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Forthcoming Events

1997

25-27 July	CLA Game Fair, Castle Ashby, Northampton
8-14 Sept	Pheasant and PQF Symposium, Melaka, Malaysia
6-9 Dec	Third International Megapode Symposium, Victoria, Australia

Front cover: Harmani eared-pheasant (see p. 11) *Photo: Lu Xin*

Back cover: Malleefowl - delegates will see this species at Nhill, Australia (see p. 10) *Photo: Pat Corder*

Prof Cheng Tso-hsin's 90th Birthday Celebrations

Zhang Zhengwang

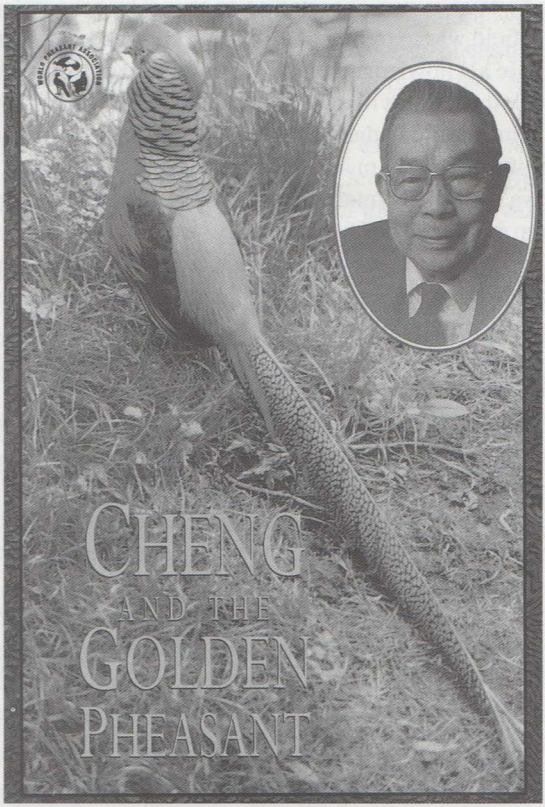
On 18 November 1996, a sunny day in Beijing, Prof Xu Wei-shu, Prof Li Fu-lai and I met at the main gate of Prof Cheng's house. On behalf of the China Ornithological Society and WPA-China, we went to see Prof Cheng and celebrated his 90th birthday. The basket of flowers we presented to him on the one hand expressed our thanks for his life-long contribution to Chinese bird research. On the other hand, red flowers in bud also symbolize his scientific undertakings which have produced hundreds of qualified successors.

Prof Cheng was born in 1906 in Fuzhou, Fujian province. After graduation from Fujian Christian University in 1926, he went to the United States for his PhD in Michigan University, where a Golden pheasant specimen on show in the museum there changed his life, his interest from embryology to ornithology. In September 1930, he returned to China and started to work on ornithology. Over the past 60 years he and his students have established modern Chinese ornithology and founded

Our President, Prof Cheng Tso-hsin, with presentations from WPA Council to celebrate his 90th birthday. L to R: Zhang Zhengwang, Cheng Tso-hsin, Lydia Cheng and Philip McGowan.

the China Ornithological Society. He has published over 20 monographs, 30 professional books, 140 scientific papers and 260 popular articles. He has made enormous contributions to taxonomy, zoogeography and ecology. His *Competive Expulsion Principle* offers supplementary evidence to support Darwin's evolution theory. Beside his marvellous work in research, he has supervised many students all over the country. To encourage the young researcher to work hard on birds, he established a foundation. In 1991 he donated all awards of his book *A Synopsis of the Avifauna of China* to the China Ornithological Society to set up the foundation for The Cheng Tso-hsin Award for Young Ornithologists. At present, he continues work on his new book, *Fauna Sinica-Aves*.

We were welcomed by Mrs Cheng and were very pleased to see both Prof Cheng and his wife in good health. While we were sitting around and talking about bird studies in China, Prof Cheng told me that there were many organisations, such as International Crane Foundation, World Pheasant Association and The Game Conservancy Trust which had sent representatives to Beijing to celebrate his 90th birthday. He hopes WPA-China can work more closely with WPA-International and he wishes us success in pheasant research and conservation. All of us wish Prof Cheng a happy long life.



