Instrument of Conservation

by: Anita Chauhan

Industrialisation had a profound effect on the social, economic and ecological scenario in human history between 1750 and 1950. Changes that began in the UK and USA in the beginning of this time-period spread to the rest of the world by the 1950s. There was a delinking of the responsibility of maintaining the ecological balance from the religious institutions and aristocratic setup, to instruments of democratic government. This was caused by the rise of the working class and urban expansion. As world population increased many fold due to immunisation and better sanitation by 1900, there was increased pressure on natural resources (agricultural expansion, mining, etc) to satisfy the needs of this population and increase in pollution. This ultimately resulted in the shift in the study of science (from the classical physiology and economic botany, etc.) to the conservation biology and environmental science streams.

Conservationist today often struggle with efforts to main-stream biodiversity conservation, increase people's support and participation, and prioritise conservation over short-sighted development for the benefit of the capitalists. In this context, one wonders if religious institutions can help conservationists to reach out to people. The Society for Conservation Biology, an international non-profit organisation that has branches in 5 continents [https://conbio.org/], has Religion and Conservation Biology as one of its Working Groups, aiming to strengthen the collaboration between faith traditions and conservation. A summation of the 'Religion and Conservation Biology Working Group's (RCBWG) Best Practices Survey of SCB members on engaging faith communities is now available. Conducted on behalf of RCB Working Group in 2016, the survey results underscore the benefits to conserving biological diversity when researchers and practitioners relate positively to faith leaders and communities. It provides an overview of the responses to ten questions submitted by thirty-nine SCB members who have engaged leaders and members of faith communities in conservation projects. The faith communities represent the major world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism—and a diversity of native spiritualities including Australian Aborigine and Native American'.

'Respondents to the survey also shared their approaches to engaging leaders and members of faith communities in ways that might be helpful to other SCB members. Societal support for conservation has become increasingly vital for approval, collaboration, and advocacy of scientific solutions aimed at mitigating threats to the loss of biological diversity on the land and in the water. Results of the survey point to religious and native faith communities as allies in this quest. The projects on which SCB members reported range from – 'polar bears, bison, climate change, coral rehabilitation, fish, iguana, kangaroo, rattlesnakes, terrestrial vertebrates, wildlife used for bush meat, to forest management and restoration, restoration of rivers, and protective management of shrines and sacred places'. [https://conbio.org/groups/working-groups/religion-and-conservation-biology]. Popular culture in the form of village and tribal traditional knowledge and folklore, as well as historical urban culture of towns and cities manifested in literature old and new (and other means of reaching organized communities like corporate businesses and universities) can also be used to connect people with regional conservation objectives.

Conservation of National Bird, India

Chevaliar J.L.P. Roche Victoria K.S.G. Memorial Trust Society has taken up an interesting and inovative project in Vilathikulam, Ottapidaram & Thoothukudi blocks of Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu State. The main initiative is to form ***Peafowl Protection Force*** *at village and other local levels, including schools and colleges. Axtracts from project report are given below.*

Formation of Peafowl Protection Force: In the blocks of Vilathikulam, Ottapidaram & Thoothukudi several cases of Peafowl death by poisoning have been recorded. In these agricultural areas, farmers cultivate maize in their fields. The farmers soak the seeds in copper sulphate solution, then they dry the seeds before sowing in their fields. Peafowls take these seeds and meet death. Several birds die at a time. We are unable to control the farmers in these areas. Hence we decided to form **"Peacock protection force"** (PPF) from the students of Schools and Colleges.

Major Activities:

1. Intensive training.
2. Group discussions for the students in the problematic areas.
3. Following the group discussions, voluntary evaluation feedback from the leaders among themselves.
4. Leaders together to form a Peacock Protection Force in every academic institution.

Responsibility and Duties of PPF:

1. Make the village understand well about the National Bird
2. Provide counselling to the people who eat Peafowl meat.
3. If a Peafowl is affected, students must do the first aid and also inform the Forest Department and our NGO and arrange for further treatment.
4. Create Awareness in the village about forest laws and especially regarding punishments for killing Peafowl.
5. Provide food and water for Peafowl at their living places.
6. Taking oath to save and conserve the National Bird and Nature as best as possible.

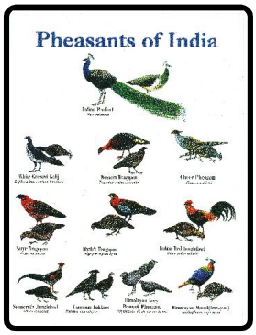
Oath taken by Peacock Protection Force.

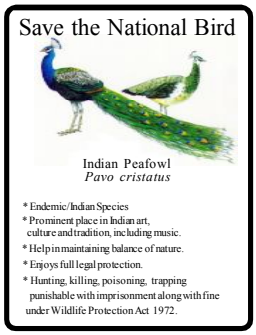
Students were advised to organise continuous Peafowl Conservation Awareness Programmes among the common people and farmers, specially to encourage the farmers to utilize natural pesticides and natural seeds in their agricultural fields. It was also emphasized to arrange the food and water for the peafowl in their living locations. Students were asked to emphasize the point that hunting Peafowl is a punishable crime. The students were asked to form National Bird Peafowl Conservation Committees and National Service Scheme students and NCC students were asked to take the lead.

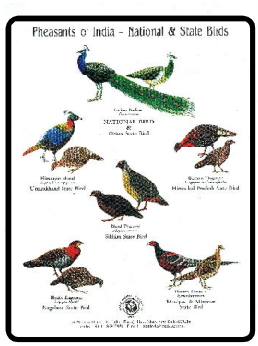
Resource Material - *available on request*

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
- Himalayan Monal

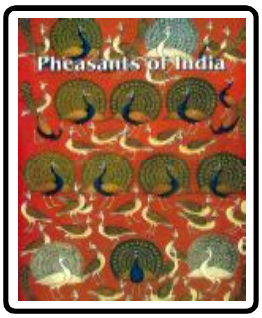


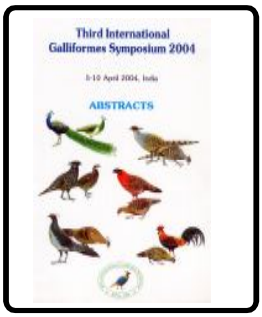


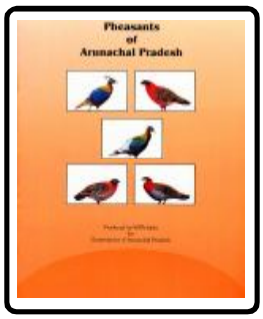


Booklets

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







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