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WPA News 47 (1995)

World Pheasant Association

WPA NEWS

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The International Newsletter of the World Pheasant Association

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BRITISH AIRWAYS ENVIRONMENT
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WPA News No 47

Editor: Derek Bingham

Contents

Forthcoming Events

1995	
1-2 July	WPA stand at the Game Conservancy Trust Scottish Fair, Scone, Perthshire - sponsored by Famous Grouse
28-30 July	CLA Game Fair, Harewood House, Leeds
21-24 Aug	Workshop on Chinese Galliformes
22-24 Sept	20th Anniversary Convention including WPA AGM
23-24 Sept	WPA Germany AGM, Gierstadt, near Eurfurt
21 Oct	WPA France general meeting at Paris Zoo
1996	
January	Pheasant and PQF Symposium, Malaysia
Sept	Grouse Symposium, North America

Front cover:	Cock and hen Ceylon junglefowl	Photo: Jean Howman
Back cover:	Cock Sonnerat's junglefowl	Photo: Jean Howman

Chairman's message

Edward Dickinson

Plans for the events on 23 and 24 September are developing well. We hope to present a good programme of speakers, an art exhibition and opportunities to visit the Harewood Bird Gardens which are enjoying their 25th anniversary. Before the buffet lunch and the first talks on the Saturday we shall have a brief AGM, and we hope that by combining it with an event we shall ensure that it is well attended: if this is successful we shall try to offer an event with every AGM in future as your attendance is important to us. On the Friday, quite separate from the anniversary celebrations, the Earl and Countess of Harewood have graciously agreed that we may hold a fund-raising dinner in Harewood House.

My message in **WPA News 42** which included the use of the words 'back garden hobbyist' proved more provocative than I intended. I therefore offer a sincere apology: although it was my intent to use this term to distinguish between one level of aviculture, a past stage of personal evolution as far as most of our members are concerned, and another, I did not realise that my text would be interpreted to be so disparaging.

What I meant to describe was that level of aviculture in which the interest is essentially confined to the enjoyment of the birds with no wish (yet) to take on the substantial extra requirements that become obligatory with a deeper, more scientific, interest in captive breeding. This is that of a hobbyist; the second level - which sees the acceptance of these obligations and the hard work that goes into the struggle to fulfil them, as so many of our members do - is that of a scientist or aviculturist (whether amateur or professional). Both levels do, of course, depend on back gardens.

I, and certainly the Association, understand and welcome the hobbyist level of interest; the world is certainly richer for people who take up this occupation at this level. My point is, however, that at this hobbyist level there may be a need for help and encouragement which the Association cannot itself fulfil through the constrained application of its limited funds (which must be increasingly focussed on more scientific goals) but which will have to depend on the enthusiasm and goodwill of its members to extend this. It is only fair that our members be told whether or not their particular level of interest is likely to benefit from the focussing of our spending or not. So far I seem to have provoked a debate on the semantics of 'back garden hobbyists' but no debate on whether the way in which the Association focuses the spending of its limited funds is right or wrong. Perhaps the debate can now shift to this real issue.

Director General's notes

Keith Howman

Our 20th anniversary year has begun well. Members should by now have received their first **Annual Review** which will, we hope, become a feature of our activities for the future. We hope you liked it but whether you did or not, your comments would be welcome.

An even more significant event has also taken place as reported on page four. This is the publication of our first action plan which, perhaps surprisingly for an Association which has undoubtedly devoted more time to pheasants than the other galliformes, is on the megapodes. We worked on this one first since it was the shortest and it has provided us with a model for those that follow. It is a happy coincidence that the Megapodes Action Plan should be first since it may surprise members to know that the first field work project that WPA ever supported was on *Megapodius freycinet* in Papua New Guinea - a project put up by David Bishop, then an ex London policeman, who has now become an acknowledged expert on the birds of Wallacea in S E Asia.

This Megapode Action Plan and the partridge, quail and francolin and pheasant ones which will shortly follow, really do represent a milestone in our development - indeed I would go so far as to say that they represent the most important achievement of your Association to date.

On the captive breeding front we also have exciting developments to report. In the UK Michel Klat, whose remarkable pheasant collection must now represent the most diverse collection of pheasants ever put together, has announced that he is putting it into trust with the ultimate beneficiary being the World Pheasant Association. An incredibly generous act. The collection is already home to some 40 pheasant species and many subspecies.

Also on the captive breeding front, Gillian Stewart has been working in Hanoi and Saigon Zoos under co-operation agreements set up last summer. My latest information is that in Hanoi six *Lophura edwardsi* and ten *L. hatinhensis* chicks hatched. Gillian also visited Jurong Bird Park in Singapore and Sarahan Pheasantry in India before returning in mid-May. We hope to have an article from her for the next newsletter.

As we start our 20th anniversary year it is clear that WPA is in good health. We have, as can be read above, some of our avicultural members taking our Chairman to task for his phrase 'back garden hobbyist'.

It is a healthy sign that the newsletter is being read and healthy too that we should be pulled up if members do not like what we say and do. Having just suffered

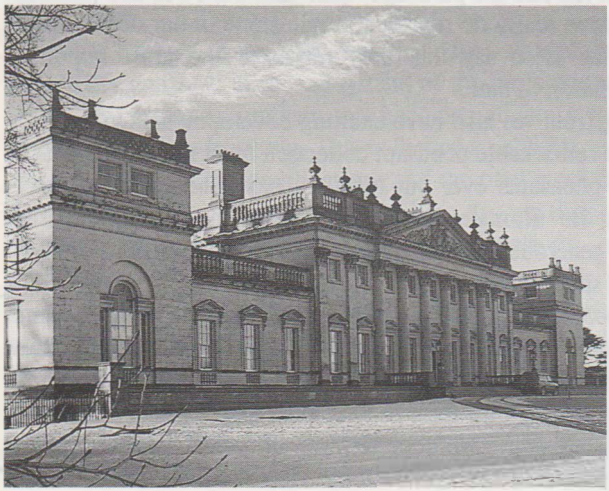
to the extent of £140, four visits from my local vet and pages of paperwork in order to comply with regulations necessary to send two Blyth's hens to their selected stud book mates within the EU, I for one do not consider I am any longer a back garden hobbyist - the host of regulations surrounding us have turned most of us into captive breeding professionals yet the birds are no better looked after or better off.

Indeed the birds are worse off with having to be caught for blood samples and a week later caught again for despatch just because some bureaucrat considers a rare ornamental pheasant is poultry. Oh for the good old days 30 years ago! And good luck to our colleagues who are keeping up the fight with the EU bureaucrats. Lets hope for good news soon.

Back now to that Megapode Action Plan and those that will follow it shortly on pheasants and partridge, quail and francolin. They are a wonderful achievement and a great credit to Philip McGowan who drafted the text, René Dekker who provided most of the detail for the megapodes and our own typesetting team of Jane Clacey and Tom Gardiner. In celebration, the megapodes feature strongly in this issue.

20TH ANNIVERSARY FUND RAISING DINNER

Friday 22nd September 1995



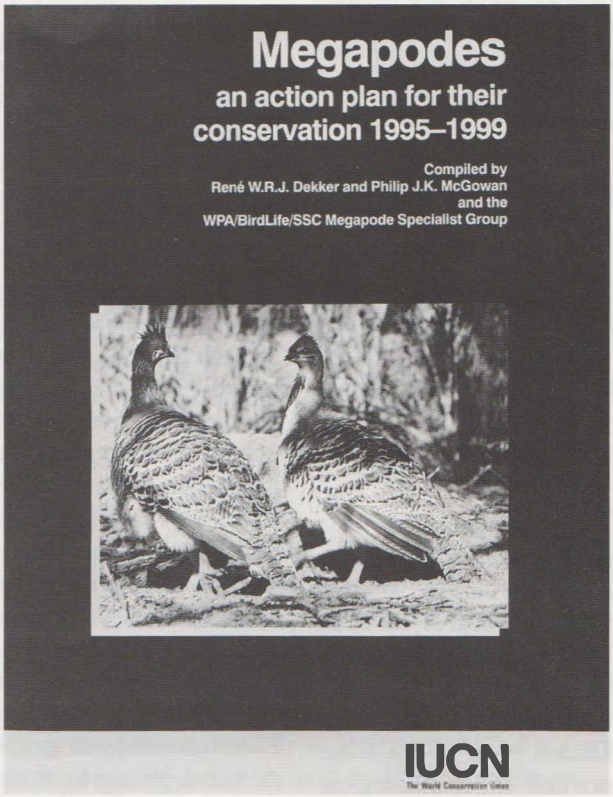
This dinner is the day before the Association's Annual General Meeting. Due to a limited number of places in the Harewood House dining hall, we would ask all members to understand that this must be by invitation only. Any member who would like to receive an invitation should write to Jan Readman at WPA HQ. The Association plans a more informal reception the following day for all members present. The Association is most grateful to the Earl and Countess for their agreement to preside over these events. The price per head is likely to be £75. The intention is also to run a charity auction, amongst those present, from which the Association hopes to benefit.

Megapode Action Plan WPA leads the field

The first action plan for any bird specialist group of BirdLife International and the Species Survival Commission of IUCN has been produced by the World Pheasant Association and printed by IUCN.