Note: The full story of Prof Cheng's remarkable life is recorded in his biography Cheng and the Golden Pheasant. *Available from WPA HQ price £19.95 plus £2 p&p.*

Summary of the Proceedings at the WPA Convention, Saturday, 28 September 1996

Dr Peter Garson, Chairman of the Pheasant Specialist Group, gave an overview of the many world-wide projects underway and advised members to read the *Action Plan* for further details. More funding would be required to fully achieve objectives but by and large WPA was well recognised as one of the leading organisations involved in field research in galliformes. He went on to describe progress on projects over the past year.

Dr John Carroll of The Game Conservancy gave an excellent paper outlining the activities of the PQF Specialist Group. At an early stage he confirmed to the meeting that whilst he was accepted as an expert he acknowledged that his experience within this field was extremely limited and confined to a small number of species and areas.

He acknowledged that there was still an enormous amount of work to be done to reach the point with PQFSG that has been reached by the PSG.

Euan Malone then explained the recent work carried out with DNA research with galliformes. Too many of us thought his paper was largely technical and in some ways over the layman's head. However, I feel sure that we each obtained a message from it. Using DNA technology, we can begin to trace the origin of some of the blood lines that we have in our collections and hopefully in the fullness of time, establish strains of purity at least to the bloodlines which have been seen this century. It would appear that the technology is now available to extract DNA from feathers in, for example, the Natural History Museum at Tring and compare chromosome counts *etc* with present stock.

Keith Chalmers-Watson informed the meeting that a company called Diagnostics Ltd had recently patented a system of sexing avian species using DNA analysis of the feather quill. This method obviates the need for surgical sexing or blood sampling and can be done at the time of ringing the birds. WPA members would be able to enjoy a 10% discount when using the DL system and details are available in the **Annual Review.**

Roger Draycott of The Game Conservancy gave his view of the use of the game pheasant in the United Kingdom for sporting purposes and he highlighted methods whereby conservation and intensive agriculture might work more closely together. Commercial shooting was a major form of income to the rural communities within the UK in general and in Scotland in particular.

Philip McGowan outlined the establishment of a database that contains locality information on Asian galliformes (excluding megapodes) and then discussed one of the uses to which it can be put. Details of the establishment of the database are given on page 10 of the 1996/96 WPA **Annual Review**. Analyses designed to see how far existing data can be used for quantifying the change in the status of SE Asian species

suggest that threat assessments based on locality-only measures are different from those that incorporate habitat information. Nonetheless, some broad priorities for action can be identified and show overlap with those outlined in the *Action Plans.*

The captive breeding initiatives for the Vietnamese *Lophura* species by WPA CBAC was outlined by Han Assink, he described how contact was first made with both Hanoi and Saigon Zoos and how the co-operation developed with the visit of Gillian Stewart to provide technical assistance and establish communications with the outside world. WPA CBAC raised funds to provide a fax machine and a computer to set-up their ARKS record system donated by ISIS in the USA, which in turn has allowed Hanoi Zoo to establish an International Studbook for the Vietnamese pheasant *L. hatinhensis.*

Gillian Stewart, presently working in Jersey Zoo, ably described with the aid of slides some of the progress which has been made in pheasant aviculture within Hanoi Zoo. She outlined the successes in breeding the Vietnamese pheasant in particular and her version of the trapping of the wild pair of Edwards's made fascinating listening.

The present status of the Edwards's Pheasant Studbook was explained by Alain Hennache. The Studbook is now held in the Bird Garden at Cleres and birds have been returned to Vietnam where it is felt that a re-introduction of the species was not too far away.

At this point the meeting formally ended but most stayed on to view some of John Corder's videos showing Crested Argus, Malay and Mountain peacock-pheasants and many other species which he has seen in his recent trips to Malaysia. The day's events concluded with an excellent bar-b-que at the Child Beale Centre.

On Sunday morning, we were able to enjoy a visit to Michel Klat's collection at Hare Hatch. It is generally accepted that Michel has put together the finest collection of game birds ever assembled in the UK and probably Europe. He opened his doors to the group and we were fascinated by the range of aviaries and the number of species kept within them.

During the afternoon a smaller group visited Bird World and, for those of us who had not been for some years, we were impressed at the new layout and improvements that had been made. We all wish Rob Harvey well with his new owners and hope that the Park will continue to thrive.

