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WPA News 46 (1994)

World Pheasant Association

WPA NEWS

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The International News of the World Pheasant Association

Registered Charity No. 271203

WORLDWIDE CONSERVATION OF GALLIFORM BIRDS

Dear Member

As I am sure you are aware subscriptions for WPA membership have remained the same for six years whilst the level of our activity has increased dramatically on all fronts. In order to remain effective we are raising our basic membership to £20 though with a reduction to £18 for those who covenant their subscription.

The new rate becomes payable on the anniversary of your joining and we will be writing individually to you at that time. We are undertaking to maintain these new rates for at least two years.

The rise in subscription coincides with the introduction of our new Annual Review which each full member will receive. You should by now have received without extra cost, your first copy.

Despite this increase, our membership rates are still remarkably low compared to other similar organisations - we are not just a conservation body or just an avicultural organisation, but a combination of the two, to ensure the conservation of all the galliformes by all means available to us. No other organisation has done so much for one group of birds.

I do hope you will continue to support the work of your Association for without your support we cannot continue to function effectively.

With kind regards,

Keith Howman
Director General

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WPA NEWS NO 46

Editor: Derek Bingham

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

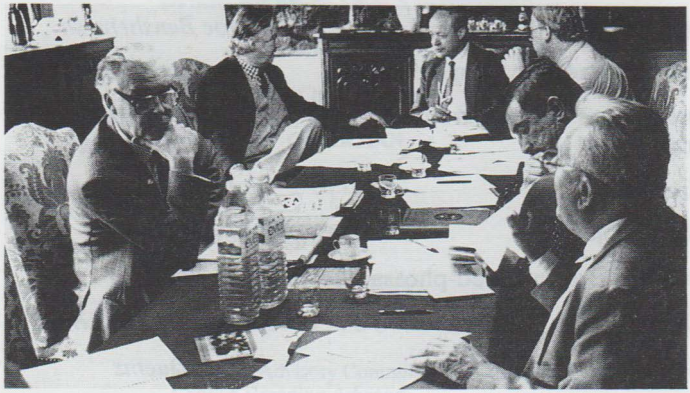
1994	
2-4 Dec	National Cage Bird Show, NEC Birmingham
1995	
2 April	Joint WPA UK/Aviornis open day Tropical Bird Gardens, Rode
22-24 Sept	20th Anniversary Convention including WPA AGM
1996	
Jan	Pheasant and PQF Symposium, Malaysia
Sept	Grouse Symposium, North America

Front cover:	*Bulwer's pheasant*	*Artist: Timothy Greenwood*
Back cover:	*Cabot's tragopan*	*Artist: R. David Digby (see page 37)*

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Edward Dickinson

I am very pleased to report that the Annual General Meeting adopted the Report of Council and the 1993/94 Accounts, and approved the changes to the rules that your Council had proposed. We are all pleased that the new rules caused no dissension. We shall now move quietly ahead in partnership with our chapters to affiliate them. Initial discussions with WPA France were most positive and we expect this to be the pattern everywhere.



Meeting with WPA France at Chateau Cleres. L to R Edward Dickinson, Keith Howman, Bernard Giboin, Han Assink, Alain Hennache and Roger Houpert
Photo: John Brown

In my address to the Annual General Meeting I asked members to recognise that the Association must focus very clearly on its priorities: these are simply, **conservation of pheasants and allied species in the wild and captive breeding wherever there is a good case for this.** It is essential that we all recognise that the captive breeding management required is not really for back-garden hobbyists as it will usually be essential that a studbook be kept and often decisions on the physical assignment of offspring will be a Committee decision. Studbooks are computerised and costly to maintain. Those who wish to participate in these programmes will have to have their premises accredited regularly and may be asked to contribute to the costs of studbook maintenance. The studbooks will often be managed for us by zoos with a special interest in the species, but we must help to see that data comes in quickly and efficiently. The cost of studbooks is not one that our membership as a whole should be asked to pay.

We are conscious that some members need continuing advice and that they may not find they can get it from other busy members. The Association cannot, in the light of its two main priorities, offer more than its published works and its personal network. As this may leave a gap we are, for our UK members, exploring a strategic alliance with Aviornis UK. Although agreed in principle, the details must wait for the next issue of **WPA News**.

There is to be an exciting 20th Anniversary programme in the UK and we hope that other chapters will also plan special events for our 20th year. The year runs from 1 May 1995 to 30 April 1996; it should include a more regular series of meetings to be arranged by the UK branch, a Convention for members at Harewood from 22-24 September and the Malaysian Symposium in January 1996. Watch for announcements. As your Anniversary contribution to the Association's funds please buy our table mats at Christmas - and sign up two new members at New Year.

Fittingly the year will open with a publications bonanza. Members will get the first **Annual Review** free. **Action Plans**, from three of our five Specialist Groups, dealing with all their endangered species, will be printed and a limited supply of copies will be available to members at a moderate price.

Finally the bad news subscriptions will go up after several years unchanged, probably by 20%, and partly to cover the increase in costs the **Annual Review** entails so we'll want you to see it first. If you're not yet a life member become one NOW; you could save £200.

WPA AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

Tom Gardiner

In the past, WPA has mainly made use of computers for fairly simple tasks such as membership management and desktop publishing. Because our computing requirements have previously been fairly modest, the computer systems used by Jan Readman at WPA Headquarters and Jane Clacey at Ashmere have been 'adequate'. However because of their age, they were incompatible with most modern software packages and files produced on them.

Bodies such as BirdLife International, IUCN, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, the Game Conservancy Trust, the Open University, and other organisations with which WPA co-operates on a regular basis, are increasingly using modern computer technology. To a certain extent this means that if WPA is to continue to be effective in the conservation of Galliformes in the wild and in captivity, it must also upgrade its computing capability to achieve a degree of compatibility with these other bodies.

Recently a new computer system has been installed which goes a long way

towards providing this compatibility. Many academic institutions use Apple Macintosh computers, whereas other organisations and individuals use IBM-PC compatible systems. In the past exchanging data files between the two systems has proved to be something of a headache. The new system supports both platforms and has already proved to be extremely efficient at reading both Mac and PC files produced on a variety of software packages. This latter feature has proved to be a boon, since many articles which are received for publication arrive as disk files which may have been produced on any one of a number of different word processing programmes.

The new system includes an improved desktop publishing package which is currently being used to prepare the Proceedings of the Udine Grouse Symposium and Action Plans for some of the Specialist Groups and will in future be used for preparing Newsletters and the Annual Review. The use of the new system for producing pre-press files should also enable savings to be made in the cost of producing publications.

Samantha Clacey mastering the new computer!

Another feature of the system is a CD-ROM of maps of the world which can be edited and incorporated into documents which has already been put to good use in generating maps for the Specialist Group Action Plans.

Another computer-based project currently in progress is the Bibliographic/References Database. This database currently holds details of articles in WPA publications including all of the WPA Newsletters and Journals and a growing number of symposia proceedings. Information held for each article or paper includes the title, author(s), and details such as the journal title,

year of publication, volume number, page numbers, editor(s), etc. and a comprehensive set of keywords relating to the article to allow efficient retrieval.

By searching on a word or words, such as the name of a bird or a location, one can rapidly list all of the references to that subject within the database. For example, by entering the word CHEER as a search word, the program will list details of articles or papers currently residing on the system which contain references to Cheer pheasants. By narrowing the search to include the word AVICULTURE, the programme will list only the avicultural articles relating to Cheer pheasants. Alternatively a search using an author's name will list articles by that author.

The References database is already proving to be an invaluable tool and saves a great deal of time when looking for articles on a particular subject. It is often used when researching material for publication or dealing with enquiries from members. Eventually the database will contain not only references to WPA publications but also to books, scientific papers and journals produced by other organisations or individuals.

Another computer-based project is being undertaken by Dr Philip McGowan at the Open University. Dr McGowan is currently working on a database of locations of galliformes in Asia. This is a major project which is producing a wealth of valuable data which will eventually be made available to WPA. Similar projects are being undertaken by Dr Umar Aftab in Pakistan, Dr Ding Chang-qing in China and Dr Rahul Kaul in India.

Measures are being taken to ensure that database record structures used in the projects outlined above are, as far as possible, identical, so that data can be easily exchanged between various parties, thus avoiding duplication of effort and providing a 'template' for future database projects in other countries.

In addition a proposal to seek funds for a WPA Central Database Management System, which will incorporate data from those projects mentioned here and from other computer-based projects in the future, has been accepted by WPA Council.

As we approach the 21st century the benefits of establishing and maintaining a modern computing capability within WPA are considerable, and will strengthen the Association's conservation efforts and allow more effective co-operation with other organisations. Unfortunately the costs involved in providing such a capability are not inconsiderable and, in terms of obtaining sponsorship from potential donors, funding for headquarters equipment and personnel appears to be a less attractive proposition than are projects based in the field. However, unless this funding can be found and a modern computing capability can be established and maintained, the Association could find itself in a situation where it cannot adequately make use of the wealth of valuable data generated from those field projects.

FURTHER SEARCHES FOR THE WESTERN TRAGOPAN: THE 1994 SURVEY IN PALAS VALLEY

Phil Whittington, Phil Benstead, Nigel Bean and Dave Showler

The Western Tragopan, an enigmatic and colourful species of pheasant, is found only in the temperate forests of the Western Himalayas and with a world population estimated to be between only 1600 and 4800 birds is an endangered species. The forests of northern Pakistan remain an essential refuge for this bird. Surveys over the past ten years have revealed important populations of this species in Azad Kashmir and District Kohistan, North West Frontier Province and in particular the Palas Valley. By the end of 1991, a minimum of 53 tragopans had been recorded in Palas and an estimated 330 pairs may inhabit the forests so far surveyed.

In May and June 1994, our team of four British ornithologists, two field officers from the Himalayan Jungle Project and two wildlife officers from NWFP Forest and Wildlife Department, set out to search a fairly large expanse of previously unsurveyed forest in Palas Valley.

Our survey work was split over two periods, the first being from 15 May - 3 June and the second period from 12-21 June. Survey work in Palas is very demanding. It involves trekking over long distances through rugged terrain, involving numerous steep ascents and descents and the occasional crossing of a fast flowing river by means of a narrow tree trunk! Food consists essentially of chapati, tea, dal, rice, dried fruit and biscuits. Getting up shortly after three o'clock each morning to listen for tragopans adds to the general feeling of weariness! Consequently, we were all ready for a short break between surveys to recuperate and vary our diet a little!

Our accommodation in Palas Valley usually consisted of shepherd huts in varying states of repair. The abundance of fleas in one or two of these meant that we would usually choose to sleep on the roof, if the weather allowed. In the villages,we received tremendous hospitality from the local people, who offered us chai and lassi, as well as letting us sleep in the comfort of the village mosque.