It is the first of three action plans for the galliforme groups which will be produced in 1995. The second will cover partridge, quail, francolin, snowcock and guineafowl and the third, the pheasants.

Each action plan describes the group, their problems and conservation needs and reviews the status of each species and, perhaps most important of all, concludes with a chapter outlining the projects which the megapode specialist group hopes will be undertaken over the next five years. Members of WPA can obtain a copy from Jan Readman, PO Box 5, Lower Basildon, Nr Reading, Berks RG8 9PF, UK. Price £8.00 including p&p.



Notes and News

Funds for conservation projects
BirdLife International and the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society, with support from British Petroleum, hold an annual competition for conservation exploration projects. Projects entering the competition are judged especially on the level of host country involvement and the global importance of the conservation issues on which the project is focused. Proposals for 1996 expeditions must be entered no later than 31 December 1995. For further details contact Michael Poulsen, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Ct, Girton Rd, Cambridge CB3 0NA.

Perdix VII
International symposium on partridges, quails and pheasants in the Western Palearctic and Nearctic 9-13 October 1995 Dourdan, Essonne, France. For further details and booking form contact Dr Marcel Birkan, Secretariat Perdix VII, ONC, BP 236, 75822 Paris Cedex, France.

Tragopan
Tragopan, the newsletter of the Pheasant Specialist Group, records:

'Another major event during 1994 was the award of a PhD degree to Ding Chang-qing who, studied Cabot's tragopan under Professor Zheng Guang-mei at Beijing Normal University. This is a very significant event as this is the first PhD awarded to ornithological fieldwork in China. Our warmest congratulations go to both Professor Zheng and Dr Ding, who has moved to Academia Sinica to continue working on pheasants (and partridges) under Professor Cheng Tso-hsin.'

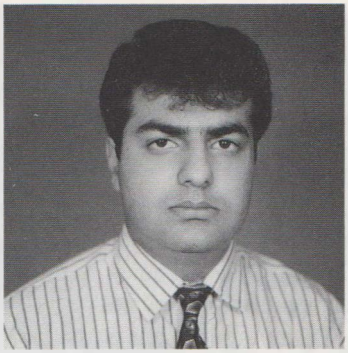
Capercaillie in Scotland
Forestry Commission Bulletin 113
Management of Forests for Capercaillie in Scotland
by R Moss and N Picozzi

Both the range and numbers of Capercaillie in Scotland are less than in the 1970s. This publication examines the possible reasons for this decline and makes recommendations for the management of forests for Capercaillie.

The association between Capercaillie and old semi-natural Scot's Pine forests is well known and the authors suggest that this is due more to the open nature of such forests, which encourages the growth of heather and blaeberry, than to the species of trees found in them.

Guidelines are given for encouraging the growth of blaeberry and the bulletin also covers such topics as the impact on Capercaillie populations of changing climate, predators, red deer, and human activities. The publication is available from WPA HQ priced £6 plus £2 postage and packing.

Pakistan computer project
A recent visitor to Britain, Mr Umar Aftab from WWF Pakistan, is



Umar Aftab

compiling a database of historical and contemporary locations of galliformes in Pakistan. The work being done by Mr Aftab will fit in well with the Asian Galliformes Localities Project being undertaken by Dr Philip McGowan at the Open University.

After an initial period at WPA HQ Mr. Aftab spent his time here training at the Open University and collecting references from Tring museum.

Oriental Bird Club award

The 1994 Forktail-Leica Award has been won by Chinese ornithologist Wen Xianji who will spend the £1,000 grant researching the green peafowl *Pavo muticus* in south Yunnan.

Soliciting for the birds!

Do we have an avicultural/solicitor member from whom we could occasionally seek advice? Please advise Jan Readman at WPA HQ if you are willing to help.

Summer School

The Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust has at its zoo a unique centre for the breeding of endangered animals as a means of insuring against their extinction. The goal of endangered wildlife conservation is pursued through establishing controlled captive breeding programmes; promoting research on biology and ecology in captivity and in the wild; conducting reintroduction programmes and providing professional training programmes in zoo biology.

It runs three-week summer school courses to provide an introduction to practical aspects of investigation and management and to supply detailed information relevant to conservation and captive breeding.

OBITUARY

It was with great sadness that we heard that Gerald Durrell died on 30 January. He was one of the first of the heavyweights from the zoo and wildlife conservation world to support the fledgling organisation the World Pheasant Association.

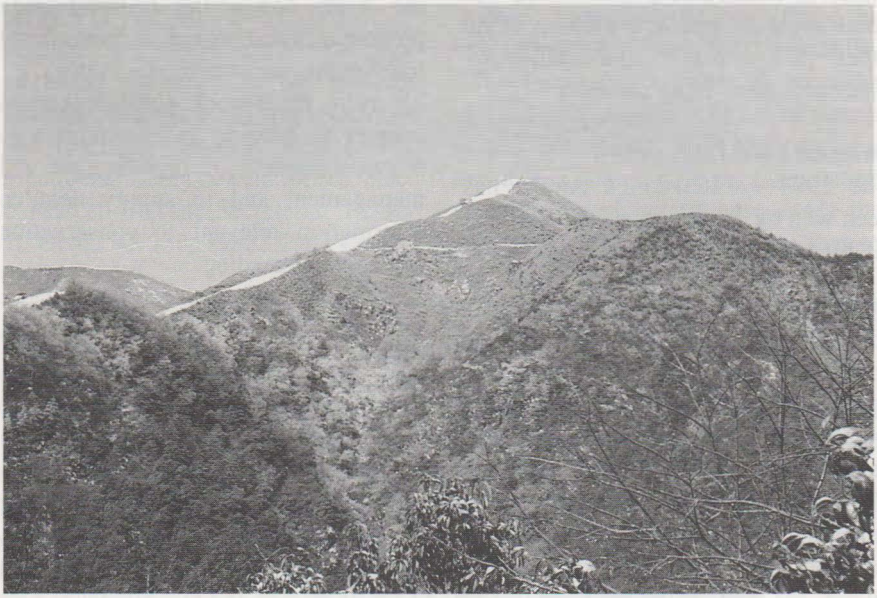
He did not just provide vocal support either but, together with Jeremy Mallinson, embarked upon active support in the form of programmes for Edwards's pheasant, Palawan peacock-pheasants and the species for which Jersey is probably best known, the white eared-pheasant. He will be sorely missed and our sympathy goes to Lee Durrell who always supported his work with such enthusiasm.

Fieldwork conditions for the study of cabot's tragopan

Ding Chang-qing

Wuyanling Natural Reserve is located in Taishun county, Zhejiang province about 1600km south to Beijing. Because of the long distance and the lack of public transport, it takes quite a long time to get there. It takes 28 hours from Beijing to Hangzhou by train, then 15 hours to Taishun county town by coach, and at least four hours of hard mountain road by bus to Wuyanling which is 60 km away from the county town.

The total area of the reserve is 1495 ha consisting of two parts. The central core area for wildlife conservation (esp. for cabot's tragopan) is between 700-1500m high with the main vegetation of subtropical mixed evergreen deciduous-coniferous forest. Surrounding this core area is an area of commercial conifer plantations which used to be the primeval evergreen-deciduous forest. The forest was felled around 1970 and commercial conifer wood such as cryptomeria *Cryptomeria fortunei* was planted. However, several broadleaf strips (about 20-50 m wide) remain along the streams.



General habitat of Wuyanling Nature Reserve showing fire-proof road.

Photo: Jean Howman

Cabot's tragopan .

The cabot's tragopans are distributed in the upper part of the reserve. Their typical habitat is the mixed evergreen deciduous-coniferous forest dominated by the family *Fagaceae* (Zheng 1991). In recent years, according to our radio tracking study, the tragopans could also live in the broadleaf strips and the hens prefer to select cryptomeria as their nesting trees. This shows that cabot's tragopans have the adaptability to chang habitats.

The living conditions in Wuyanling were very hard. It seems always to be raining and that makes the weather seem to be very cold and damp. Moreover, it is no warmer in our room for the temperature was almost the same inside as in the open air. The food is simple with no fresh vegetables except bamboo shoots and a kind of fern that we collected in the forest. Although the bamboo shoots and the fresh fern are delicious dishes and very expensive in big cities as our main food, they always left us hungry and with no energy to climb the mountains!

In order to hear the calls and observe the behaviour of the tragopans, we usually get up early and set out before sunrise. The morning dew makes our clothes very wet and feel like an ice-made shirt. Around 07.00-08.00 we return and a local assistant makes breakfast. Usually it is a large mess-tin of hot noodles. I find it the most delicious meal of the day.

During the daytime, we are busy doing field work such as radio tracking, population census, behaviour observation and habitat sample studies. Sometimes we take some light food with us for lunch when we have a long walk from the base camp.

Generally, we come back after sunset after the tragopans have gone to roost. After supper, I look through my field notes, calculate and put the local points of the radiotagged birds on the map, summarise the whole day's results and plan what to do in the next day. Since there is no electric power in the reserve, all has to be done by candle light.