To conclude the Convention, on Monday a group of 12 visited the Natural History Museum at Tring where we were allocated some two hours to view the skin collection. Needless to say one cannot absorb the fascinations of a collection such as this in that time. However, a number of us really analysed specific species within the collection and emerged with a much better understanding of species such as Argus, Coppers and Tragopans. Our hosts, Robert Pryst-Jones and Michael Walters were thanked profusely and offered to welcome any future WPA visiting party.

WPA's Malaysian Symposium - notes for interested delegates

John Corder

First, I should point out that we are still in the process of negotiating prices with a number of bodies, so at this stage it is not possible to give an indication of costings. I am sure that potential delegates would wish to know that our organising committee are committed to a symposium which is enjoyable, good value for money and affordable. Since we are hoping to arrange a considerable number of alternatives within the whole symposium package, we hope to provide opportunities to suit all interests. Our hosts in Malaysia will be the Department of Wildlife and National Parks for Peninsular Malaysia, often known as The Wildlife Department. Some of the visits/tours which they have proposed will provide opportunities to visit areas which most tourists would never have the chance to see.

The symposium will open on Monday, 8 September at The Malacca Paradise Village Resort in Ayer Keroh. This hotel is a few miles outside the historic city of Melaka. It has its own conference facilities, swimming pools, squash and tennis courts, and is also within close walking distance of Melaka Zoo. Rooms are air-conditioned. Delegates may wish to arrive in Malaysia before the symposium, or to

The Malacca Paradise Village Resort in Ayer Keroh.

All photos: J Corder

Christ Church, Victoria Square, Melaka.

stay on afterwards, and discounted rates have been negotiated at this hotel and another in Kuala Lumpur (The Plaza). It is hoped that a number of tours will be available in and around Melaka for those not wishing to attend all the symposium proceedings. There is a motorway from KL to Melaka, and cars usually take about one-and-a-half hours to make this trip.

After our traditional three-day symposium, it is hoped that the majority of delegates will wish to extend their stay to visit the forest. There is a very large National Park (Taman Negara) in the centre of Malaysia where logging has never been permitted and which contains superb rainforest. Many pheasant and partridge species can be found there, such as roul roul, black wood partridge, Great argus, Crested argus, Crested and Crestless firebacks, Malaysian and Mountain peacock pheasants. Elephant, gaur, rhino, tiger and many more species are also found there. Some ornithologists regard this area as one of the best in the world. Tourists are normally only permitted to visit one area of Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan, on the southern border. This area is now on the itinerary of many visitors and the quality of wildlife has suffered as a consequence.

The Wildlife Department has two small forest resorts in the north of the Park, in areas not usually accessible to tourists. Although conditions are unlikely to be as plush as those in our Melaka hotel, we hope that the opportunity to enjoy the forest will appeal to many. If residential conditions are a little primitive, we hope this will

Captive breeding aviaries well landscaped into the forest.

be made worthwhile when the diversity of wildlife can be experienced. For example, there is a dancing ground for the Crested argus only 20 minutes walk away from one of the Wildlife Department's camps. We feel that this section of the symposium will provide numerous informal opportunities for all those with an interest in galliformes to contribute their knowledge and expertise in the home environment of many of the birds in which we have an interest. The Wildlife Department hopes to build a hide for ornithologists; their staff often undertake bird-ringing here, so there should be opportunities to see some of the forest birds at close range. Rangers will also take delegates out into the forest. For delegates who are making the trip on a limited budget, camping facilities are available.

The journey to this somewhat inaccessible area is likely to take much of Thursday, 11 September, but delegates will have two further full days in the forest before leaving for Kuala Lumpur or any of the post-symposium tours on Sunday 14th. Flights to Europe leave late in the evening, but time zones are such that a delegate leaving KL at 11 pm on Sunday night will arrive in London by 6 am on Monday morning.

A number of post-symposium tours are being investigated, and we would invite you to indicate whether you might be interested in any of these.

- **A Wildlife Tour**. This will take in many of the conservation breeding projects which the Wildlife Department have, for pheasants and partridges, gaur (giant forest cattle), elephants, sambar deer, and rhinos (the highly endangered Sumatran rhino is also found in Malaysia). All of these projects are situated in forest areas. Within KL there will also be visits to an excellent bird park (Taman Burung) and the National Zoo (Zoo Negara). It is likely that this tour will be based in Kuala Lumpur with the projects being visited on a daily basis. Thus many of the famous sights and shopping facilities of KL will be accessible during the evenings. Since most of these projects are owned by our hosts, costs will be largely limited to those involving transportation, accommodation in KL and food of your choice.