As well as the Western Tragopan, our surveys included two other species of

pheasant, the Himalayan Monal and Koklass. All other bird species were recorded, with estimates of status and abundance made wherever possible. An attempt was also made to record butterflies, dragonflies, amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

We carried out our surveys using 'dawn call count' methodology, as used on previous surveys in Kohistan District. During the breeding season, between mid-April and mid-June, the male Western Tragopan will call from within his territory, from about half an hour before and up to half an hour after dawn. While birds may call at dusk or sometimes in the afternoon, dawn is by far the most reliable time to hear them. However, they sometimes restrict their vocal activity to just one alarm call or may not even call at all.

Our survey points were selected in the areas of forest we considered most likely to hold tragopans. After arising bleary-eyed from the warmth of a sleeping bag, we would set off in the cold morning air, often scrambling up a steep slope for anything up to an hour in the darkness to reach our survey point. This had been chosen on the previous day. We always aimed to be at our survey points by 4.00 am before the first bird calls. It all seems worth the effort as the first birds begin to sing and the sky begins to slowly lighten. Then, if you are lucky, comes the unmistakable 'waak' call of the Western tragopan followed by a series of drawn out territorial calls. The Koklass pheasant follows soon after with its four note crow. The Himalayan Monal has a series of croaking calls ending with a flourish of whistles. We sat quietly, listening, until 5.00 or 5.30 am, recording any calling pheasants on a circular chart, showing compass direction and estimated distance with respect to the observer. We also recorded other details such as altitude, aspect, steepness of slope, other topographical features, weather, vegetation cover and main tree, shrub and herb species present, along with any evidence of human impact on the landscape.

Ideally we tried to select our survey points on ridges within or above suitable forest to give good, all round hearing. In practice, this was usually impossible, due to the constraints made by the local topography. Consequently, some counts were made from within nullahs, or from the opposite side of a valley to that being surveyed, or close to a river or stream. It is very difficult to hear much above the noise of the fast flowing water in this instance.

The habitat favoured by the Western Tragopan in Kohistan can be described as a mosaic of forested ridges and shrubby and/or snow-filled gulleys, often with rocky outcrops or cliffs. The ridges are typically covered with coniferous trees, such as silver fir and spruce. The gulleys tend to be predominantly filled with broadleaves species such as oak, maple or Himalayan birch. Most important is the presence of some thick cover to which birds will always fly or run when disturbed. During the breeding season birds tend to be at higher altitudes than

during the winter, and can be found between a minimum of 2500m and as high as the treeline at 3300m.

During the course of our two survey periods we heard at least 22 different Western Tragopans from a total of 43 survey points. While males call most regularly at dawn during the breeding season, not all males in a given area will call every morning. Together with the practical difficulties of getting to good listening points and the fact that some areas were practically impossible to reach, this figure must represent the absolute minimum number of birds present. If we assume that the remaining suitable habitat to which we were unable to gain access or adequately survey held similar densities of birds to that which was surveyed, we could tentatively estimate that a minimum population of 75 birds could exist throughout the whole of the survey area.

Expedition team at Pulbela, Upper Palas *Photo: Nigel Bean*

The total number of tragopans now recorded by survey work in Palas Valley is between 75 and 89, with an estimate, using the principle outlined above, of 330 birds throughout the forests of middle and upper Palas. If these calling birds, predominantly territorial males, were all paired, then there could be a population of 330 pairs or more. As far as is known, this is the largest number and the highest estimate of density of Western Tragopans to be found in the world. It also represents over half of the known population of Western Tragopans in Pakistan, emphasising the importance of the Palas Valley forests and the need to conserve them.

The other pheasant species recorded during survey work also seem to have healthy populations in the Palas forests. We frequently saw Himalayan Monal

and recorded them at nearly half of our survey points, while Koklass pheasants were recorded on virtually all of our surveys. We made a brief search for Cheer pheasants in one area of the valley. One or two of the older villagers seemed to be familiar with the birds and said that they were present but that numbers had decreased. Unfortunately, our brief search for them was unsuccessful.

A grand total of 123 bird species was observed during our survey work. This included 11 species which had not previously been recorded in Palas Valley. A pair of one of these, the Speckled Piculet, was nesting and probably feeding youngsters. This diminutive woodpecker has been described as rare and local in Roberts' *Birds of Pakistan*. There are nine bird species whose world range is restricted to the region of the Western Himalayas. Eight of these species were found to be present and almost certainly breeding (proven for five of them) in Palas Valley. It is even possible that the ninth species, the Cheer Pheasant, may still exist there in small numbers. The Western Tragopan is one of these eight species, the others being Tytler's leaf warbler, Brooks' leaf warbler, white-cheeked tit, white-throated tit, Kashmir nuthatch, red-browed finch and orange bullfinch. Of the other faunal groups, only mammals had previously received much attention in Palas. Consequently, the majority of the butterflies, dragonflies, amphibia and reptiles, even the commoner species, that we saw are the first documented records for the valley.

Over 20 species of butterfly were observed, some specimens being collected for the Pakistan Museum of Natural History. Many have yet to be identified, but those that have been include species found through much of Europe, such as the large white, painted lady, brimstone and clouded yellow, alongside species more typical of the Himalayas, such as the Indian cabbage white, Indian tortoiseshell and Himalayan fivering.

Seven species of dragonfly were observed and a few specimens were collected. They include species which are widespread in Pakistan along with some montane specialities. One species has yet to be identified.

Dave Showler was able to confirm the presence of two species of toad (the Indus toad and green toad), one species of frog, three - four species of lizards (Pakistan rock agama, yellow-bellied mole skink, Himalayan ground skink) and at least two species of snake, the mountain racer and the Himalayan pit viper. The frog has yet to be specifically identified and the identity of another lizard species has yet to be confirmed. Another snake, which resisted close observation, was thought to be a cliff racer. Reports were received from local people of the occurrence of cobras in one area of the valley. This has yet to be confirmed.

Between us, we saw at least eight species of mammals including rhesus macaques, both adults and young, and a grey langur, which is probably the first

to be seen by a non-resident of the valley. A Himalayan black bear was seen by one member of the team before it was chased away by our porters! Only two yellow-throated martens were seen but one of its prey items, the Indian pika, is probably quite common in the appropriate habitat. They are very approachable animals and will feed in front of their burrows within a few feet of a quiet observer. Judging by the abundance of chewed cones, the giant red flying squirrel is probably quite common although we saw only five. Being nocturnal, they tend only to be encountered at dawn or dusk. We found the long-tailed marmot to be fairly common in areas of high alpine pasture. They warn of approaching danger by standing on their hind legs and making a noise similar to a soccer referees whistle!

Although there are undoubtedly hardships to endure, survey work in Palas Valley is essentially an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The noise and pollution of the city is left far behind, exchanged for the peace and tranquillity of the mountains and an abundance of wildlife.

'Tragopan forests' on south side of valley above Shared
Photo: N Bean

Another survey is planned in January/February 1995 in the middle and lower Palas Valley. Tragopans will not be calling at this time of year, so it will be necessary to search on foot and flush them. As yet, little is known of the winter distribution and habits of the Western Tragopan, so this next survey will hopefully add more to our knowledge of this rare species of pheasant, and one of its last remaining refuges - the forests of Palas Valley.

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WPA News 46 p 5-9

SURVEYING MALLEEFOWL BY THERMAL SCANNING - A SUMMARY OF RECENT RESEARCH

Joe Benshemesh

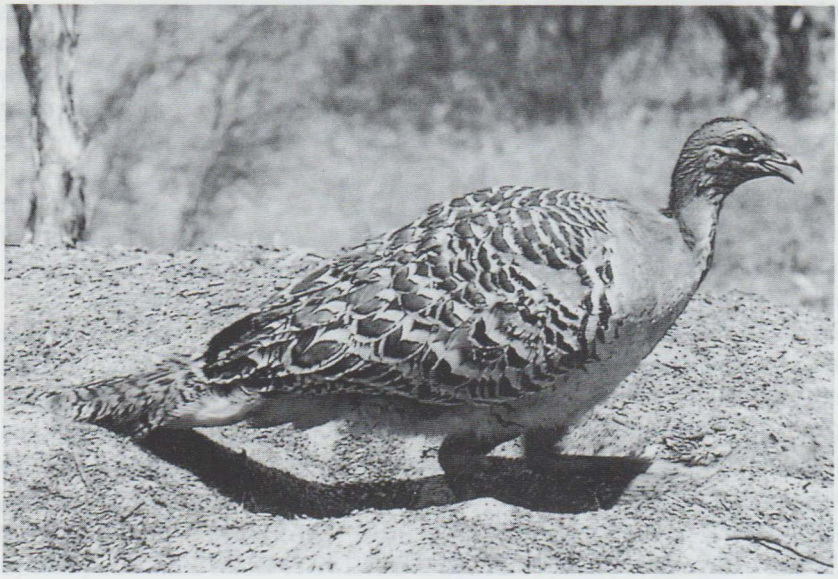
Extracted from BirdLife/WPA Megapode Specialist Group Newsletter, Vol. 8, Nr.1 May 1994

Although Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata* are one of the most thoroughly researched megapodes, their distribution and abundance over their vast range in Australia is only poorly known. However it is clear that the species has declined alarmingly since the coming of Europeans to Australia (Blakers et al. 1984) to the extent that it has been declared endangered (ANZECC 1991). The destruction of suitable habitat by agricultural practices, predation by the introduced red fox, and inappropriate fire regimes have all been implicated in the decline of the species. While research into the ecology and conservation of the species (reviewed in Garnett 1992a, Benshemesh 1993) has elucidated some of the causes for this decline, this work has often been hampered by the difficulty and cost of surveying the usually sparse populations of the species. Ground-searches for active Malleefowl nests using teams of people have been the most common method of assessing Malleefowl abundance, but is slow and costly and only feasible in small and accessible areas. Surveys have been tried from the air using observers in small planes (Frith 1962) or helicopters (Brickhill 1985) over the large and inaccessible areas that characterise the species' range, but high costs and methodological problems have limited application of the techniques. The need for more information on the distribution, abundance and stability of Malleefowl populations remains an urgent priority (Garnett 1992b, Benshemesh 1993) and a crucial step toward conservation and management.

Thermal scanning for Malleefowl nests is a new technique that may provide some of the data that have not been obtainable in the past. The technique relies on the detection of heat released from the nests when they are opened by the birds in the morning. The mounds (usually three - five metres in diameter and up to one metre high) comprise an internal core of leaf litter buried under a thick layer of sand. Early in the breeding season (spring), the heat for egg incubation is provided by decomposition of the litter, but excess heat is typically generated and the mound requires regular cooling (Frith 1956). This is accomplished by the birds opening the nests in the early morning and exposing the warm (30-35^{o}C) sand inside the mound to cool (5-20^{o}C) air. At this time there is high thermal contrast between open mounds and other surfaces in the habitat, thus providing the possibility of detecting mounds using an airborne

thermal scanner.