The loss of nests and eggs is one of the key factors which causes the cabot's tragopan to be endangered. In the breeding season, we make a small shed in the forest and guard the nests all day long. In the earlier years of the research, Prof Zheng and Zhengwang used to sleep in the open at night in order to prevent the nests from being damaged by small mammals such as *Charronia flavigula* and *Felis bengalensis.*

Although the fieldwork conditions there were very hard and full of difficulties the study provides quite a rare chance for me to gain useful experience. It has helped me to do this work myself and learn just how hard it is to collect the data we need.

In China, most of the pheasants are distributed in remote mountain areas mostly undeveloped and hard to live in. Almost everybody who works on the pheasants have the same experience. I was lucky because Prof Zheng's research group has had very friendly contacts with the reserve for more than ten years. The people of Wuyanling often looked after me well and treated me as one of their own family. They helped me solve most of the difficulties, gave me a relatively comfortable room to live in and served me warm food. However not all the Chinese fieldworkers have these advantages. They have to sleep outside in tents, struggling against the dark, cold, dampness and wild beasts. They also have to make food themselves or have cold food. Gastric problems are quite common among Chinese fieldworkers!

Finally I want to express my thanks here to Wuyanling Natural Reserve and the people who helped me during my 18 months fieldwork.

Ding Chang-qing, Dept of Biology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China.

Discovering the winter food of cabot's tragopan in Wuyanling, Zhejiang

Sun Yue-hua

The cabot's tragopan *Tragopan caboti* is an endemic and endangered pheasant in south-east China. From November 1987, a research group from Beijing Normal University, directed by Professor Zheng Guangmei, went to Wuyanling Natural Reserve to study this bird by radio-tracking. This was the first time this technique had been used on birds in China.

The Wuyanling Natural Reserve is located in Taishun county, Zhejiang province, 1600km from Beijing. It has a total area of 1495 ha, and has a warm, moist, subtropical monsoon climate with a mean temperature of 15.2°C.

Radio collar being fitted to a captured cabot's tragopan.

Before 1950, there were large areas of old evergreen broadleaf forest in Wuyanling without disturbance from people. In 1958, when China was in a movement of 'great steel making', parts of the old forest were logged. In 1975, the natural reserve was set up and the cutting of the old forest was stopped. In 1987

many of the cleared areas in the forest within the reserve were planted with *Cunninghamia lanceolata* and *Cryptomeria fortunei*. to an extent of 808 ha. The old forest was only 614 ha, 43 per cent of the total area of the reserve.

The top of the mountain in Wuyanling is 1611m. There are four types of main vegetation in our study area:

1. Evergreen broadleaf forest, at an altitude between 450-1250m on mountain slopes, dominated by *Alfingia gracilipes, Cyolobalanopsis glauca, Castanopsis eyrei, Schima superba* and *Elaeocarpus japonicus.*
2. The evergreen conifer broadleaf mixed forest, at the altitude between 1000-14000m, dominated by *Pinus tainwaniana, Schima superba, Rhododendron latoucheae* and *Rhododendron simsii.*
3. Industrial forest, distributed at the altitude between 800-1000m, with the main tree species of *Cunninghamia lanceolata* and *Cryptomeria fortunei.*
4. Up to 1400m were the sub-tropical highland scrubs, dominated by *Arundinellia hirta, Angelica citriodors* and *Vaccinum henryi.*

The cabot's tragopan were captured by walk-in traps. Fruits of the tree *Daphniphyllum macropodum*, which were their most favoured food in fall, were used as the bait. The fruits were spread in line to a large cage 2.5x1.5x1m with an automatically closing door. When a tragopan touched the gear, the door closed immediately. The tragopans in autumn were in flocks so sometimes we captured two birds together.

In winter and early spring, the tragopans showed a strong preference for the leaves of the tree *D.macropodum.* The birds often fed every morning and late

Leaves of Daphniphyllum macropodum *eaten by cabot's tragopan.*

The trap used for capturing cabot's tragopan.

afternoon, almost at the same time and on the same trees for a short period. In January, when the weather was very cold and the ground was frozen or covered by snow, the leaves of *D. macropodum* were almost their only food available. At that time the leaves were also covered by ice of about 6mm thickness. The tragopans would first knock the ice off with their bills and then tear off the leaves.

In March/April, *D. macropodum* dropped their old leaves and the new ones were still in bud. At the same time ground vegetation became lush, insects and worms were becoming numerous and fruits such as *Prunus* and *Rubus* were ripening. The birds thus moved away from the *D. macropodum* areas to exploit these other food sources.

The results suggested that the main reason for the cabot's tragopan being so endangered is that it relies to a major extent on the tree *D. macropodum* as the dominant food in winter. This also tells us that it is very important to protect the old evergreen broadleaf forests which produce the conditions on which the cabot's tragopan depend for existence in winter.

After a ten-year long study, we are still not able to answer all the questions. For instance we do not know about the distribution and density of cabot's tragopan near the natural reserve, what status of isolation they are in or if the population is stable in the natural reserve. So, a landscape and ecological study on this bird is needed in the future.

Sun Yue-hua, Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100080, China. All photographs provided by Ding Chang-qing and Sun Yue-hua.

Studying the ecology of satyr tragopan in Singhalila National Park, Darjeeling

Sarala Khaling

Ecological studies on the vulnerable satyr tragopan have been carried out in the Singhalila National Park, Darjeeling since June 1994. Singhalila National Park lies at the extreme north western boundary of Darjeeling district of West Bengal with Nepal on its western border and Sikkim on its northern border. The park spans an area of 10,877.97 hectares (core zone 7,860.04 hectares and buffer zone 3,017.93 hectares) and has an altitudinal range varying from 2,400m to 3,650m. The main aim of the present study is to collect ecological information about this little-studied pheasant species. These studies will also give indications about the probable causes of habitat destruction and help the park authorities to frame control strategies accordingly.

Prior to the actual field studies, two reconnaissance surveys were conducted in the National Park. During these exercises, I visited all the beats of the park on foot. I also collected information on the general habitat of the park and reports of local sightings of the satyr tragopan from villagers, shepherds and wildlife division employees. These preliminary surveys enabled me to identify areas in the

Photo: Jean Howman

Male cabot's tragopan.

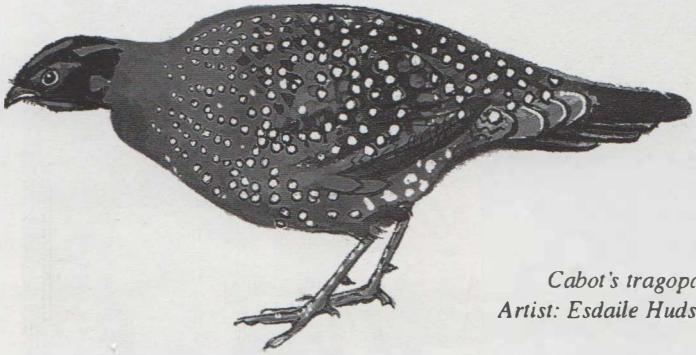
national park with the most suitable tragopan habitat and also areas where the frequency of tragopan sightings was high. I am now using these high-intensity tragopan areas as my main study sites.

The actual field studies began in June 1994. In the intensive study area where I have been able to obtain direct and indirect evidence of tragopans, I have also been conducting detailed habitat assessment studies. These mainly include the plant species structure and composition. Data on the disturbance caused to the habitat by grazing, lopping, firewood collection, fodder collection, construction *etc* are also being collected especially from the areas in close proximity to human settlements.

Future work will include a detailed population estimate of the satyr tragopan in the park and surrounding district. I shall also be studying the feeding ecology of the species. A more precise and thorough study on the habitat use may call for the use of radio telemetry.

Sightings of the satyr tragopan during the ensuing months since June 1994 have been quite rare though fortunately I have been getting indirect evidence quite frequently. Encounters with the bird have been by chance only and their immediate reaction has been to run for cover. When encountered the satyr tragopans were usually solitary and only occasionally in pairs. These birds seem to prefer very steep hill sides with abundant bamboo cover with a water source close by. The steepness of the terrain and the thickness of vegetation make accessibility and sightings in a tragopan habitat quite difficult.

Satyr tragopan studies are a part of the wildlife project sponsored by the Department of Forests, Wildlife Circle, Government of West Bengal. The project is being executed through the Postgraduate Department of Zoology, Darjeeling Government College, Darjeeling.



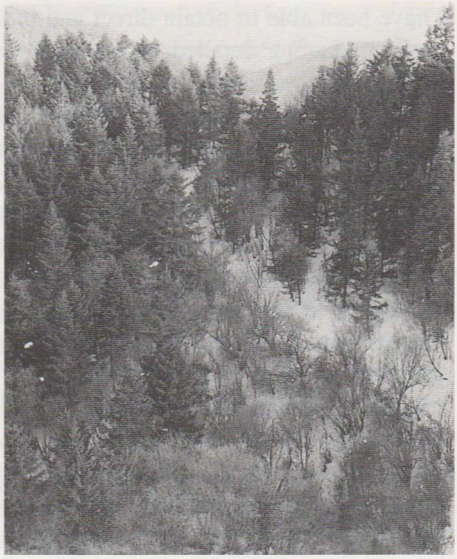
Cabot's tragopan.
Artist: Esdaile Hudson

Sarala Khaling, P.G. Dept of Zoology, Darjeeling Govt College, Darjeeling 734 101, India.