- **A Scientists' Tour**. This will be led by Dr Philip McGowan at Kuala Lompat, where he studied Malaysian peacock-pheasants for four years. The tour will cater for a maximum of 12 people. Conditions may be somewhat spartan, but Philip and staff of the Wildlife Department hope to provide scientists with opportunities to develop their field research techniques in one of the best-researched areas of pristine rainforest in the world.

- **An Ornithologists' Tour**. Richard Howard, WPA's Chairman and a renowned ornithologist, will organise this, in conjunction with a very well-known Malaysian Wildlife Ranger. It is hoped to visit Kuala Gula, Fraser's Hill, Cameron Highlands and Genting Highlands. Kuala Gula will provide the opportunity to visit the milky stork colony off the north-west coast, just south of Penang. This tour will require some travelling, and accommodation in different hotels and rest-houses on several nights, but the new north/south motorway should ensure that the majority of time is spent bird-watching.

In addition to the above, Gary Robbins is hoping to organise a tour to Sarawak and Sabah, to visit some of the wildlife facilities there. Gary has visited this area on several occasions and has many contacts there. It is hoped to spend some time on a Wildlife island resort and also to visit pheasant breeding facilities and zoos. This tour will require a flight to Kuching in East Malaysia. Delegates might also wish to go further and visit Sepilok, where one of the world-famous orang-utan rehabilitation centres is found. A breeding project for Sumatran rhinos is also in this area.

Han Assink is organising a pheasant workshop in Vietnam, since WPA has close contacts with both Hanoi and Saigon Zoos. Han knows Vietnam well, and has been at the centre of WPA's involvement with the captive breeding of the Vietnamese pheasant *Lophura hatinhensis* in Hanoi and the crested argus in Saigon.

Financial arrangements

It is anticipated that delegates will be responsible for arranging their own air travel, hopefully using a discount arrangement with a nominated airline. Delegates will also pay for their own symposium accommodation at discounted rates. These arrangements will avoid difficulties over the Association having to act as a travel agent for delegates from all over the world. Thus delegates should be reasonably certain of their level of expenditure, which is likely to be considerably lower than any alternative. However, in the past, WPA has been able to use an element of any negotiated discount to offset the costs of some more needy delegates, particularly from Asian countries. This arrangement will not be available to us, although there will still be a need to assist some delegates. It is vital for WPA to support some of these delegates and often their contributions are vital to the success of our symposium. It is proposed that delegates should be made aware from the outset that all negotiated savings will be passed on directly to them, and that there will need to be a symposium fee to cover the cost of meals, tea breaks and the programme, and also to assist those delegates that the committee feel need to attend to make it successful. Tours and visits will be arranged as separate financial packages.

So far, we have had great support from the Melaka Tourist Board and the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board. Leaflets on many aspect of Malaysian tourism can be provided by their London office (or offices in other cities), and all prospective delegates should receive a brochure which features photos of two pheasant species.

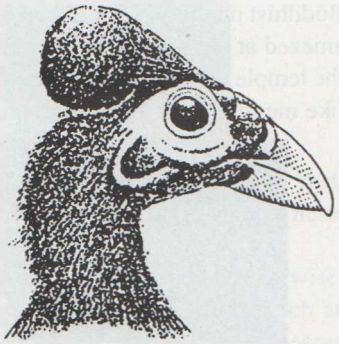
Provided our negotiations with an airline come to fruition, it is hoped that discounted flights might also be available for delegates to visit other parts of Malaysia after the symposium. Areas for consideration might include Penang, the East Coast, Sabah or Sarawak. Singapore might also prove popular for anyone who has not had the opportunity to visit Jurong Bird Park, the Zoo, The Night Experience and the Orchid Gardens. My wife, Pat, and I have visited Malaysia on many occasions and have always received an extremely friendly welcome. If you feel you would like to telephone us to discuss your plans, please feel free to pick our brains. We'll do our best, but hope people will understand that we cannot afford to 'phone everyone, so we would expect you to ring us! (John and Pat Corder : 0181 654 6032)

Finally, a number of sponsors, specialising in radio-tracking, incubation and pheasant foods have already shown an interest in supporting the symposium in return for the opportunity to have a display board in the poster area. Gary Robbins has agreed to co-ordinate this area, so if you know of any potential sponsors, please let him know.