A trial of the technique conducted in early November 1990 confirmed that active Malleefowl mounds could be detected with reasonable accuracy and little ambiguity (Benshemesh, in press). For the trial, a multispectrum scanner (Daedalus 1240/60) mounted in a Queenair aircraft was used to record surface temperatures over four sites in northwest Victoria, Australia. The Malleefowl population density at these sites is monitored annually, and a total of 39 active mounds were known at the time of the trial. Eight of these mounds were opened by people on the morning of the trial to ensure that some useful data were obtained even if few birds opened nests on the morning chosen for the trial. The aircraft was flown at an altitude of 1000 feet (300m) resulting in a pixel size of about 0.75 metres and swathe width of about 440 metres, and scanning occurred during the first two hours after sunrise (after which background temperatures rose above those of nests). Data acquired during the flights were examined primarily in the form of rough prints produced by the scanner, and on these were indicated all but one of the nests opened by people and eight (26%) of the 31 other nests. Detailed image analysis was also conducted on the data from one



Malleefowl *Photo: Ralph & Daphne Keller*
Taken from Pyramids in the Bush, a book about Malleefowl *by David Keystone. Available from WPA HQ.*

site and revealed a further nest (one of only two nests not represented on the prints for this site), and that all nests were unambiguously indicated by maximum pixel temperature alone. Thus it is likely that image analysis of the data collected at all the sites would result in a considerably higher proportion of nests being detected by the techniques, although this has not been done as yet.

The success of the technique depends largely on the nest-opening behaviour of the birds as nests can only be detected when they are open and while background temperatures remain cool. During the 1991/2 breeding season, the time and frequency at which nests were opened by the birds was monitored at 17 nests using automatic timing devices, and the duration and heat emission of opened nests was observed using an infra-red camera mounted in a tower overlooking a nest (Benshemesh 1992, in press). These data were used to examine the influence of weather on the time and frequency of nest opening, and to derive a model of the likely success of scans conducted under various conditions.

Spring, especially October, appeared the best time to conduct scans. Nests were opened earliest and most frequently (65% nests per day) in early spring and nest opening did not appear related to climatic conditions. In contrast, during summer, nests were opened less frequently (55%) and more than an hour later than in October and both the time and frequency of nest opening were related to climatic conditions. More nests may thus to detected by thermal scanning in October than at other times, and surveys could be planned in advance and would not rely on accurate weather forecasts (as would be the case in summer).

The value of the thermal sensing technique of Malleefowl survey lies in its potential contribution to the conservation of the species, especially in areas of low Malleefowl density where large coverage is required to obtain meaningful density estimates. In this regard the technique promises to be a powerful tool for the inventory of extant Malleefowl populations, for monitoring the stability of these populations, and for investigating the habitat and landscape preferences of the birds. These studies are of the highest priority considering the decline of the species and the continuing alteration of their habitat due to agricultural and land-management practices, and wildfire.

The full article with all references is available in Megapode News *available from Dr Rene Dekker, National Museum of Natural History, PO Box 9517, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands.*

Dept of Conservation and Natural Resources, 253 Eleventh St, Mildura 3500, Australia

WPA News 46 p 10-12

SURVEY AND STATUS OF THE CONGO PEAFOWL IN EASTERN ZAIRE
Progress Report March-June 1994

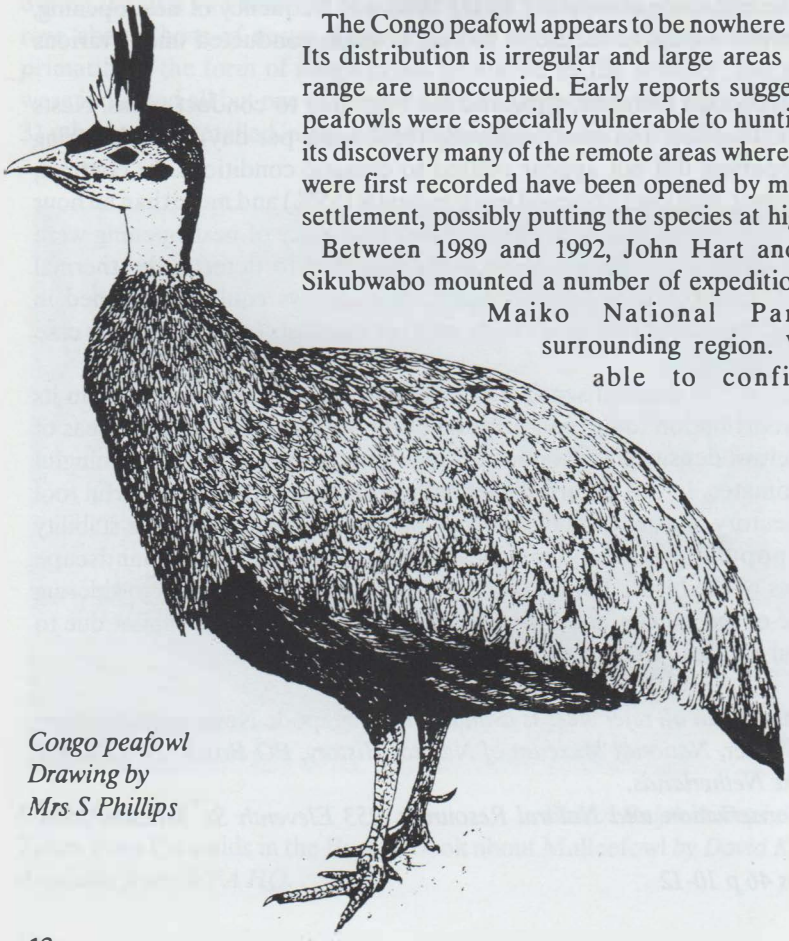
Dr John A Hart

Introduction

The Congo peafowl is the only known African pheasant. It is entirely restricted to the forests of eastern Zaire. Since its unusual and unheralded discovery in 1937, little has been learned of the species in the wild beyond the basic outlines of its range, which includes some of the least known rain forests in Africa.

The Congo peafowl appears to be nowhere common. Its distribution is irregular and large areas within its range are unoccupied. Early reports suggested that peafowls were especially vulnerable to hunting. Since its discovery many of the remote areas where peafowls were first recorded have been opened by mining and settlement, possibly putting the species at high risk.

Between 1989 and 1992, John Hart and Claude Sikubwabo mounted a number of expeditions to the Maiko National Park and surrounding region. We were able to confirm the



Congo peafowl
Drawing by
Mrs S Phillips

presence of the peafowl at about a dozen sites. Little else, however, has been reported of the bird in the wild in the last 30 years. Any conservation initiatives for the Congo peafowl is impossible until the current distribution and status of the species is assessed.

In January 1994, Drs John Hart (International Programmes) and Don Bruning (Ornithology Department) of the Wildlife Conservation Society in collaboration with Agenonga (Dieudonne) Upoki of the University of Kisangani, Zaire, Department of Ecology and Wildlife Management, initiated a project to determine the current distribution and conservation status of the Congo peafowl *Afropavo congensis* in Eastern Zaire. The target region for this study, covering about 250,000 km^2, constitutes over half the area of the peafowl's originally described range, and all of its range that is included in national parks and reserves.

The first field surveys were made in January by John Hart on a site visit to the Kahuzi Biega National Park. In March the project brought a small motorcycle and more in-depth surveys were initiated by Upoki. Between March and June, Upoki made trips to Wanie Rukula, the Lutunguru region and the Kahuzi-Biega extension. We summarise here our first findings and present our agenda for the following six months.

Operating strategy

Given the large area to survey and the difficult access of many sites we decided to break the survey into two phases. During phase one as many sites as possible where Congo peafowl had been recorded in the past would be revisited and an initial assessment of the status of the species in the area would be made by contacts with local hunters and forest people. Phase two will entail in-depth field surveys to sites where potentially important populations of peafowls were reported during the first phase.

Phase one site visits

As of June 30, 12 sites where Congo peafowl had been reported have been investigated. These sites are located on map 1. Our discoveries are summarised on table 1. Selected details for each site are given below.

Northern Sector, Maiko National Park: Opienge, Loya, Peneluta (1-3)

Since our first discoveries of peafowl in this area, Alan Root, Kenyan film producer, returned to Loya at the northern edge of the park and succeeded in capturing several birds. An adult male is currently in captivity in Epulu.

Wanie Rukula (4)

In April, Upoki made a brief trip to Wanie Rukula where he met with local authorities and interviewed about 50 traditional hunters. Peafowl do not occur

in the Wanie Rukula area. A number of informants reported that peafowl occurred further east and south toward the basin of the Maiko River. Several of these informants described behaviours of the bird that indicated personal experience with the species. No further trips to Wanie Rukula are planned.

Lutunguru (5)

Upoki visited this area with Tom Gullick and Peter Wood (BirdLife International). The expedition did not reach forest areas where peafowl had been recorded by Prigogine in the 1950s. Major deforestation has occurred especially at higher elevations (> 1700m). Blocks of forest still occur below about 1500m, but the area is a focus of intensive gold mining activity. Subsistence hunting is widespread. The status of the species in the Lutunguru area where the species was recorded remains uncertain. However, current levels of activities in the forest do not bode well for the species. Based on this preliminary survey, we have decided the Lutunguru region has a low probability of harbouring significant peafowl populations for conservation.

Mangurudjipa and Etaito Area (6,7)

Peafowl have been reported in forests to the immediate west. An over flight of the region in March revealed major deforestation occurring with immigration from Kivu highlands. Gold prospecting occurs throughout. There is no possibility for peafowl in the immediate vicinity of Mangurudjipa. Peafowl may occur in forests west of Manjurudjipa, toward Etaito. Further prospection in this region is a priority.

Itebero and Irangi (8)

John spent two weeks in this area in January 1994 with the WCS Eastern Lowland Gorilla Survey Project led by Jefferson Hall. I interviewed local hunters at several sites from Irangi to Itebero. Peafowl are not present in any of this region, and have not been seen here for many years. I spoke with two hunters who had worked with Charles Cordier, a Swiss animal dealer who provided birds that ended up in the Bronx collection in the years before independence in 1960. They confirmed that peafowl still occurred in the forest northeast of Itebero. Arrangements were made to return to this area for further contacts.

Walikali (9)

Upoki's reports from Oso were the same as for Walikali. No peafowl currently occur in this region.

Masisi and Pinga (11)

Access to this region is currently restricted due to proximity of civil war in Rwanda and a concentration of Zairean military in the area. We have learned that deforestation in the Masisi area is extensive. Peafowl are unlikely to occur here. Status of peafowl in the Pinga area remains uncertain. The region has low

priority for further work until the military situation comes under control.

Kahuzi Biega Extension (12)

In April, Jefferson Hall radioed us that his field crews had reported hearing peafowl in the remote interior of the Kahuzi extension between Utu and Katshinga. In May, Upoki joined members of Jefferson's expedition at Itebero. Contacts were made with a number of hunters who have a personal knowledge of the species and were able to provide specific details concerning its ecology and behaviour. A number of sites where peafowl could be expected were identified. More extensive field work in this area is a priority.