Chinese radio appeal for help

We hear from Sun Yue-Hua that he has successfully trapped and fitted radio collars to five Chinese grouse and four blood pheasants. The Chinese grouse is the name given by the Chinese to the sub-species of spruce grouse unique to China.

In a letter he writes "Our effective method for capturing hazel grouse by use of a walk-in trap is also working for blood pheasants. Although living conditions are very hard, our study area is quite beautiful. The birds are not very shy and in good density so we hope to be able to collect a lot of data. This would be greatly helped if we could get an extra ten radio transmitters for next year's studies and I wonder if WPA members might help to contribute to these?"



Our beautiful study area - spruce forest about 3000m ASL.

A male blood pheasant in the hands of my assistant, Mr Fang Yun.

The beautiful male Chinese grouse.

The radio transmitters referred to by Sun Yue-Hua are made in the UK and cost just under £100 before shipment. Any WPA member willing to contribute to one or more transmitters to be sent out to Mr Sun should write to Keith Howman at Ashmere, Felix Lane, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 8NN, UK.

The mule was used to carry food and other materials to our study area.

All photographs by Sun Yue-Hua

Friends of the malleefowl

The following article is taken from Australian Shooters Journal*/January 1994. It is hoped the next International Megapode Symposium will be held at Little Desert Lodge, near Nhill ,so this article is particularly appropriate.*

Imagine a strictly territorial bird whose idea of nesting is to scrape together a mound of dirt and vegetation one metre high by two wide; a bird which is so obsessed with house-keeping that it has little time for anything else. That's the malleefowl, or Lowan, and there are not many of them left.

Nhill (in Lowan Shire!) lies in western Victoria. Its unusual name means 'mists on the waters', so bestowed by Aborigines who believe that such vapours are ancestral spirits. The township lies on a busy main highway and it is hard to imagine that only a few kilometres south lies the Little Desert, a 132,000-hectare strip 20 kilometres wide and 100 kilometres long stretching between Dimboola and the South Australian border.

Little Desert is badly named. It is really a very specialised, well vegetated heathland of extraordinary variety and beauty which harbours much wildlife. It may become the last refuge of the malleefowl.

Before settlement it covered about 178,061 hectares. Even then the malleefowl attracted attention, for prior to 1968 a section known as the Kiata Lowan Sanctuary existed. In that year government proposed to subdivide and clear some 80,000 hectares for farming. Fortunately, after protest by conservationists and doubts as to economic worth of the scheme, the idea was dropped. Instead, the existing Park was expanded to 35,300 hectares and in 1988 the whole 132,000 hectares were proclaimed.

In the meantime the malleefowl carried on as usual. This is what it does. About February, the pair scratches a depression in the ground, usually at a traditional site so well fixed that if you move it the birds will promptly move it back again. This is about one metre deep and two metres across. During April, May and June vegetation from as far away as forty metres is scratched into the depression, which is to be the incubating chamber.

During July and August rains dampen the compost nicely and the birds then cover it with sand and debris and then raise the mound about one metre. By the end of September or early October the nest has heated up to the required 34.4 degrees. The birds delve and test it daily with their beaks or perhaps more specifically their tongues.

Egg laying then commences, the male doing the digging and the female bracing herself to eject an egg of not less than 150-200 grams - not bad for a bird weighing

only 2kg! The laying of up to 24 eggs (in drought years perhaps only half a dozen) may last until February. The male bird opens and closes the nest for each egg, which will hatch after 50-60 days.

In high summer, the compost having cooled off somewhat, the sun provides the required warmth. The birds open it and test the temperature daily and may even fetch warm sand in their beaks if required. A busy bird is the Lowan!

The reason for the huge egg is that a large yolk is required to form a fully feathered chick before hatching and to enable it to be so well equipped that it can scratch its way up through the nest at once and then walk away. By evening it can fly up to roost! It is immediately independent. In fact it seems to fight shy of the parent birds should they be around at the time.

Incidentally, there are 13 species of megapodes (big footed) and these range across the Pacific into Malaysia. Oz has three, including our northern scrub turkey. At Rabaul, in New Britain, one species has an easy time of it, just depositing the egg in warm volcanic soil.

The southern malleefowl is the only one which actually uses a combined compost-solar heat system. One ponders on the marvels of evolution and why, for heaven's sake, any bird should become so encumbered! Obviously, such adaptation became necessary at some time over the years.

All right, very interesting, but so what? Well, the fact is that the malleefowl, needs help because, as we said, there are not many of them left. In Oz only about 2000 birds exist today despite it ranging from southern NSW, across Victoria, and into South Australia - in the malleefowl belt, that is. Mallee? Small scrubby eucalyptus, mostly.

On hearing that SSAA was interested in the malleefowl, I went to Nhill to see what was going on. There I met John and Evelyn Stephan and enjoyed their

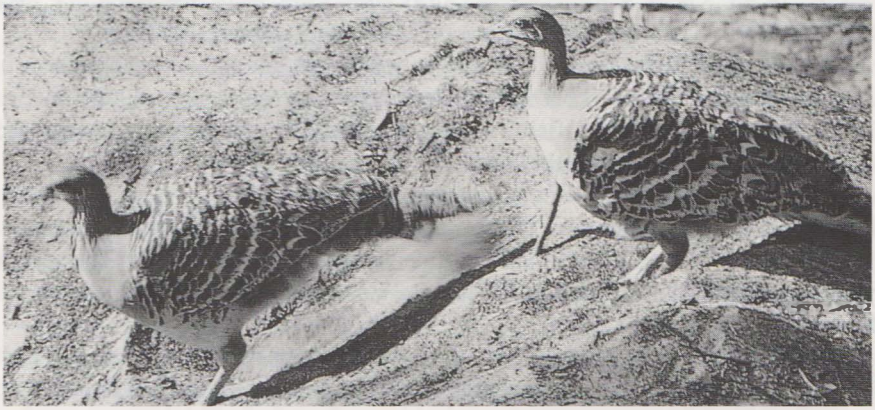


Photo: Raymond Reichelt

The malleefowl cleans out the old mound so that it can be used again for the next season.

hospitality. John is a farmer and president of the SSAA Nhill branch. He and other local landholders are not only keen naturalists but have a soft spot for the Lowan.

This does not surprise me at all but the old idea about land clearing and indiscriminate shooting dies hard in the city. The fact is that modern farmers are very concerned about their custodianship: uncleared sections are now the norm. And some of them are converting good scrub to permanent sanctuary by means of a legally binding covenant. How many placard-waving protesters have done anything so practical? And where does SSAA come in? Hold on a moment and I'll tell you.

John Stephan then took me to see Ron Boine, who lives in Nhill township and is secretary of 'Friends of the malleefowl Inc', an organisation which needs no explanation, I'm sure. They have been busy lobbying for five years in all possible ways to promote the welfare of the Lowan, and are seeking as much support as they can from government, business people, school projects, and enthusiastic citizens. $5 will get you membership; $7 the whole family; and $10 for a group or corporate organisation. People are encouraged to form their own group of 'friends'. Contact Ron at 9 Park Street, Nhill, 3418, Australia.

So far so good; I was learning something which obviously touches a sympathetic chord. "OK, but where do I see a malleefowl?" I asked. In no time at all I was motoring down the road with John and Ron to the Little Desert Lodge only 16 kilometres south of the main highway.

"We're keeping things as close to nature as we can. The Lodge is comfortable but rustic, homely without being grandiose. It is a base, a headquarters for our reason for existing - to share an appreciation of the Little Desert." So say Maureen and Roy Reichelt, owners of the Lodge, in their handbook.

You can have en-suite, bunk style, or camping facilities at the licensed lodge which is set charmingly in mixed, sandy scrub consisting of casuarina, acacia, banksia, Ti-tree, yucca, and eucalyptus. Add yellow sand dunes, red sandstone, clay pans, and heath plants, and you've got a typical section of the Little Desert.

There is water down below but the first people got theirs from mallee roots in dry times. Kooris lived well but later settlers knew only of western culture and, as one explorer saw it, "...an infinite world of aggression and retreat, survival and oblivion, regeneration and death."

But I arrived comfortably in spring and saw a veritable profusion of flowers. Snow myrtle, red parrot pea, golden pennants, grevilleas, woolly everlasting, creamy candles of stackhousia, banksia, rice flowers, and storks' bills. The rest of the 600 species of plants I didn't have time to view - some Desert! And you should have seen the birds.

In 1970 the Reichelts got their first four-wheeled-drive and licence. Little Desert Tours emerged and four years later came an educational centre and wildlife shelter, since grown into modern facilities.

For six years the Lodge has had its own malleefowl, and 'Whimpey' Reichelt

Photo: Raymond Reichelt

An old mound which will be reused by the malleefowl .

took me with John and Ron to see the special big aviaries which are really a section of scrub wired off. Here I learned about the Lowan and its biology (it can only be sexed internally under anaesthetic) and the problems of breeding. But now, in the end, home-bred, healthy young birds have been released into the wild. Well done!

And where does SSAA come into the picture?

"We have another, 200 acre private block of scrub", said Whimpey. "It has Lowan nests and we want to protect them and the birds. When John suggested that the SSAA could help out with vermin control I was at first a bit wary.