For any further information please contact either John or Pat Corder on the number above or you may write to Jane Clacey, Symposium Secretariat, World Pheasant Association, PO Box 5, Lower Basildon, Reading, Berkshire RG8 9PF, UK. Tel: +44 118 984 5140, fax: +44 118 984 5140.

The Third International Megapode Symposium, The Little Desert Lodge, Nhill, Victoria, Australia 6-9 December 1997

Dr Darryl Jones



Planning for our big event of 1997 is proceeding well: the first Australian-based International Megapode meeting promises to be unique and exciting as well as providing the very latest ideas and findings from megapode workers around the world. We are particularly heartened to have people coming from some of the more remote locations representing some of the least known species.

Fourteen international speakers have already confirmed their attendance but it is not just going to be all science - one of the key themes of this conference will be the human/adventure side of this work. So a number of speakers will also be providing informal slide-shows at night. This promises to be a major highlight - a chance to see what really happens in the field, in extremely remote locations and often among fascinating people. And it is not going to be endless talks either. It's likely to be hot in the afternoons in the Little Desert so rather than fight the natural post-lunch fatigue the afternoons will be free to sleep, talk, bird-watch or drink lots of tea. This meeting will not be overly exhausting!

Although getting to the Little Desert may appear to be difficult we will minimise travel problems by providing buses that will pick up from the Melbourne International Airport (and some other locations) at specific times to be arranged. These buses will then transport delegates to the Little Desert Lodge and will return at the end of the conference. The official application forms will be distributed early in 1997.

There will be two days of the scientific programme (Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 December) followed by two days of excursions for those who want to see more of the local country. Details will be contained in the application forms.

This will be a unique and important meeting in a remarkable setting with the best of the megapode workers. If you would like to attend the Third Megapode Symposium (especially if you would like to provide a paper), please write to Dr Darryl Jones, Megapode Specialist Group, Faculty of Environmental Science, Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland 4111, Australia.

Harmani eared-pheasant, under the umbrella of Tibetan Religion

Lu Xin

In my experience it is really hard work to study wild pheasants in the field. I have made many attempts to watch several species close at hand but rarely succeeded.

In the middle of February 1996, when I arrived at the Xiongse temple, the largest Buddhist nunnery of the Tibetan Red Sect of Lamaism consisting of 300 nuns, I was amazed at the scene in front of me. Over 30 eared-pheasants were scattered around the temple over an area the size of a football field and were so fearless that a stranger like me might get as close as one meter to watch!

Both photos: Lu Xin

Harmani eared-pheasants feeding close to the nunnery.

I was a welcome visitor and the old Living Buddha, religious leader of the temple, kindly arranged lodging for me when he understood my aim in coming. The nuns were also friendly toward me though there was a barrier of language between us. The temple is located half way up the mountain which is about 30km from Lhasa at a height of 4300m. Every morning, accompanied by the song of the Buddhist sutra sung by the nuns, the pheasants come to range around the temple from their roosting site only 300m away. Like domestic fowl, the pheasants might be seen almost everywhere around the temple, feeding in the nuns' rubbish areas and standing besides their houses and calling. The nuns often attracted the birds with a shrill whistling voice sounded like "zhou...zhou..." and bestowed food upon them. The birds rapidly gathered around the nuns when they called. Due to this abundant food

supply, between 10.00-11.00 am, the pheasants entered natural vegetation for rest. This pattern of behaviour was sustained until females began incubating their nests in fields round about.

During my studying here I never found any behaviour, human or otherwise, which did harm to the pheasants. Other wildlife living around the temple, such as Tibetan partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae* and various birds, were also given the same treatment as the eared-pheasant. Sometimes some flies or moths entered my house and made a little disturbance. When I wanted to kill these winged insects, the nuns always seriously thwarted my attempt. The vegetation around the temple consists of sparse shrub and woodland of mountain willow and the cover, obviously, could not provide sufficient protection for this ground bird with its big body and noticeable plume. However, because of the influence of the temple, none went to disturb the pheasants living area far away from the temple where vegetation was short and restricted.