Programme July-December

Upoki will continue to conduct phase one site visits during July and August, concentrating on the Lubutu, Peneluta areas south and west of the Maiko Park, and in the Opienge/Loya region north of the park. John will return to Zaire from New York in early September. We plan a phase two site visit to the Opienga/Loya area to work out methods for forest-based activities. Further phase two site visits will be planned and phase one surveys of the area north of Kisangani will also be conducted.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of our donors who responded to our special requests and who have made this project possible. We would also like to thank Jefferson Hall who first reported peacock populations in the Kahuzi Biega extension and alerted us to their presence, and to Claude Sikubwabo who assisted us in our early investigations in this area.

Addresses: Dr John A Hart, International Programmes, Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, NY 10460, USA; Mr Agenonga Upoki, Faculty of Sciences, University of Kisangani, Kisangani, Zaire; Project address in Zaire: c/o Dr John Hart, CEFRECOP, P O Box 21285, Nairobi, Kenya. *WPA News 46 p 13-16*

"This report has been presented to the Wildlife Conservation Society by their researchers working in Zaire. We are quite pleased with the initial results of this work, but recognize that it will take a longer term project if we are going to actually learn enough about this species to be able to fully assist in conservation efforts. The Wildlife Conservation Society would greatly appreciate any contributions which might be made to our Congo peafowl census and conservation efforts."

Donald Bruning

Chairman and Curator, Wildlife Conservation Society

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF BLACK-FRONTED PIPING GUAN IN MISIONES PROVINCE, ARGENTINA

Phil Benstead and Richard Hearn for

Pato Serrucho 93, a Farnborough College of Technology (UK) expedition, spent 11 weeks in Misiones Province between 1 July and 15 September 1993. The primary aim was to assess the status of the Brazilian merganser *Mergus octosetaceus* in Argentina. This was achieved by identifying and surveying suitable subtropical forest rivers using a rubber boat. Secondary ornithological surveys were undertaken at a number of subtropical forest sites in Misiones.

Surveys revealed Black-fronted piping-guan *Pipile jacutinga*, in small numbers, along all the river sections including the Arroyo Piray Guazú, a site not recorded in Collar et al. (1992). This species is noted to be particularly restricted to riverine strips of forest in Misiones (Collar et al. 1992) almost never occurring in the forest interior. This was supported by the expedition's results. The only birds seen over one kilometre from a major river were three observed feeding on a fruiting liana (15 metres up) at base camp along the Arroyo Piray Guazú (26°29'S 54°22'W) on 18 August. Partridge reported birds eating molluscs along the bank of the Arroyo Urugua-í only once during his years in Misiones (Collar et al. 1992). We suggest that this behaviour is commonplace when water levels are low enough to allow access to boulders and shingle banks along the watercourse. We often encountered groups of birds (maximum four) feeding along stretches of rapids. These birds allowed close approach and there

Black-fronted piping guan by Esdaile Hudson

was little doubt that they were removing food items from stones and boulders. It is notable that during the first descent of the Arroyo Urugua-í, when the river was in spate, only one Black-fronted Piping-guan was recorded, but during the second descent, when the river was low, ten birds were recorded. Whilst feeding, the birds would often walk into shallow water. Additional land based and more protracted observation at Iguazú National Park indicated the same, with birds watched feeding above the falls, undisturbed by the passage of tourists along the waterfall boardwalks.

Perhaps in Misiones, the southern limit of this species range, where most frugivorous birds migrate north or altitudinally in the winter, this species appears to exploit alternative food sources. The preferred riverine feeding areas were long shallow rapid sections where the river split into two or three channels, separated by low scrubby islands. Due to the nature of the preferred feeding areas it is likely that some birds, especially if not calling, were missed during the surveys.

Reference

Collar, N.J., Gonzaga, L.P., Krabbe, N., Madrono Nieto, A., Naranjo, L.G., Parker III, T.A. and Wege, D.C. (1992). Threatened Birds of the Americas: The ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book. [Third Edition, part 2]. International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, UK.

Acknowledgements

The expedition received a very generous contribution from the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and was a winner of a BP Conservation Award (organised by BirdLife International and FFPS). We thank all concerned sincerely. We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, who provided funding, as well as technical and logistical support. Finally the following organisations and companies also provided sponsorship, support or equipment without which the expedition could not have taken place:
ABB Kent-Taylor Ltd., Administración de Parques Nacionales (APN - Argentina), Bird Exploration Fund (BOU), British Airways Assisting Nature Conservation, International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), Fundacion Vida Silvestre Argentina (FVSA), Leica (UK) Ltd, The Russell and Mary Foreman 1980 Charitable Trust, The Scouloudi Foundation and Varig.

Phil Benstead, Beaver House, Norwich Road, Reepham, Norwich NR10 4JN
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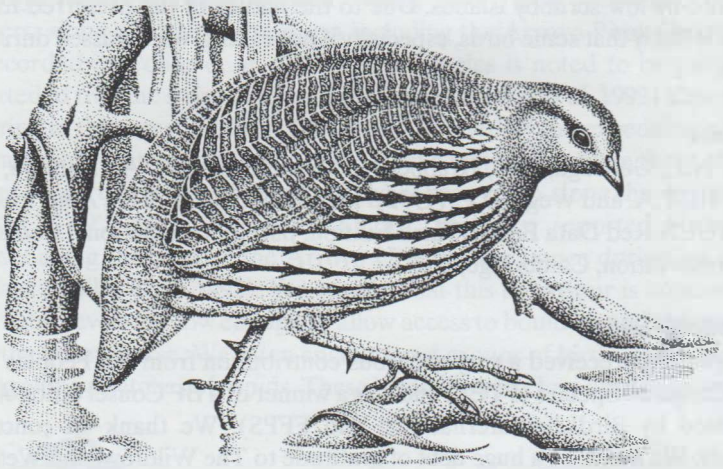
WPA News 46 p17-18

Taken from WPA India News Vol I, No.3-4 p13-14.

SWAMP FRANCOLIN CONSERVATION PROJECT

P McGowan, A Rahmani and P Iqbal

In the last issue of WPA-India News, Salim Javed provided an introduction to the Swamp francolin *Francolin gularis* and outlined some information that has been collected recently in and around Dudhwa National Park. As a result of this work, especially after a visit to the park in March/April 1993 to assess the feasibility of an intensive study of the species, a two-year project was initiated in November last year.



Swamp francolin *Artwork: David Mead*

The main objective of the project is to provide information on the francolin in marshy areas both inside and outside the National Park. The main issues were outlined by Salim, but collecting good quality data which can be used to compare the species' ecology in agricultural areas with those in a fully protected site is not easy.

In the first year an ecological description of the habitat is being collected for one site inside and one site outside the National Park. This includes a quantitative analysis of the plant and invertebrate species present in each site and the sequence and timing of seasonal changes, such as the flowering of grasses and disturbance to the habitat, noted. For example, the harvesting of the tall sugar cane crops in Ghola Taal was completed by the middle of April and this represents a major change to the structure of the habitat available.

For this season, data are being collected on the species by non-evasive methods only. Therefore, during the early part of the season, data were collected in such a way as to permit a critical assessment of the method by which territories can be mapped. Most of the information for this analysis was collected from calling birds at standard times in the morning. The habitat use of calling birds is also being investigated.

When broods emerge, efforts will be made to make as many direct observations as possible. These can probably be made along the grassy roads through tall grasslands in the park and along the edges of fields containing young crops on agricultural land at Ghola. Number of chicks, foraging and other behaviour patterns will be noted. After each observation the area will be searched for droppings for faecal analysis.

Against this general background, we are pursuing the possibility of radio-tracking birds in 1995 so that we can investigate nest-site selection, chick movements and the habitats used at these crucial times.

The Swamp francolin project is part of the Partridge, Quail and Francolin Specialist Group programme and the WPA-India National Galliformes Conservation Strategy, and is supported by the International Trust for Nature Conservation, The People's Trust for Endangered Species and British Airways - Assisting Nature Conservation.

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WPA News 46 p 19-20

NEW WORLD BANK PROJECT IN THE GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

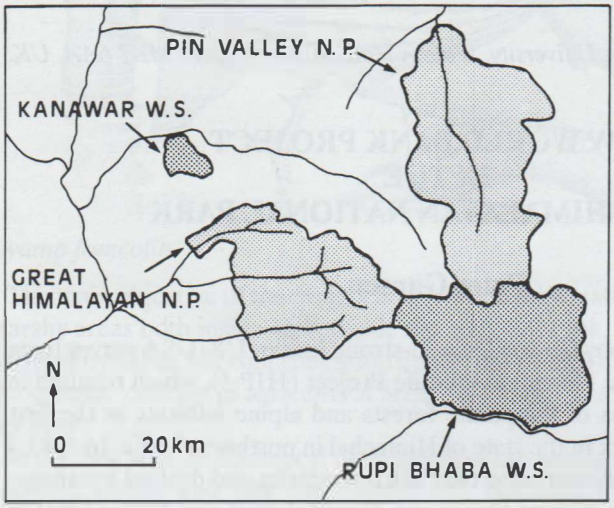
Peter Garson

During 1979-80 Dr Tony Gaston led a 25-strong Indian/UK/USA survey team on the first phase of the Himachal Wildlife Project (HJP-I), which resulted in the selection of an area of temperate forests and alpine habitats as the first candidate National Park in the state of Himachal in northwest India. In 1983, I led a small team which demarcated the Park boundaries and drafted a management plan. The resulting Great Himalayan National Park was notified by the state government in 1984, and thereby became the first in the world to hold a significant population of the Western Tragopan, as well as a few Cheer sites, and an abundance of White-crested Kalij, Himalayan Monal and Koklass pheasants. In 1991 Tony Gaston and I returned to the area for another look at

its magnificent forests and abundant wildlife, 11 years after our first surveys and seven years after the Park's notification. In general we were delighted by what we found, but there are still problems ahead if this wonderful area is to preserved for ever. Fortunately, and quite appropriately, international aid agency funds have now been allocated for this purpose. But first, a little history..!

In 1991, we found remarkable concentrations of Western Tragopan, Himalayan Tahr, Musk deer and Bharal, to mention some of the larger and rarer animals there. Himalayan Monal populations had increased dramatically since the early 1980s, which we believe to be the result of effective legislation against the wearing of Monal crests in Kullu hats. There seems to be little doubt that hunting has less impact on all manner of bird and mammal species there these days.

However, as I already hinted, it is not all good news. Our data from 1991 suggest that pheasants and other animals occur at the highest densities and at the lower, as well as higher altitudes in the forests of the uninhabited Tirthan Valley. Densities are lower and altitudinal distributions generally higher in the Jiwa and Sainj Valleys, both of which have permanent human settlements at present. Plans to resettle the two dozen or so families living in these valleys outside the Park boundaries are proceeding, but slowly.