"I mean, who wants a mob of shooters wandering around such a place? Besides which, we'd been baiting the place and it was unlikely that there were any foxes still surviving. I said so but finally agreed to the idea of a vermin shoot although the thick scrub seemed a difficult place to hunt.

"I was pleasantly surprised on the day John, being SSAA branch president, briefed the shooters extremely well. I was very impressed with attitudes shown; the fact that an SSAA police officer member was there really made no difference at all.

"Nobody was more surprised than I with the result. Shooters lined the fire tracks and beaters worked through towards them. Nine foxes were shot! Working on the

old bush principle of the same number getting away unseen, well, thats a lot of foxes for a small block. Clearly, shooting is the way to go."

Nine foxes were shot.

"What next?" I asked. Said Whimpey "We're thinking of putting a specially designed and electrified fence around that block. It will take a lot of thought because it may well be that some fauna needs to move through a fence which at the same time must be cat, dog and fox proof."

"How much?" I asked.

Whimpey sighed and muttered, "$34,000".

You'd think that having proved themselves competent as Friends of the Malleefowl by practical means, local SSAA people would be encouraged to extend their activities. The success of South Australian SSAA members in goat eradication in National Parks is a prime example. Did Little Desert National Park authority welcome an offer by our Nhill branch to cull vermin? Let me quote (in part) the *Wimmera Mail Times* of October 29, last:

Feral cats, foxes free to run wild

An appeal by Wimmera shooters for authority to track down foxes and feral cats in the Little Desert National Park has fallen on deaf ears...

Conservationists fear that ground-dwelling Lowan malleefowl, small birds, and other native wildlife will be wiped out...

Lodge manager Ray 'Whimpey' Reichelt said last night that responsible shooters had shot nine foxes from his malleefowl habitat...

"Think how many are out there, decimating native wildlife...

"Wimmera Sporting Shooters have applied unsuccessfully to the Conservation and Natural Resources Department in Melbourne for permission to shoot in the national park...

"I have phoned many times. They promised an answer. We've heard nothing".
Mr Reichelt said he feared that much of the park's native wildlife, especially the mound-building malleefowl would be wiped out by the time biological controls became available.
He said that, ironically, unfortunate rules made a national park a refuge for predators.

Photo: Raymond Reichelt

Malleefowl chicks are vulnerable to predators.

Your writer is disappointed that things have not gone better with regard to vermin eradication in protected areas. Nevertheless, a start has been made and a precedent created. Such an example is a good springboard and it now remains for everyone to exert themselves in trying to convert authority to a more realistic line of thought.

I think it can be achieved; government's first refusal may well be just a conditioned reflex caused firstly by political considerations and secondly by popular notions that if a fence is put around an area then that is all that needs to be done.

In fact, the idea of the 'balance of nature' needs closer examination. There is really no such thing. Nature does strive to balance but the see-saw of survival and adaptation is on constant motion. Populations continually thrive and decline in never-ending cycles. What can be drastic is unnatural and comparatively sudden intervention over a short time span - extinction may result. This may be a present problem with malleefowl.

The idea that shooters don't care is completely wrong. In particular SSAA is very concerned about conservation, a word which is somehow pronounced 'prohibition' by those with closed minds.

We shall have to alter all that. The question is; what are you doing about it? Get involved with your local SSAA branch.

The malau or Polynesian megapode translocation update

Dieter Rinke

Extract from BirdLife/WPA/SSC Megapode Specialist Group Newsletter Vol. 8. nr. 2, November 1994

In *Megapode Newsletter* 7 (2), I reported about the translocation programme for the endangered malau or Polynesian megapode *Megapodius pritchardii.* Another expedition to the northern islands of the Kingdom of Tonga was undertaken in March 1994. Purpose of this trip was to distribute the booklet *Koe Malau - Life and Future of the Malau* to all families on Niuafo'ou, the home of the megapode, and to collect more eggs and chicks for another transfer to Late and Fonualei.

I was accompanied on this expedition by Wolfgang Dressen, biologist at the Krefeld Zoo. Travelling to Niuafo'ou has become more difficult in recent times, making the island even more isolated. We had to charter a plane in order to continue with the Malau Translocation Programme.

The booklet was a great success on Niuafo'ou, an island where the inhabitants do not receive much to read. After having presented the booklets to all families, we saw groups of people under huge mango trees studying and discussing the Life and Future of the Malau. We also talked with teachers and church ministers, and convinced them of the need to address the fate of the malau in their lessons and sermons.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the recommendations for the 'management of the malau' will be translated into action by the people of Niuafo'ou themselves. This would be essential for the survival of the species on this island, because official regulations will not be followed in this remote place.

In the meantime, Lafaele Peeie, the local malau expert, collected another 32 eggs and two newly hatched chicks. These were flown to Vava'u immediately, where a Tongan vessel waited to take us to Late and Fonualei. But the weather conditions were not favourable. Rough seas prevented our immediate departure. We finally sailed to Fonualei, because landing is a little bit less riskier there than on Late.

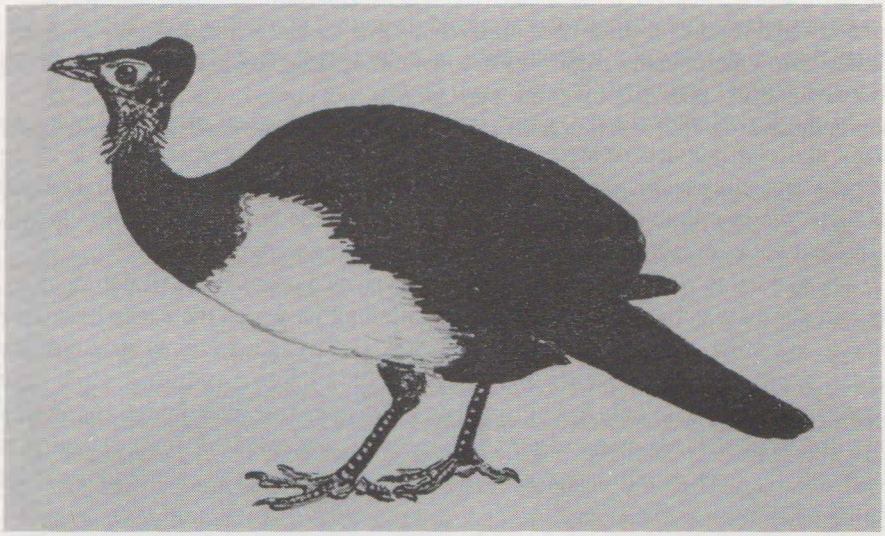
It was still a rough trip, the boat dancing on the waves, the landing being a wet event. Meanwhile, another chick had hatched. All three chicks were soon released behind the landing beach at the north-west side of the island. We then buried the remaining 31 eggs in one of the many warm areas.

The following morning, we made our way up to the crater, surrounded by large numbers of seabirds, friendly ground-doves *Gallicolumba stairii*, and Pacific

pigeons *Ducula pacifica*, passing numerous hot, steaming grounds and nests with male frigate birds *Fregata* spp. which spectacularly displayed their bright red throat pouches.

When we passed the last patch of forest on our decent to the landing cove, we suddenly froze. Less than ten metres away a fully grown malau emerged from the undergrowth. We had the opportunity to watch this elusive bird for about 15 minutes. Or did he watch us?

Its behaviour was quite unlike that of the megapodes on Niuafo'ou where the malau is very wary and, consequently, extremely difficult to observe. Sometimes, he approached us as close as four metres. A ground-dove, which took the liberty to come too close, was chased away.



Malau illustration by Esdaile Hudson taken from Megapodes, an action plans for their conservation 1995-99 *project 4.2.2.*

At least one malau out of the 30 eggs and six chicks which we had transferred to Fonualei in June 1993 had grown up. The chance to see a megapode on such a difficult island during such a short stay is close to zero. There is a high probability therefore that more than one megapode have grown up. Although, due to intensive and long-term preparatory activities I was rather confident that the malaus would easily grow up and survive on Fonualei and Late, I was very moved when I stood face to face with the bird. The first step has been made. But only the future will tell whether the malaus will establish a healthy population on Fonualei.

Dr Dieter Rinke, Vogelpark Walsrode, Am Rieselbach, 29664 Rieselbach, Germany.

Quail hunting in the Punjab

Mike Harrison

I can recollect the months of March and April during the mid 30s to the late 50s when the common quail migrated across the Punjab in thousands taking advantage of the vast acreage of wheat fields awaiting harvesting.

Quail shooting was not quite as popular as other game shooting. None the less it provided a good sport for those hard pressed for time, or had other problems such as walking, not to mention the sufferings of the morning after the night before!

Occasionally a quail shoot was arranged by getting in touch with a 'Bitaair Barz' (quail enthusiast) who, for a few rupees, or more if you weren't aware of the price, arranged a shoot and hired 'bolaras' (call birds).

In the Rawalpindi district a few professionals made their business known to army and civil service officers, guaranteeing a specified number of birds to be bagged depending upon how good a shot you were and the time of day one intended to shoot, the best time being before 9am. Generally one bolara per small field was sufficient but to earn a few extra rupees, more bolaras were used.