The old Living Buddha told me that two years ago, several administrators came and attempted to shoot the pheasants. The temple made a strong protest. Some dogs abandoned by their master or having strayed from their village once resided in the mountain and many pheasants became their prey. The temple managed to drive these pests away. "Why do you protect the pheasants which appear not to be of benefit to you?" I asked the old Living Buddha. He seriously said, "It is a basic Buddhist monastic discipline and we could not do any thing that violated our discipline. But also, like other wildlife, the pheasant is a lovely bird and it could bring our temple good luck." From this answer I recognize the unique role of religion in protecting wildlife.

Having lived for five months accompanied by the nuns as well as my eared-pheasants, I was reluctant to leave the sacred temple and grand mountain. But, the nuns and the pheasants, two products from spiritual world and natural world respectively, would live together for a long time.

New localities for Blyth's tragopan from Nagaland, India

Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury

Blyth's tragopan *Tragopan blythii* is believed to occur in the hills and mountains of north-eastern India, north-western Myanmar, Bhutan and extreme south-eastern Tibet (China). In India, the species has been reported from Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and a tiny pocket of Assam.

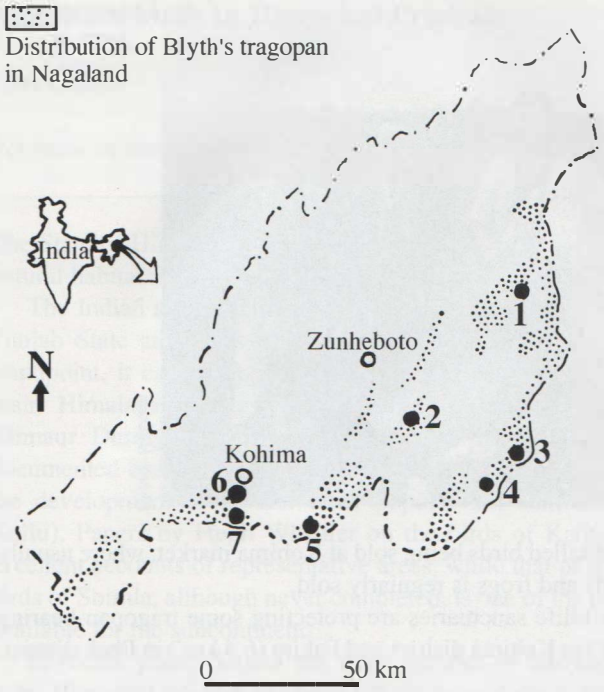
In Nagaland, the tragopan has been recorded from the Barail Range, especially Mt Japvo (Japfu) and Pulie Badge of Kohima district, Fakim Sanctuary and Pfutsero of Phek district.

During a survey in June, 1996, I recorded the species in a number of other localities in different districts. I examined in Kohima town a well-preserved and mounted specimen of a male tragopan originally collected from Noklak area. The species is also reported to be common on the slopes of Mt Saramati and the entire range running along the Indo-Myanmarese international boundary. Both Noklak and Saramati are in Tuensang district.

The tragopan is still found, but not in large numbers, in the range near Vishepu, Dzulhami and Kilomi villages, mostly in Zunheboto district but also partly falling in Phek district. However, it is in Satoi area of Zunheboto district and the adjoining areas of Phek and Tuensang districts that I found Blyth's to be still abundant. Two preserved skins of male birds and some feathers of another bird were examined at

Photo: Anwaruddin Choudhury

The little-disturbed sub-tropical forests of Satoi, an important haunt of Blyth's tragopan.



Key:
1 Noklak
2 Satoi
3 Saramati
4 Fakim
5 Pfutsero
6 Pulie Badge
7 Japfu

Map: Anwaruddin Choudhury

Satoi village and in Zunheboto town, all originating from the dense and little-disturbed jungles of Satoi. In early 1996, a pair was aparently captured from Satoi area by the villagers and donated to a local Minister who kept the birds as pets. The male died soon after while the female still survives.