The components of Himachal's Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve

Another disturbing development over the past decade is the explosion of herb collecting activity on the alpine meadows in the summer months. Truly enormous quantities of plants are being removed each year via routes into valleys north and south of the Park that are not policed effectively. This crop

cannot be sustainable, and the herb collectors themselves are already admitting that some valuable species are becoming vanishingly rare. This activity has been hijacked from the local people by contractors, and one aim of the Park managers in future must surely be to return its control and the benefits accruing from it to the local people. There is also a need for research work on the sustainability of alpine grazing regimes, and pleas for the establishment of a Research Station close to the Park are continuing.

Meanwhile the Great Himalayan National Park has become part of an enormous block of protected areas in the northern part of Himachal. It has been extended to include the upper Parbati Valley to the north, and now abuts extensively with both the Pin Valley National Park in Spiti, and the Rupi Bhaba Wildlife Sanctuary in the upper Sutlej. The whole of this area is to be designated as the Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve, giving it much deserved international recognition.

The other piece of good news for this area arises directly from the Earth Summit (UNCED) in Rio back in 1992, in the form of the UN 'Global Environment Facility (GEF)' programme of financial support for conservation projects, which is administered by the World Bank. India's Ministry of Environment and Forests made a successful bid for support under this scheme in 1993, and as a result a project is scheduled for implementation in and around the Great Himalayan National Park in Himachal Pradesh from 1994 for five years. The indicative plan for the project suggests that work on the sustainability of herb and fungus collecting, and of grazing regimes, will be important foci for research carried out by an expert team based locally throughout this period.

More broadly, this project has its objectives in ecodevelopment, that is in the diversification and control of a local economy largely based on the abundant natural resources available. Most of the area between the present National Park boundary and the main Beas valley to the west is to be designated as a buffer zone within which ecodevelopment projects will be developed.

Big multi-disciplinary projects like this may seem to have precious little to do with conservation of galliforme species. Rest assured, however, that if the needs of the local people are not satisfied over the long term, this area, like most of the rest of India before it, will become subject to over-exploitation of every kind, with the consequent degrading of habitats, excessive hunting and local extinctions for tasty species like the pheasants!

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WPA News 46 p20-22

IN SEARCH OF THE BROWN EARED-PHEASANT

Li Xiangtao

It was 4.20pm I had been waiting here for eight hours but still waited patiently, watching, careful of every movement. I had tempered myself during surveys of rare animals year after year. Several years ago I had visited the Longmen Mountains in Sichuan doing research for my master's degree on the ecology of Temminck's Tragopan. Today I came specifically to find another rare bird, the Brown Eared-pheasant, in Dongling Mountain.

Dongling is the highest peak of Beijing Municipality. It has green hills and clear waters, and is only about 100km to the west of Tiananmen Square. There were red leaves and fruits hanging on the trees throughout the mountain in the deep autumn. 500,000 years ago, human beings began to live in Beijing. Hence it had become a very important city in the northern part of the country. During the Jun, Yuna, Ming and Qing dynasties, Beijing, as the capital of China, assembled an even larger population. People chopped forests to go in for large-scale construction and brought wild earth under cultivation. This led to a serious destruction of natural environment. Under these circumstances, Dongling Mountain, with better preserved virgin nature, not only works for water and soil conservation and the balance of ecosystem but also becomes an ideal living place for plants as well as wild animals.

Several bees circled around me and buzzed while flying, just like an old engine in the silent forest. "How long would I wait?" "Could I find Brown

eared-pheasants?" "Would they really live here?" I wondered.

The Brown Eared-pheasant is famous for its beautiful feathers and elegant posture. Unlike most species of pheasants, both sexes are much alike. It has velvety face wattles and dark brown body feathers. Its head and neck are light black, two bunches of white feather project upwards at the back of its ears like a pair of horns, after which its name 'brown eared' comes. Its Chinese name 'brown horse pheasant' is derived from its long, compressed rectrices hang down loosely like a fluffy horsetail. When several birds are making their way through grass slopes or around forest, their movements are exceedingly graceful and pleasing.

In ancient times, the bird was widely-spread in Northern China. Unfortunately, it has become extinct in many former areas due to thousands of years of war, over-hunting and destruction of habitats. It is now confined to the mountains of northern and northwestern parts of Shanxi and northwestern part of Hebei, and has become an endangered species.

Although there was no direct data to prove that the species inhabits Beijing in recent information, many ancient books and local chronicles had indicated that Beijing was one of the distribution areas of the bird. In addition, some bone fossils of Eared pheasant has been found in Zhoukoudian, western part of Beijing. In recent years, I visited Dongling Mountain several times, came to know it very well and fell in love with the place. Two clues about the birds were obtained. First, I had found two types of forests between 1300-2000 meters above sea level which were typical habitats for the Brown Eared-pheasant to live. One is poplar-larch forest, the other is dragon-spruce-Liaodongli forest. Second, the local people told me that they had seen this kind of 'horned pheasant', a local name of the Brown Eared-pheasants, in the mountains. I deduced that Dongling Mountain is probably a potential distribution area for the species. My suggestion was supported by my director, Dr Cheng Tsohsin, Professor of Institute of Zoology. He encouraged me to survey the Brown Eared-pheasant in Dongling Mountain.

But it was not an easy task for me to look for an endangered species - the Brown Eared-pheasants in the field. I pitched a tent on the hillside. Regardless of wind or rain, I climbed up the hill at dawn each day and went back until it was getting dark. Half a month went by, I still didn't see any sign of the bird. I felt in the dark, but it didn't shake my resolution. I chose a place with a wilderness of pine and birch trees as my observation site. It was on the southern slopes, out of the wind and near water, covered with shrubs on which berry grew in close clusters. The lower visibility was also favourable to conceal myself. I judged by my experience that Brown Eared-pheasants would not turn a blind eye to these delicious food if they existed here.

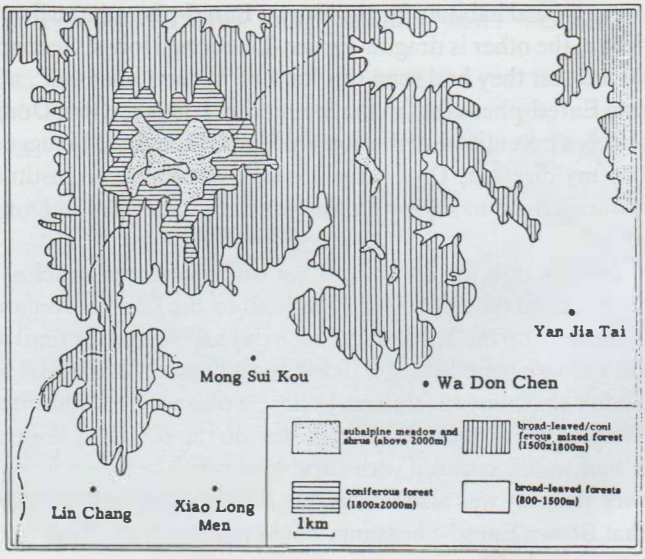
It was getting dark. Suddenly, the silence was pierced by the calls which came from the shrubs, "Goo, goo", the sound came nearer and nearer, even the steps were audible, but a cluster of branches and leaves were right in my sight. I had to grab a branch to change my position, I felt a sting on my hand and the branch was carelessly broken by my hand when it drew back instinctively. Then, the sounds vanished and the woods became silent again.

I looked at my hand. It had been stung by a wasp. I gave no care to the pain but hastened to the place where the pheasants disappeared. I found the birds had eaten many berries on shrubs and leaves of grass. There were some pits left on the ground which was dug by the birds. "They won't be here in a short time." I thought, "Are they Brown Eared-pheasants or other species?" I felt remorse while searching carefully on the ground. Finally I found several feathers of the birds. I put them in between the leaves of my notebook, then went back to my tent and felt entirely tired.

The next morning, after a quick breakfast, I was going up the mountain while I heard someone shouting "Mr Li, wait a moment please!"

I looked back. It was Wu Bo, an old shepherd who lived in a village near the foot or the mountain. He went up, grasped me by my arm and said: "Are you looking for the horned pheasant, Mr Li? I caught one alive. Come with me."

"Alive? Where is it?" I asked and followed the old man down hill.



Habitat suitable for the Brown Eared-pheasant in Dongling Mountain.

"In my sheepfold." the old man said. "How did you capture it?" I went on to ask. I thought it was impossible. In spite of the heavy body and its short and round wings, the Brown Eared-pheasant could run very fast and glide downward the slope under the provocation of an extremity of danger. It was hard for people to catch up.

"Oh, I put some vegetables out of my house, but recently they were stolen many times by a 'horned pheasant'. I used a big basket making a trap, then caught it. It is said that you come here to study the bird, so I got up early to tell you the story." "What does it look like?" I felt in doubt. The Brown Eared-pheasant move through different forest types from shade to exposed slopes in autumn. Its sociability and gregariousness is perhaps more pronounced than in any other species of pheasant. It won't always go to the same place alone and won't approach man's house either. "Dark green head, with a long crest and a large patch of white on each side of its neck. Body feather brownish, and a straight tail but not too long." Old man Wu said. "I see". I got it. It was not a Brown Eared-pheasant but a male Koklass pheasant. Because of its long crest, Koklass pheasant was also called 'horned pheasant' by the local people.

Wu Bo and I came to the sheepfold. Of course we saw a male Koklass pheasant. I gave the old man a brief introduction about the differences between the Brown Eared-pheasant and Koklass pheasant. Then I said: "Koklass pheasant is also a protected species in our country. Let it return to nature." Old man Wu agreed with pleasure.

Another half a month went by. I had no further discovery. "Where are your Brown Eared-pheasants? Will I go back without finding you?" I said to myself. "No, keep on surveying, I won't go back until I have seen you." I had examined those feathers picked up among shrubs and confirmed that were feathers of the Brown Eared-pheasant. There's no doubt that it hunted in the forest of Donglin Mountain. The next step I would go was to find, to study and to protect the rare bird.

I packed up my lunch, camera, telescope and other outfit. Today I planned to cross a valley which was more than one hundred meters deep, then climb up to the coniferous at an elevation of about 1800 meters above sea level. With great difficulty, I crossed a steep hillside clothed with bush and dead grass when I saw a Golden Eagle soaring in the sky. It was one of main natural enemies of the Brown Eared-pheasant. I crawled out of shrubs rapidly regardless of clothes ragged by branches and blood on my face and hands as if I had foreseen something.

Oh! How splendid these Brown Eared-pheasants are! Maybe dozens of them! They were seeking their food in the groves slopes leisurely. I had finally seen a flock of Brown Eared-pheasants! Their gait is slow and dignified, slowly making their way through longish grass stubble, with their long, flowing tail feathers held high, their movements are exceedingly graceful and pleasing.