These bolaras were pet quails kept in cone shaped cages made of cotton cloth, the circular base compris reinforced cotton meshing on which the necessities were placed, *ie* a bowl of water and a dish of millets. These cages were not spacious, the largest approximately 18 inches high with a radius of about six inches. Each cage housed one bird. The only visibility was below them viewed through the cotton meshing when the cage was hung up. I believe the reason for this form of caging is threefold. It enhances fighting propensities, calls frequently, and cannot injure itself if panic stricken.

On confirmation of a quail shoot, the bolaras were taken out after midnight and suspended on poles in selected wheat fields some six to eight feet off the ground. By the early hours of morning, plenty of quails should have collected in the proximity of the bolaras to earn their keep. The reason for bolaras being placed in the field by night is because quails will readily fly in darkness to collect in their vicinity. They are reluctant to take to the wing by daylight because of the predators, especially the hawk family which are a part and parcel of the countryside.

Before the quail shoot started the bolaras were removed from the poles for obvious reasons. Then the slow walk up start with about four beaters who gently rustled the top of the wheat field. Here and there a quail would rocket up making a 'poeep' noise before flying low for a hundred yards or so before settling unless shot down. The highlights of each walk up was when the end of the field was reached because the disturbance made the majority of quails hesitant to fly, instead they ran

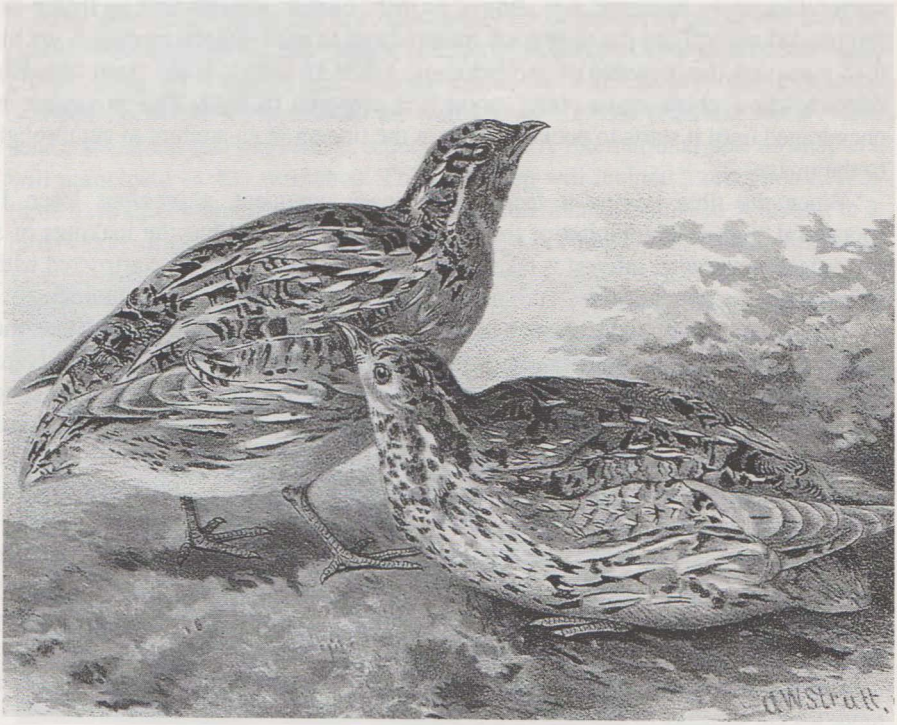
ahead of the beaters until they came to the end of the cover and were forced to fly. This is when one couldn't load fast enough.

Another method of shooting quails in wheat fields without beaters, though once again bolaras are an asset, is to use a rope about 30-40 yards long, each end of which is tied to the other's waist.

A section of the field is entered, and rope being kept reasonably taut so that it rests along the top of the wheat crop. The rustling noise of the rope frightens the quails below to either make them fly or to run ahead, once again hot barrels occurring on reaching the end of the field. Though pickers were available, I cannot over-emphasise the use of a good gun-dog for retrieving birds falling within the wheat fields.

While the shooting fraternity might have made their presence known by the occasional bombardment it was, and I believe still is, the silent factor responsible for the deterioration of the migratory common quail's plight in the Punjab - overnetting.

As a sportsman I detested netting, especially unlicensed. A case which immediately comes to mind is when I successfully prosecuted an offender who



Common or grey quail from The Gamebirds of India, Burma and Ceylon *by Hume and Marshall.*

trapped over 700 quails. Pleading guilty before a magistrate at Multan, he was fined 10 rupees (approx £1) while the market value of the quails was about 400 rupees! I was given to believe such offences were trivial.

The netting of quails was a simple procedure. Ironically, bolaras were invaluable. Perpendicular nets, some ten feet high with single folds at the bottom were erected in close proximity to the bolaras - once again this was all done by night. At first light the catch was collected and transported to agents in towns and cities for sale to hotels, restaurants *etc.*

Generally, the professional netter selected a few good quails from each catch as potential bolaras, or for training as fighters. Fighting was very popular, but the training took time. First the quail had to be tamed which meant constant handling, stroking the bird from head to its back, starving it till it fed from the hand.

Friendship between owner/trainer established, the build up for the quail's fighting potential take shape. A mirror is placed on a table, its natural feed sprinkled in front. The quail is held in the right hand while the left hand rests on the table immediately in front of the quail to prevent it from feeding or seeing itself in the mirror. Gradually, however, it is allowed to make contact with its feed by lifting the left hand slightly. Then the fingers are manipulated so as to impede its vision, yet for it to recognise the presence of another quail, albeit an image. If the quail instantly utters a 'chow chow, chow chow' noise it is prepared to fight. This procedure is encouraged until it starts to peck and spur at the fingers in an attempt to get through to the image.

When the time is ripe it faces an ordinary opponent, a previous loser. If successful, and in the opinion of the owner/trainer, the quail has the makings of a good fighter, a greater interest is taken in its training. Naturally, it is confronted with stronger opponents until it starts to earn fistfuls of rupees for its owner/trainer.

Unlike cock fights which are staged in bazaars or open spaces in villages, the venue for quail fights is generally on the floor of a dwelling house or courtyard where enthusiasts are invited to participate in a series of quail fights, betting being the prime objective. The actual fights do not compare with the horrific cock fights, though for small birds they are indeed tenacious, skilful, pecking and spurring each other until there is a loser - if it goes on to lose further fights, it gets the vernacular name bhugli (a loser).

The bhuglis, along with thousands of trapped migratory quails, end up sold to restaurants and hotels, the price they pay for being classified as a delicacy, not only in the Punjab but more so in the North West Frontier Province to become a speciality when cooked with pillau rice and 'dumbah' on a spit (a fat tailed sheep).

I'm given to believe that the quail migration in the Punjab has now reduced to a mere trickle - thanks to uncontrolled netting.

Mike Harrison, 60 Stuart Road, Wimbledon Park, London SW19 8DH, UK.

First Chinese Pheasant Workshop to be held

Zhang Zheng-wang

The first Chinese Pheasant Workshop will be held in Xifeng City, Qingyang in Gansu province from 21-24 August 1995. This decision was made during the Symposium of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the China Zoological Society. About 30 WPA-China members attended the symposium and several papers were presented. WPA-China held a small meeting during the symposium and around 20 members attended and reported the research project on galliformes. Professor Zheng Guang-mei and Professor Wu Zhi-kang gave an instructive speech on the continuing pheasant research in China. Professor Liu Na-fa and other members suggested that WPA-China should hold a workshop next year, which was agreed. Mr Zhou Tian-lin, who presented a good paper on koklass pheasants at the symposium, was asked to host this workshop.

The workshop will be the first opportunity for delegates to gather and present useful information on the status, biology, ecology, captive breeding and conservation of Chinese galliformes since the 4th International Pheasant Symposium in 1989. Apart from all well-known Chinese pheasant researchers, senior scientists and pheasant breeders from WPA International and its chapters will participate in the workshop. The workshop will include a reception (21st), three days of conferences (22nd-24th). Tours to Huangdi Tomb, to Xian and to a bird watching site will be organised after the workshop. WPA-China welcomes any friends either from China or from other countries to attend. The deadline for registration to attend the workshop will be 1 July 1995. For more information, please contact WPA-China, c/o Zhang Zheng-wang, Dept. of Biology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China.

Photo: Jean Howman

A Chinese television crew from Zhejiang TV Station spent a week in England completing a film on cabot's tragopan.

Cracids and more cracids

David Hancock

The 1994 Third International Cracid conference was my first real introduction to these marvellous Central and South American galliformes. I had seen a few birds in zoos, most at Houston, a few in private breeder hands, and during my 1991 visit in Europe I had seen the marvellous Stichting Crax collection in Belgium. But they were not a bird group I had met in a personal sense. Then the conference. Lots of talk by breeders, a visit to Roy Powers' collection near Houston and a more intimate meeting of a few of the Houston Zoo birds and I was hooked. Most birds that I met were large, beautiful and people seeking. And there was their conservation needs!

The meeting of course discussed the cracid's plight across the rain forests of Mexico, Central and South America, the bird's total disappearance in many areas, and some very positive elements about local initiatives on reintroductions and education of the local native populations. The big jump came when I met Dr Jesus Estudillo Lopez at the conference. I had heard of this legendary figure, a man of incredible personal integrity and conservation ethics and a man who had spent a great many months of every year of his adult life tramping the jungles of the Americas searching for cracids.