All of a sudden, they alerted to the eagle in the sky. One of them gave a screem, then ran along a brook. The others followed closely. They seemed as if a group of horses were galloping in the forests. In a twinkling of an eye they vanished in the forest. I was astonished at such an exciting scene. I recalled many legends about the beautiful bird accounted in ancient books. But it has greatly changed. It is now extinct in many former habitats and is very vulnerable to changes in its environment.

However, it was really a wonder to find a new habitat of the bird near the capital. In the not too distant future this forest will be fenced and classified as a nature reserve in order to give further protection to this species. I made up my mind that I would keep on the research and propagate the importance of protecting the rare pheasants. I believe that Dongling is a superb place to educate people in the conservation of this species, and to get the interest and support of relevant government officials for the needs of wildlife conservation in general and of the Brown Eared-pheasant in particular.

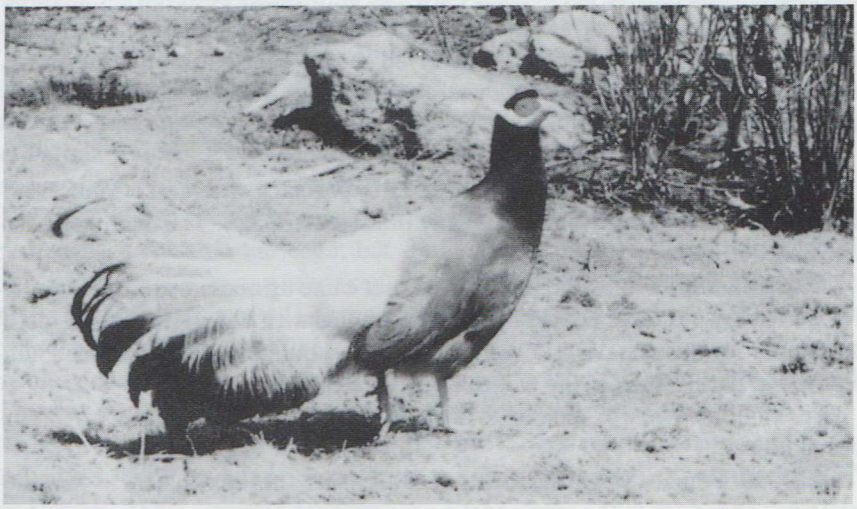
Illustrated from a booklet by Li Xiangtao and Liu Rusun 'The Brown Eared-pheasant' available from WPA HQ.
Beijing Natural History Museum, 126 Tian Qiao Street, Beijing, China.
WPA News 46 p 23-27

CITY OF DJINNS - A YEAR IN DELHI

William Dalrymple

If poetry, music and elephant fights were the preferred amusements of the court, the humbler folk of the age of Safdarjung had their partridges. Again and again in the letters and diaries of the period there are references to both partridge and elephant fights; they also feature prominently in the miniature illustrations of late Mughal manuscripts.

Both sports were clearly popular and well-established traditions; but when I asked my Indian friends about their survival in modern Delhi, they all shook their heads. As far as any of them knew, the last elephant fights had taken place around the turn of the century in the princely states of Rajputana; and as for partridge fights, said my friends, those sorts of Mughal traditions had all died out at Partition. I might find the odd partridge fight surviving in Lahore or somewhere in Pakistan, they thought, but not in Delhi.



Black francolin from a plate in The Gamebirds of India, Burma and Ceylon by Hume & Marshall Vol.II. 1880

It was Balvinder Singh who one day in late January suddenly announced, quite unprompted, that he would not be on duty on Sunday as he and his father Punjab Singh were going to watch what he called a 'bird challenge'. The fights apparently took place every Sunday morning in a Muslim cemetery in Old Delhi: "Bahot acha event hai", said Balvinder. "All very good birds fighting, very good money making, all very happy people enjoying."

I asked whether I could come along too; and Balvinder agreed. The following Sunday at six in the morning the three of us set off from International Backside into the thick early morning mist. As we neared the cemetery, the streets began to fill with people, all heading in the same direction. Some were carrying bulky packages covered with thick quilted cloths. Every so often one of the packages would let out a loud squawk.

The cemetery lay within a high walled enclosure at the back of the Old Delhi Idgah. Despite the early hour, the arched gateway into the cemetery was already jammed with chai wallahs and snack sellers trying to push their barrows through the narrow entrance. On the far side a crowd of two or three hundred people had already gathered: craggy old Muslims with long beards and mountainous turbans; small Hindu shopkeepers in blue striped lungis; Kashmiri pandits in long frock coats and Congress hats.

The crowd milled around chatting and exchanging tips, hawking and spitting, slurping tea and placing bets. As the partridge enthusiasts pottered about, three elderly men tried to clear a space in the centre of the cemetery. They strutted around, sombre and authoritative, clearly in charge of the proceedings. These, explained Balvinder in his (characteristically loud) stage whisper, were the khalifas, the headmen of the partridge fights.

"Very big men," said Balvinder approvingly.

"How do you become a khalifa?" I asked. "Experience and market value, said Balvinder, and you must have too many titar (partridges). This man here has one hundred fighting birds..."

The khalifa whom Balvinder had pointed out came up and introduced himself. He was a very old man; he had blacked his eyelids with collyrium and his teeth and upper lip were heavily stained with paan. His name was Azar Khalifa and he lived in Sarai Khalil in the Churi Wallan Gulli of the Old City.

"We khalifas live for the bird challenge," he said. "We have no other occupation."

Azar and Punjab Singh agreed that Delhi was the best place to see the partridge challenge in the whole of the subcontinent. "I have seen the partridge fights of Lucknow, Jaipur and Peshawar," said Azar. "But never have I seen anything like the fights in Delhi. Khalifas come here from all over India and Pakistan to participate."

Some of Azar Khalifa's partridges were fighting in the match that day, and the old man showed us his birds. From behind the headstone of an old Muslim grave he produced an oblong parcel trussed up in flowery chintz. Unbuckling the fastenings, he removed the wraps and uncovered a wickerwork cage. Inside, separated by a dividing trellis, were two fine plump partridges.

"This one lady. This one gent," explained Balvinder.

"The birds responded with a loud cry of Ti-lo! Ti-lo!"

Of the two birds, the male was the more beautiful. It had superb black markings as precise and perfect as a Bewick wood engraving running down its spine; lighter, more downy plumage covered its chest. Half-way along the back of the lower legs you could see the vicious spur with which the birds fought.

"I feed my birds on milk, almonds and sugar cane," said Azar, sticking his finger through the cage and tickling the female under its neck. "The males I train every day so that they can jump and run without feeling too much tired."

As we talked there was a shout from one of the other khalifas; the fight was about to begin.

Azar called me over and with a flourish sat me down on a plastic deck chair at the front of the ring of spectators. The open space in the middle had been carefully brushed and in its centre squatted two men about five feet apart; by their sides stood two cages, each containing a pair of birds. The spectators - now arranged in two ranks, those at the front squatting, those behind standing upright - hurriedly finished placing their bets. A hush fell on the graveyard.

At a signal from Azar, the two contestants unhitched the front gate of the cage; the two cock partridges strutted out. As they did so, their mates began to squawk in alarm and encouragement. The males responded by puffing up their chests and circling slowly towards each other. Again the hens shrieked "Ti-lo! Ti-lo!" and again the males drew closer to one another.

Then, quite suddenly, one of the two cocks lost his nerve. He turned and rushed back towards the cage; but finding the gate barred, he skittered off towards the nearest group of spectators, hotly pursued by his enemy. At the edge of the ring the cock took off, flying up amid a shower of feathers into the lower branches of a nearby tree. There he remained, striking "Ti-lo!", his chest heaving up and down in fright. The rival male, meanwhile, strutted around the deserted lady partridge in ill-disguised triumph. The hen averted her head.

This first short fight obviously disappointed the connoisseurs in the audience. Balvinder shook his head at me across the ring: "This one very weakling bird," he shouted. "This one very weakling."

Money was exchanged, the two contestants shook hands, and their place in the ring was taken by a second pair of fighters: a Rajput with a handlebar moustache, and a small but fierce-looking Muslim who sported a bushy black

beard. To my eyes the new pair of partridges were indistinguishable from any of the other birds I had seen that day, but the rest of the audience clearly thought otherwise. A murmur of approval passed through the crowd; Balvinder got out his wallet and handed two 100-rupee notes to his neighbour.

At another signal from Azar Khalifa the two gates were pulled back and again the cocks ran out. This time there was no bluffing. Encouraged by the raucous shrieks of their mates, the two birds rushed at each other. Handlebar's bird, which was the lighter of the two, gave the Muslim's bird a vicious switch across its forehead; the darker bird responded by ripping at its rival's throat. The two then fenced at each other with their beaks, each parrying the other's thrust. A frisson went around the crowd: this was more like it. Despite the violence, the blood and the cloud of feathers, I was surprised to find it strangely thrilling to watch: it was like a miniature gladiator contest.

The two birds had now broken loose from each other and withdrawn to the vicinity of their respective cages. Then Handlebar's cock suddenly jumped into the air, flew the distance that separated it from its rival and came down on the darker bird with its neck arched and talons open. The spurs ripped at the Muslim's bird and drew blood on its back, just above the wing. The bird rolled over, but on righting itself managed to give its attacker a sharp peck on its wing tip as it tried to escape. Then, scampering up behind Handlebar's bird it grabbed its rival by the neck, gripped, and forced it down on to its side. The first bird lay pinioned there for four or five seconds before it managed to break free and fly off.

Handlebar's mate had meanwhile broken out in a kind of partridge death-wail. The cry was taken up by the loser of the previous fight who was still watching the new contest from his tree. Soon the whole graveyard was alive with the squawking of excited partridges.

The action had also electrified the crowd who were pressing in on the ring despite the best efforts of the khalifas to keep them all back. Someone knocked over the tray of a chai wallah and there were loud oaths from the squatting men over whom the tea had fallen. But the incident was soon forgotten. The Muslim's bird had gone back on to the offensive, swooping down with its spurs and ripping a great gash along its enemy's cheek. It followed the attack up with a vicious peck just above the other bird's beak. Handlebar's bird looked stunned for a second then withdrew backwards towards its mate.

The ring which had originally been twenty feet across was now little wider than seven or eight feet; the squatters were now standing and getting in everyone else's view. In the middle, Handlebar was looking extremely agitated. Although the rules laid down that he could not directly intervene he hissed at the hen who dutifully shrieked out a loud distress call. This checked her mate's retreat and

the bird turned around to face the Muslim's partridge with his back against her cage.

The proximity to his hen seemed to bring the cock new resolution. For a few seconds the two birds stood facing each other, chests fully extended; then Handlebar's bird flew at its rival with a new and sudden violence. He dealt the Muslim's bird a glancing blow with the hook of his beak, then rose up, wings arched, and fell heavily on the lighter bird's head. As he hopped out of reach he again cut the darker bird with his spurs.