When he invited us to visit his collection and come to assist in locating some tropical rain forest areas in Mexico for possible reintroductions we could not refuse. Laurel and I immediately planned for a trip just after Christmas. From the conference it became apparent that Jesus had more captive cracids than the rest of the world combined - perhaps over 5000 birds. And now he wanted to initiate some serious reintroductions. In preparation he had bred some species up in numbers to over 500 individuals. He also agreed he must write some books!

While my past experience with tropical rain forest was restricted to a few trips to Central and South America and a month in New Guinea and a few weeks in both northern Australia and Malaysia, I was thoroughly involved in galliforme reintroductions and familiar with the general literature on reintroductions. Besides I wanted to go! Jesus and Carolina Estudillo Lopez were incredible hosts and we are looking forward to returning that hospitality when they and their lovely family come to Canada.

First, it is almost impossible to describe over 1500 cement foundation aviaries, fully planted and filled with species after species that I had not seen before or only seen rarely. There must have been 12 pairs of great argus; four or five varieties of firebacks, each in great numbers; some 80 baby cranes of six species were

wandering everywhere; and he even had three pairs of golden eagles set up for breeding - not to mention several unusual species of tropical eagles, hawks and owls. Rare jungle deer were tucked away in the generous walkways between the enclosures - each group being from a remote and decimated part of Mexico where its habitat was rapidly disappearing.

While wanting to focus on his specialty, the cracids, one cannot overlook the marvellous quality of his lines of golden, amherst, silver, reeves and on and on pheasants. Most come from stock he has imported directly from China. A few dozen pens of peacock-pheasants, pheasant pigeons and superb Java green peafowl are easily overlooked. And what can one say of 50-plus oscillated turkeys?

I am not a hookbill person but we were in raptures over hyacinth macaws and many varieties of scarlet macaws. There were more species and regional varieties of Amazons than I knew existed. An impressive show was a breeding colony of some 40 or 50 pairs of thick-billed parrots. There were parrots of every size, colour, shape and screaming ability to please the most blasé and deaf parrot aficionado. And I won't begin on the birds of paradise and spectacular oropendulas and the fine enclosure each has. But the cracids you ask. Yes they are there. Everywhere. The rows of aviaries, probably in length between 400 and 600 feet long, are listed by street names, block after block. And indeed there is at least a small town of cracids. It is very easy to say I saw more species of curassows, guans and chachalaca than I ever thought existed. He has nearly a hundred breeding and holding pens of the great curassow alone. He has been breeding them up for a reintroduction programme and has accumulated over 500 of this species.

From the Yucatan he has a very beautiful brown barred race that adds a new dimension to these already huge and spectacular birds. On a guided tour with Jesus he goes into each pen and offers the birds a special treat of some great tasting (but of unknown name to me) fruit which the birds usually gently take from his hand. He constantly comments on the trials and tribulations of catching the original stock, the unique details on behaviour and structure that differentiates each subspecies, and the successes and failures of 40 years of rearing cracids. You see a man transfixed by the beauty and mystique and wonder of all these birds. Each is an old friend but a new joy and experience each day. From each he has learned so many questions.

If the great curassow had been in abundance then you could only call the crested guan merely common. This is the second species he hopes will be reintroduced back to parts of the lowland tropical rain forest of Mexico. The subtle olive-brown colouring seemed to match the bird's pleasant personality.

To mention a few species specifically seems to take away from the totality. There were literally hundreds of pens of enormous razor-billed, yellow-knobbed,

wattled and bare-faced curassows; more pens of nocturnal, blue-billed and red-billed curassows. And helmeted curassows donned frontal plates of every size and shape.

There were so many species and stories of chachalacas my mind went into overload. Where the curassows made their presence known by their sheer size and dominance, the smaller chachalacas by their confusing sameness (to this novice) and by their harsh calls, while the more delicate guans seemed to have more distinctive and expressive faces. The white-topped common piping guans were particularly attractive but not more so than the wattled guan with its bright orange pendular wattle sack contrasting with its brilliant turquoise bill. But no bird on the property had quite the magical aura or the incredible presence of the elegant horned guan.

When I first saw Albert Earl Gilbert's painting of this bird in *Curassows and Related Birds* by Jean Delacour and Dean Amadon I thought the painting must be fanciful, exercising a lot of artistic freedom in portraying both the bird and setting in such a 'noble classical' way. But not so. This is a spectacular bird that offsets any surrounding. In the dozens of lush tropical aviaries Dr Lopez has succeeded in rearing this bird very successfully but from very limited founders. The search for more blood lines should continue to ensure this incredible creature's continued captive breeding success.

Photo: Stuart Strahl

Horned guan

But there was one shadow cast over the farm. We arrived in Mexico just a few days after Mt Popocatepetle blew its top requiring some 45,000 inhabitants downwind to be evacuated. From the Jesus farm you look up at 'Popo' and ponder its awesome power. On this occasion the wind was blowing the other way - though every leaf and speck of ground had a thin covering of ash. Here is another natural threat that we all have little control over.

David Hancock, Hancock Wildlife Research Center, 1431 Harrison Ave, Blaine WA 98230. USA

A pheasant collection in Nepal

Col J O M Roberts

To put history into perspective it is necessary to go back some time - in fact over 50 years! It was during my service with a Gurkha unit at the beginning of the war in 1939, and again at the end of the war, that I developed a fascination for Himalayan pheasants. We were in the Dharmsala hills in the north of India (now the temporary residence of the Dalai Lama) and there were five sorts of pheasants in the hills behind the military cantonment (5000 feet above sea level) including the now rare western tragopan. I hate to have to admit it, but we used to shoot these pheasants. 'Shoot at' would be a better term, as we did little damage to the birds. In my defence, I may say that in those days I never heard one word from my elders about conservation or the need to preserve the local stocks. The birds were there in those days, but no longer exactly plentiful.

Col J O M Roberts presenting a leather-bound copy of the proceedings of the first International Symposium held in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1979 to HRH The Prince of Wales.

The war and the years passed, but I did not forget these pheasants. From 1950 onwards I was able to embark on a whole series of mountaineering expeditions into the mountains of Nepal. Incidentally I did see some pheasants on the way to the mountains, but apart from the places like Tengboche monastery at the foot of Everest, they seemed rather thin on the ground. In 1961 I retired from the army after three years as Military Attaché in our Embassy at Kathmandu, and on my return from the 1963 American Expedition to Everest, I sat on the bank of the Seti river in Pokhara and thought what to do next in Nepal. One result of my thoughts was the formation of Mountain Travel, the first 'trekking agency' in Nepal - indeed in the world. I also decided to do what I could about the conservation of pheasants or better, 'the rehabilitation'.

The next few years passed quickly, busy with the development of Mountain Travel. But in 1972 I sent two young employees of Mountain Travel to the UK for training. I had decided that if we were to do any useful work with pheasants, we must learn first how to breed and look after them. Bobby Gurung and Jhalak Thapa spent over six months in England doing an extended attachment with the Game Conservancy at Fordingbridge and shorter periods with Pat Robbins' game farm in Berkshire, the Pheasant Trust in Norfolk (this was before the days of WPA) and on a shooting estate in Gloucestershire. Apart from help with airfares I financed the whole operation personally and meanwhile ordered incubators (both electric and kerosene operated), gas brooders and other bird rearing equipment from England - we would cut the ribbon across the bamboo arch leading to the 'game farm' in Pokhara in 1973!

Meanwhile I had misguidedly decided that the best way to thicken up the pheasant population of Nepal would be to introduce the ringneck pheasants, the eggs of which, obtained from the UK, we would hatch and rear in the farm. Rather surprisingly, the Nepalese authorities, and even the UN British adviser on Parks and Wildlife in Kathmandu, seemed to view these proposals with equanimity. I even compounded my ill-judged proposals by planning to release the birds in some woods in the vicinity of Pokhara, in a sub-tropical climate and subject to a heavy monsoon (but that was because we could keep an eye on the birds). The arrival of the distinguished author and naturalist/conservationist, Guy Mountfort, on a short visit to Kathmandu changed all that. He was horrified and forbade me to do any thing of the sort.

Meanwhile we ordered several hundred ringneck eggs from a game farm in Berkshire and our hatching and rearing results were quite good (we also imported grey partridge *perdix* eggs, as the Game Conservancy had advised that these might be a better bet than pheasants in Nepal, and some mallard eggs. The former were a complete failure for some reason, and we hardly raised two or three to maturity; we still have the progeny of the mallard, 20 years later, in our duck pond).

As for the pheasants, we decided to sell these as table birds, and this provided a small but welcome addition to the finances of the farm. To the pheasants we added *Coturnix* (Japanese) quail of which we imported 100 from California, and sold the eggs and a few of the birds. I never fancied myself much as a poultry dealer, and in any case this phase of the farm operations was brought to a close after two or three years by a disastrous fire (there had been a power blackout in Pokhara for several months and we were functioning on kerosene oil appliances) in which we lost all our incubators and stock of over 800 quail. From about five survivors we later built up our stock of quail, and bought one or two incubators, but we mainly now relied on broody hens and the days of commercial production were over, which I did not much regret.