The reprisal never came. The Muslim's bird slowly righted itself, got unsteadily to its feet, then limped off through the legs of the crowd. There was a great cheer from the spectators. Balvinder jumped up and down, punched the air, then promptly confronted the man with whom he had made the bet. The latter grudgingly handed over a stash of notes. All around the ring wallets were being slapped open and shut; fingers were being angrily pointed. Everywhere arguments were breaking out between debtors and creditors, winners and losers. The outsider had clearly won.

Suddenly there was a cry from the gateway; and the khalifas started ushering everyone to one side. All the spectators frowned.

"What's happening?" I asked Punjab, who had come up beside me.

"This khalifa is saying one dead body is coming. We must leave the graveyard for an hour." "Now?"

"Yes, immediately. Some people are wanting to bury some body here."

As we were leaving, we passed the Muslim who had lost the fight. He was cradling his partridge in his hands and kissing the bird. He was close to tears, but the bird looked surprisingly perky.

"Will the bird live?" I asked Punjab.

"Yes, yes," he replied. "This Mahommedan will bandage the wounds with herbs and feed the titar with special food. In a few weeks the bird will be back in the fighting ring."

Outside the cemetery we came across Azar Khalifa.

" You liked?" he asked.

"Very much," I said.

"Everyone likes," said Azar. "For the people of Delhi this partridge fighting has always been a happiness."

"It is true," said Punjab Singh. "People are coming here drunk, worried or tired of the chores of the world, but always they leave this place refreshed."

The above is an excerpt from City of Djinns - a year in Delhi published by Harper Collins.
WPA News 46 p28-32

AVIORNIS TRIP TO ENGLAND MARCH 1994

Luc Daems

The following lighthearted account of a group of Aviornis members visit to England by coach may hopefully encourage similar tours by members.

On Friday 25 March, midnight sharp, 42 of the 43 subscribers stood ready to board the bus for the trip from Kasterlee to Calais. One subscriber was reported ill. But after a 20 minutes delay, we still had no idea where the missing one was. Although animal lovers and big garden owners enjoy a lot of respect in England, one cannot count on delaying the departure of a ferryboat, not even if, as a travelling company, one represents all pheasant, duck and wild pigeon varieties of the world. Counting on the fact that the ferry needed a little extra time, before sailing, for proper stowage and cargo hold closing, we started 20 minutes late with 42 persons in a drizzling rain from Kasterlee, to reach Calais in good time.

Photo: Jean Howman

After a nightly crossing, the bus drove off the loading bridge into the English countryside under a shining sun. Getting firm ground under their feet, some palefaces quickly showed a blush on their cheeks again. They stopped complaining about the competence of the captain of 'The Pride of Calais'. We suspected however that they had miscalculated the effect of the Guinness on board. Having to drive on the left and adjust your watch, when arriving on British soil, proves, even the most a-political watcher, that everyday life still keeps the country a little bit apart from a United Europe.

The Child Beale Wildlife Trust - a name as an organ recital - that we reached

first, was still closed, but the keeper eagerly interrupted his breakfast to let us in. This park, with its extensive collection of pheasants, also accommodates, since some time, a considerable number of ducks. Having taken ample time to visit the park and making ready to continue our trip, role call was held and, naturally, Johan was missing! When we went looking for him, we found him strolling through the park all by himself at his ease, enjoying all that his eyes saw and meditating on everything that his mind catched, meaning no harm, and that at a moment when the guide was trying desperately to keep a tight schedule. A man after our own heart, but who has to be kept on a leash.

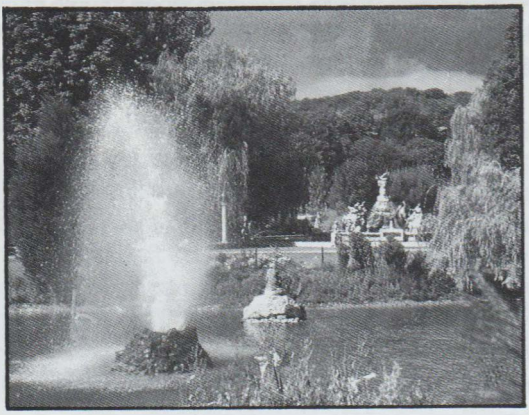
Busbridge Lakes - again a name ringing a bell - our next stop, is owned by Mrs Douetill, who is, we can say with little pride, a member of Aviornis Int, England. The collection of animals kept there consist mainly of ducks belong in lakes, of course with a few crowned cranes and pheasants, in a beautiful landscape with, as one can expect from good England tradition, a few very old trees as eye catchers.

After this visit, tired from travelling and walking around, but satisfied, we joined our hotel for a delicious meal. Soon after, most of us went to their rooms for a good nights sleep and the other followed a few beers later. The next morning there was some confusion. Before going to bed, most members of the group had turned their watches forwarded by one hour - fiddling again at their time pieces, because at midnight, summertime came into effect - and now sat already freshly and lively at an elaborate breakfast table. The rest, however, still overcome with sleep, started only then, yawning and arm stretching, to think about getting body and mind functioning again. Unsuspecting and very surprised they entered an already deserted breakfast room.

We left 40 minutes late for a visit, one could say a private visit, to Mr Keith Howman, Director General of the WPA. Because of the very good relationship between Aviornis and the WPA, he is no stranger to many an amateur. Several of them purchased 'Fazanten', the Dutch translation of a very handy book that he wrote, and that is of more use actually than just for looking at the pictures. In addition, I would not like to have to give shelter to all the Flemish amateurs who, through the regional Aviornis Book Service, bought his recent title *Pheasants of the World*. As owner of a number of fish lakes, he uses to scold on the ducks, that freely roam these lakes ... 'rubbish!'., but it was clear that he only joked. When we arrived at the collection of waterbirds, who are kept apart from the fish lakes, he put himself in the background, while Mrs Howman took the floor. The waterbirds are clearly her domain.

The main purpose of our visit to the Howman family, however, was the pheasant collection, with the Cabot and the Nagaland owned Blyths in front. In future, Keith Howman plans to occupy himself almost exclusively with

Tragopans. Because, very recently, the Sarahan Pheasantry in Himachal Pradesh, Northeast India, have achieved breeding results with the Western Tragopan (Hastings), this species figures at the top of his list. (In 1993 two chicks hatched, one died after nine days, the other was six months old in November 1993 and in excellent condition, we learned from the February issue of **WPA News**). If, however, we take pure beauty as a measuring-rule, nothing surpasses the golden pheasants, scratching around freely, suddenly dancing a whirling ballet of fanning reds, blues, yellows and greens, than winging-up like fire birds, flying over the treetops like a multicoloured garland and landing on a branch like gracious Chinese lanterns. A more oriental sight is hardly imaginable.



Three Ponds Fountain at Child Beale Wildlife Trust

It is difficult to believe, that these scenes were enacted in the historical ranges in China, long before living memory. Only recently, men - that is me and you included - succeeded in causing the alarming decline of this living symbol of beauty. A few decennia ago our race 'homo' was added the adjective 'sapiens', an error, that is even bigger than that of Bankiva. In the meantime, the latter has been corrected as 'Javanicus'. If we ever will be able to correct ours, remains to be seen. Open parks, as described above, will be a last refuge, a limbo, before the golden pheasant will disappear under the dust of some museum. Re-breeding with the dull decoction that is the yellow golden pheasant, will not set the boat afloat again - a small founder-troop tries to recapture the genetic diversity by very selective breeding, whereby the young birds are coupled to the parents, (an English genetics based method) - but, by lack of such groups or their success, a hand washing with Ariel Colour in lukewarm suds - treating them as tenderly as an exemplary husband would treat the favourite, delicate, multicoloured blouse of his spouse, could be the last chance to recover the

original colours of the 'yellows' golden pheasant. But do not put them in the drier, they certainly would not survive it. This nonsense just points out how desperate the situation is.

We were also told, that a nature film maker from the continent filmed the Argus pheasant in Keith Howman's well planted aviary and keeps up appearances that it is a real nature scene. How long do we still have, before this will be the only way to watch these, and other, birds? Before leaving the Howman's family, Mr George Allen III jr., a guest of them and publisher of the American bird magazine *The Gazette*, took a picture of our group. So, if at one time those typical Kempen faces look up at you from the pages of this magazine, you know how they came there.

Next, we drove to Birdworld, the bird park of Mr Rob Harvey, specialist in artificial incubation and author of the book *Practical Incubation*. Unfortunately Mr Harvey was on the continent, in France more precisely. Paul, replacing him, accompanied us through the park. Here, all our interest was aimed at the Rothschild Peacock-pheasant, a species that is rarely met in collections. Further distribution of this species is still far away, because, although all eggs of this couple are fecundated, all chicks die on hatching. This knowledge could be very practical. Imagine that, sooner or later, having the extremely unlikely opportunity of coming into possession of a couple of these rare birds, it seems impossible to make the chicks hatch and stay alive, even with the issue *Practical Incubation* in hand, it is not your knowledge of the English language that is faltering.

Tired but satisfied about this at all levels successful trip, we prepared to return to Dover. For safety reasons a check was made again to see that everybody was aboard the bus. General hilarity, Johan was missing again. Finally, we found him in 'The Owl's Nest Bookshop' - how do they make up these nice names - fascinatedly browsing through the big offer of natural history literature. We could convince him that there were neither clues to be found to the extinct Dodo or the rare Kiwi nor on the 200 remaining bush hens in the palm bush of only one specific tropical island and he climbed aboard the bus. Once in Dover, while the rest of the company went shopping, prior to boarding the ferry, he was nicely but firmly asked not to leave his seat.

After crossing the channel on a calm sea and an easy journey on French and Flemish motorways, we arrived back at our starting point, the village of Kasterlee. We said good-bye to each other and everyone went home, Johan also, we hope.

Talking of a successful trip - this was one! And to our English friends we would like to say: "We'll meet again".

AVICULTURE AND NOTES AND NEWS

EDWARDS'S PHEASANT PROJECT PROCEEDING WELL

The following extract was published in Gazette.

"Currently the project is proceeding well. Silver pheasants are being used as a model for the Edwards' pheasant. We have collected semen from the males through one breeding season. The males are now moulting and will be induced into a second breeding season this fall using artificial light 16 hours per day. The semen collected has been used to evaluate sperm cell shape, metabolism, survival in different dileunts, and survival with 48 hours storage at different temperatures. Several stains have been modified for use with pheasant semen in order to evaluate different portions of the cell. Semen has been frozen using two different techniques. In the fall or early spring we hope to conduct a trial, inseminating egg laying Silver hens with the frozen-thawed semen, semen stored for 24 hours at 5°C, and fresh semen in order to compare fertility and hatchability rates with each semen treatment."

Dr Rose says she will be providing an article on the research results as soon as they become available. She said donations to the project resulting from her article in the December Gazette are much appreciated. Extra funding is still needed.