Meanwhile we had built up a stock of Nepal pheasants. The World Pheasant Association was formed in the UK and Keith Howman kindly brought over a box of 30 or 40 eggs from which we had quite good hatching results. At this time, about the end of 1978-80, we had on display over 15 varieties of pheasants, including 'foreign' tropical and Chinese species and the farm became a popular point of call for visiting VIPs. HM the King and the Royal family, including the infant Crown Prince and the Royal Princes honoured us with a visit and one morning we had the PM and the entire Nepalese Cabinet sitting under a tree, discussing not pheasants but politics!

We did not have much success breeding from these imported birds, and our stocks, with the exception of some of the Chinese varieties, have died down and at the same time new import and export laws have doubled the difficulties of maintaining a small zoo of the birds.

In any case our main interest has been in the Nepalese species, of which the total is six. We have kept all these from time to time, but bred only the kalij, Himalayan monal and satyr tragopan. The cheer pheasant are on the endangered list and our eggs came from England. The blood pheasant has defied, so far, with two or three exceptions, the breeding skills of skilled aviculturists working under ideal conditions in the USA and Europe. The koklass pheasant we have obtained and exported and possibly could have bred, but it is another of the high altitude birds which are unsuited to the summer heat of Pokhara (90-100°) and monsoon rain (about 150 inches per year). Indeed the farm location in the Pokhara valley at a height of 2800 feet is far from ideal but has had to be fitted in with the daily work of Mountain Travel and Tourism, and is just 200 yards from the local airport!

Col J O M Roberts, PO Box 170, Kathmandu, Nepal.

An unusual tragopan breeding

Andrew Maycen

Taken from the November 1994 issue (Vol. 94/9) of American Pheasant and Waterfowl Society newsletter.

The aviary in which my tragopans are confined was built in 1992. It is 16 feet wide by 30 feet long, including a shelter in the rear. This sheltered portion is 12 feet in height, and the top of the aviary slopes upward from the shelter to a maximum height of 25 feet at the front. The top is covered with toprite netting, and the sides with hardware cloth and aviary netting. The interior is decorated with many perches installed at various heights.

The floor of the aviary is covered with a mixture of sand, peat-moss, and redwood bark. This is not the typical, sterile sand bottom used by many aviculturists, but our dry climate and limited rainfall here in southern California do not justify a floor of pure sand.

The aviary is heavily planted with trees and shrubs to provide a natural environment for the occupants. The unusual height differences allow for the inclusion of some larger trees and bamboos. Among the plants within the enclosure are an Anna apple tree, a Kashmir mulberry, a dwarf nectarine, junipers, bamboo, viburnum and liriope. Star jasmine and bignonia were planted on the outside of the pen, and these vines crawl up the sides and partially cover the higher portion of the aviary.

Photo: Jean Howman

Cock Temminck's tragopan.

Photo: Jean Howman

Semi natural nesting site for Temminck's tragopan in Cotoneaster bush at Keith Howman's aviaries.

I acquired an unrelated pair of Temminck's tragopans of the San Diego Zoo bloodlines, the female coming from Paul Kao and the male from John Klea. They share the aviary with a pair of Zerafschan pheasants *Phasianus colchicus zerafschanicus* two pairs of diamond doves, a pair of zebra finches, a pair of red avadavats, a pair of star finches, and three pairs of society finches.

The birds receive a daily shower from sprinklers and a hose, especially in warm weather. This is of course beneficial to the plants as well.

The diet of my tragopans consists of game bird breeder crumbles, finch seed mix, apples, mulberries, peanuts, mealworms, and a frozen vegetable mixture of peas and corn. They really seem to prefer the seeds from the finch feeder, peanuts, and any type of fruit over the game bird mix. They are also offered some kitten chow and oyster shell. In addition, the tragopans utilise some of the plants in the aviary as a natural food source. They consume a good portion of viburnum berries, mulberries, and nectarines. They avoid the Anna apples, which I, too, find totally inedible. They pick the bamboo bare of leaves wherever they can reach them. The tragopans really enjoy jumping about on the numerous perches provided for them. I have often witnessed the male displaying laterally to the hen from a high perch while she was some distance away on a lower perch.

Photo: Jean Howman

Temminck's tragopan cock behind rocks from which he displays.

A choice of nesting sites was provided for the tragopans. I placed a wooden fruit crate in the nectarine tree and anchored a wire plant basket to a branch in one corner of the shelter. Both sites were approximately six feet off the ground. They were situated about eight feet apart and not easily accessible to the birds. These nest receptacles were partially filled with fresh pine and cotoneaster branches and dried grass. I put this material in the nest and allowed the birds to arrange it as they would.

In the spring these nesting sites were checked daily. If nothing had been moved by the birds I would occasionally add more dried grass and pine needles. After I had been hearing the male tragopan crowing for about a week, I noticed that both nests had been inspected and rearranged by the birds.

A clutch of four eggs was subsequently laid in the wooden crate located in the nectarine tree. The female then began to incubate them. I checked the birds twice daily and noted that the male was often on the nest. For three days or so the female incubated during the evenings, with the male sleeping nearby. He continued his loud crowing at approximately three or four o'clock each morning.

The hen usually came off the nest to feed first thing in the morning. The male would come down from his perch at this time to display to her both laterally and frontally. After about half an hour I would check the birds again and the male would be on the nest incubating the eggs.

Eventually the male became the sole keeper of the eggs. The entire process seemed very gradual and completely natural. He did not chase the hen from the nest, and I never observed any sort of overt aggressive behaviour on his part.

Even after taking over total incubation duty from the hen, the male did not discontinue his early morning crowing. Quite often in the mornings I would see him off the nest courting the hen. It was during this time that I was privileged to observe the full frontal display of temminck's tragopan, an experience for which I had long been waiting. The male persisted for the remainder of the incubation period, sitting as tightly as any silky hen I have ever known. Yet throughout this time, he never ceased to perform his morning calling and courting rituals.

Several weeks later the tragopan hen laid a second clutch of four eggs, this time in the wire plant basket within the shelter. She again began incubating, sitting equally as diligently as the male sat on the first nest. An additional week passed, and the eggs of the first clutch hatched. The cock tragopan was soon seen busily brooding and feeding four tragopan chicks.

The second clutch also proved fertile, and the hen subsequently hatched her four chicks right on schedule. This record serves as a fine testimonial to the efficacy of natural incubation by the parent birds under captive conditions, as least with this species.

Interestingly, neither parent paid any attention to the other's brood. Each family would sleep separately, the cock with his chicks, the hen with hers. The chicks were able to roost with the adults up on high perches at only three or four days of age.

Unfortunately, the male tragopan lost all of his chicks at a few weeks of age. I attribute this loss to his having stepped on them, but did not have this confirmed by submitting them for necropsy. All four seemed fat and healthy at the time of death.

After losing his own brood, the male began assisting the hen in rearing her young. The chicks received the same diet given to the adults, except for the substitution of starter crumbles for the breeder crumbles and the addition of alfalfa sprouts. Both the cock and the hen tragopan would vigorously call the chicks to feed upon this delicacy.

All four chicks from the second brood survived to maturity, and have since been sold or traded to other breeders.

American Pheasant and Waterfowl Society, W2270 Hwy 10. Granton. Wis 54436. USA.

WPA Germany

The WPA Germany AGM for 1995 will be held on 23 and 24 September at the Fahner Hohe Hotel, Gierstadt near Erfurt. All our pheasant-loving friends are invited to come and join this 20th anniversary event.

WPA Nepal

CONGRATULATIONS JIMMY

We hear that the Council of the Royal Geographical Society has awarded the Back Award, for explorations and creation of environmental tourism in the Himalayas, to Colonel Roberts.

Satyr Calling

Colonel Jimmy Roberts writing from Nepal on 20 October 1994 says: "Our friend Dawa Norbu (sherpa) about ten days ago spent two nights in the course of a trek on Ghorapani (9-10,000 ft) and heard dawn calling of satyr (four or five) and numerous koklass - I did not know that satyrs ever dawn called outside the breeding season."

WPA Brazil

Andre Marx, 34, graduated in Physics at PUC - Pontifficia Universidade Catolica, and for seven years has dedicated himself to the design and production of furniture. He also is an enthusiastic member of WPA in Brazil. He visited WPA HQ in February and advises us that at all his exhibitions he promotes conservation of the cracids as well as of the forest by using only sustainable species.

WPA China

Full details of the first Chinese Workshop on Chinese Galliformes to be held from 21-24 August 1995 can be found on page 28.

WPA India

WPA India held its AGM on 23 April at Aligarh Muslim University.

WPA UK

The main event for 1995 for WPA UK will be hosting the 20th Anniversary Convention at Harewood House, Near Leeds in Yorkshire on 23 September 1995.

We hope to have all the Specialist Group Chairmen available as speakers on 23 September and at an informal buffet dinner that evening for discussions. There will be a tour of the Harewood Bird Gardens in the afternoon followed by drinks around an art exhibition of work by artists who have contributed to WPA publications during its first 20 years.

Any member from the UK or overseas requiring more information should write to Paul North, c/o WPA HQ, PO Box 5, Lower Basildon, Nr Reading, Berks RG8 9PF, UK.

WPA France

Their next general meeting will be on 21 October at the Paris Zoo.