DONALD RISDON

Keith Howman writes:

Donald Risdon was a much respected figure in avicultural circles long before I kept my first pheasants 30 years ago. In pheasant circles his name and that of his wife, Betty, along with the Tropical Bird Gardens at Rode was synonymous with Grey peacock-pheasants. Donald was one of the World Pheasant Association's earliest members and always made us welcome.

He will be greatly missed and our sympathy goes to Betty, and stepsons Keith and Andrew Glenn.

PHEASANT JUNGLES BY WILLIAM BEEBE A NEW WPA PUBLICATION

The great 'naturalist/scientists' have often supplemented formal publication of their results and findings with more popular accounts of their travels and adventures in the field. Directed at a broader audience,

such books have always played an important role in winning hearts and minds for the conservation cause. William Beebe's *Pheasant Jungles,* long out of print and difficult to obtain, is surely a classic example.

Pheasant Jungles is a selection of Beebe's pheasant-tracking memoirs and experiences during his 17 month trip. Capturing the excitement of the solitary pursuit of these scarce and secretive birds, it also offers insight into the (sometimes dangerous) experience of Asian travel at a time when wild places remained largely untouched by the ravages of development. The characters: hunter, trackers, porters, cooks and servants he met along the way receive lively attention and his musings during long days alone in the field are candidly revealed.

This book will be of particular interest to the increasing number of wildlife conservationists who travel to Asia whether or not they have a special interest in pheasants. William Beebe's pheasant travels took him to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), India, Burma, China, Japan, Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo and Java. Beebe's evocative descriptions have been matched by eight beautiful new colour paintings by wildlife artist Timothy Greenwood and the lovely cover plate by Ron Digby depicted on the back of this newsletter.

The Bulwers pheasant on the front cover is one of the eight new pheasant paintings illustrating this splendid new edition of the World Pheasant Association's list of publications.

Pheasant Jungles is available from WPA HQ price £19.95 plus £1.50 p&p in the UK. For overseas p&p, price on application stating air or sea mail.

EDWARDS'S PHEASANT MAKES NEWS

On Saturday 15 October an article about the Edwards's pheasant, written by Willy Newlands, was published in the Daily Telegraph. Under the title 'Pheasants go back to the war zone' the article detailed the relatively short but tragic history of the Edward's pheasant in Vietnam and explained how, thanks to the efforts of aviculturists, the species was well represented in captivity and described how four pairs of these birds had been sent to Hanoi Zoo as part of the World Pheasant Association's agreement of co-operation with the zoo.

The newspaper article appears to have generated a great deal of interest. WPA Headquarters subsequently received requests for further details and Tom Gardiner was interviewed by local radio and television companies which had taken up the story. Tom explains:

"The radio and television people seemed fascinated by the fact that the Vietnam war had contributed to the possible extinction of a species in the wild. The point was made that

many other species of pheasants are also under threat in the wild, due mainly to the destruction of their natural habitat, but it was the linkw ith the Vietnam war which appeared to be the main area of interest for the media. The short television report even included archive footage of the war. It is unusual for pheasants to make the news at all, and it would have been nice if the television people had devoted more time to the work of WPA and its members, but I suppose that even a short item is better than none at all."

Our thanks go to Willy Newlands for writing the Daily Telegraph article which provoked so much interest.

VISIT OF CHINESE SCIENTIST

Dr Sun Yue-hua, who has been working in China on Hazel grouse, visited the UK as a guest of the Grouse Specialist Group for two weeks during September. Arrangements were made for Dr Sun to visit BirdLife International and The World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, The Game Conservancy at Fordingbridge, The British Museum at Tring, as well as some leading pheasant collections. During his visit to the UK Dr Sun also spent some time with The Game Conservancy's Black Grouse and Capercaillie Research Officer - Dr David Baines - in Scotland.

Dr Sun's project 'Research on population ecology of Hazel grouse by radiotelemetry' made great advances in 1993. This project is supported by the National Natural Foundation of China and directed by Dr Sun in the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica. During the spring and summer of 1993, seven Hazel grouse (three males and four females) were radiotracked and three hens with transmitters succeeded in breeding. The results indicated that monthly home range areas of males were on average bigger than female home ranges.

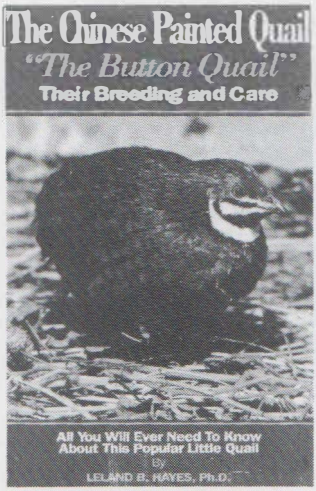
The main objectives of the study include home range, habitat selection and analysis, social organization and behavioural ecology.

AUSTRALIAN NEWS

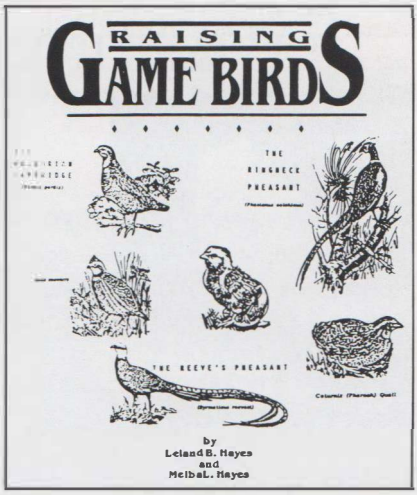
WPA Australia co-operates closely with the Pheasant and Waterfowl Society of Australia. PWSA produce an excellent bi-monthly magazine called The Pheasant. We were sorry to learn that its long time editor Ron Fay, is unwell and has had to resign. However a temporary team led by Laurie Thomson aided and abetted by Bob Bradey, Chairman of WPA Australia have produced an excellent October issue largely devoted to the problems and some solutions to pheasant aviculture in Australia. For details of membership of PWSA write to John Millington, P.O.Box 72, Nhill, Victoria 3418, Australia.

W.P.A. PUBLICATIONS

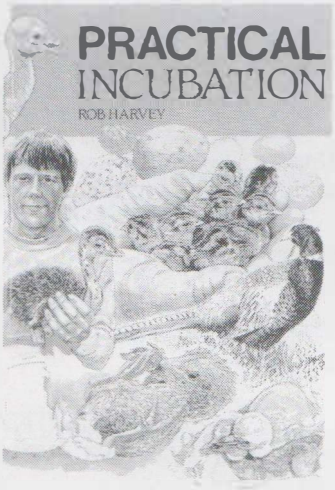
The Breeding and Management Series



At last the book bird lovers have been asking for. **'The Chinese Painted Quail'** is produced in good quality softback cover with four pages of colour plates, 161 pages and many photos, drawings and maps. The author is the current President of the American Gamebird Breeders Federation. Price £12.95 plus £1.05 postage and packing.



'Raising Gamebirds' is 300 pages packed with practical information for both the beginner and the experienced gamebird breeder on how to raise ornamental quail, partridges and pheasants. Chapters are included on commercial game pheasant farming and bird health and diseases. Price £13.95 plus £1.55 postage and packing.



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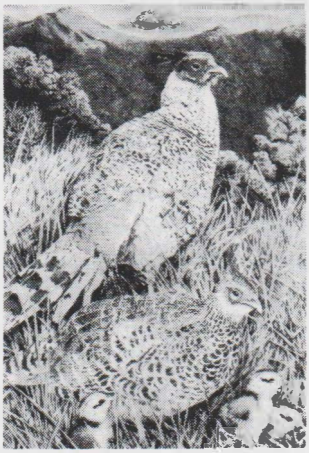
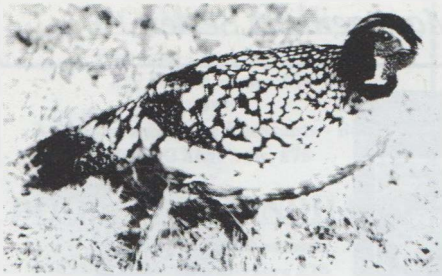


ABOVE: Cheer Pheasant
Artist: Tim Greenwood
Size: 6.5" x 4.5"
Message: With Good Wishes
Envelopes provided

ABOVE: Edwards's Pheasant
Artist: Ron Digby
Size: 6.5" x 4.5"
Message: None
Envelopes provided

RIGHT: Willow Grouse
Artist: C J F Coombs
Size: 6" x 6"
Message: None
No envelopes provided

LEFT: Harlequin Duck (face)
Reverse: Torrent Duck
Artist: R J Robjent
Size 7.5" x 6.5"
Message: None
No envelopes provided



LEFT: Cabot's Tragopan
Photo: Jean Howman
Size: 5.5" x 3.5"
Message: With Best Wishes
Envelopes provided
See front cover of **WPA News 24**

RIGHT: Blyth's Tragopan
Photo: Jean Howman
Size: 5.5" x 3.5"
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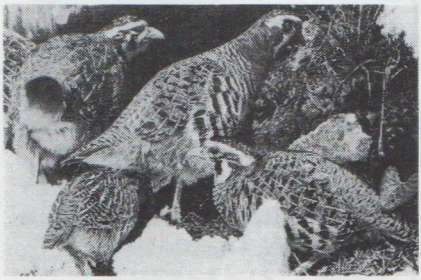
See front cover of **WPA News 25**



LEFT: Tibetan Hill Partridge
Artist: Timothy Greenwood
Size 5.5" x 3.5"
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See front cover of **WPA News 29**

RIGHT: Himalayan Snowcock
Artist: Timothy Greenwood
Size 5.5" x 3.5"
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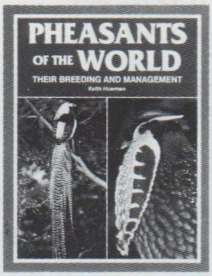

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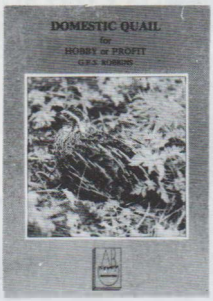

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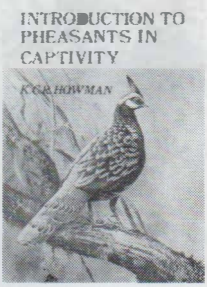

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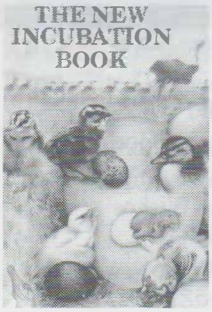

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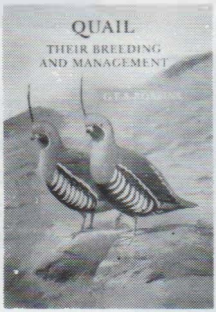

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PHEASANT JUNGLES

WILLIAM BEEBE

PHEASANT JUNGLES

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