Satoi is undoubtedly one of the best areas for Blyth's tragopan in Nagaland. The sub-tropical forests of Satoi are above 2000 m in elevation. Sighting of a few birds at the forest edge, early in the morning or late in the afternoon, is not uncommon. The villagers, all belonging to Sema Naga tribe, do not persecute the bird as a rule but occasionally hunt and trap it for food, game or to present as gifts either live or preserved. My visit to this remote corner of Nagaland has motivated the villagers to a great extent. I was accompanied by the local Magistrate, Mr Akato Sema, who also belongs to Sema Naga tribe. This helped reduce the communication gap between me and the villagers. Mr M I Bora, District Magistrate of Zunheboto and Khekiho Sohe of People's Group, a local NGO, extended help in organising the expedition.

With these records, the known range of tragopans in Nagaland has extended to four out of seven districts, in Kohima, Phek, Zunheboto and Tuensang. In Nagaland, *Tragopan blythii* is a much celebrated bird featuring in tourist brochures, Forest Department stickers, posters, hotel names, *etc*, in Satoi area, is not much persecuted.

The survey party in Satoi.

Photo: Hakeem

There are a few instances of killed birds being sold at Kohima market, where usually a large number of wild birds and frogs is regularly sold.

At present two small wildlife sanctuaries are protecting some tragopan-bearing areas, Pulie-Badge (9.2 km^2) in Kohima district and Fakim (6.4 km^2) in Phek district.

Recommendations

1 New protected areas be set up at Satoi (c.50 km^2), Japfu-Dzuko Valley (c.100 km^2) and a larger one in Saramati also encompassing the existing sanctuary of Fakim within it (c.500 km^2).

2 NGOs such as People's Group should carry out motivation programmes in the villages. Since most of the villagers are already aware of the 'celebrity' status of the tragopan, the NGOs can take advantage of this knowledge and move ahead.

3 The village councils should also try to declare some of the key pockets as 'Village Sanctuaries' as has been done at Ghosu in Zunheboto district. However, the tragopan is not found there due to low elevation.

4 The forest authorities should try to put some check on occasional poaching of this rare bird including sale in Kohima market.

The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, c/o The Assam Co Ltd, G.Bordoloi Path, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati 781 021, Assam, India.

Mountain birds in Himachal Pradesh

Tony Gaston

Reproduced from the Oriental Bird Club Bulletin 22, December 1995.

The State of Himachal Pradesh contains some of the most beautiful and accessible natural habitat in the Western Himalayas.

The Indian state of Himachal Pradesh consists of the hill regions of the former Punjab State and takes in much of the Western Himalayas. From an ecological standpoint, it can be divided into three regions: the Shiwalik or front ranges, the main Himalayan ranges, and the trans-Himalayan areas of Lahoul, Spiti and Kinnaur. During the British administration, the birds of Himachal were very well documented because of the presence of the Imperial summer capital at Shimla and the development of several other popular hill stations (Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Kullu). Papers by Hugh Whistler on the birds of Kangra and Kullu districts are excellent accounts of representative areas, while that of A E Jones (1947-48) on the birds of Shimla, although never completed, is one of the most detailed local birdlists available for the subcontinent.

In recent years, despite the large number of birdwatchers travelling to South Asia, Himachal Pradesh has been relatively neglected. This is probably because the avifauna, although rich, does not approach that of Nepal, the mountains are not so high, and the trans-Himalayan areas were, until recently, less accessible than those of Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, the excellent data available from earlier observers meant that there was less scope for exciting new finds and range extensions. However, Himachal is an enchanting area, both for scenery and culture. It has a wealth of birds and, now that Kashmir is, sadly, a dangerous place for outsiders to travel in, it is the best area to look for those species largely or wholly confined to the Western Himalayas. In this article I will attempt to give some impressions of what a visiting birdwatcher might find outside of the Tibetan plateau areas, and indicate the current status of mountain birds in the State.

The Shiwalik foothills are clothed, at lower altitudes, with tropical thorn scrub which grades into pine forests at about 1,000m. In summer, the birds of these areas are very similar to those of the adjacent plains, with the addition of a few species such as the red junglefowl *Gallus gallus* (surprisingly common in some areas), great tit *Parus major*, striated prinia *Prinia criniger* and white-browed scimitar-babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps*. However, between November and February, these areas receive a flood of winter visitors from the adjacent high ranges; so for those who wish to see mountain birds without getting out of breath, the winter is a good time

to visit the Shiwalik areas. At that season, birds such as long-tailed minivets *Pericrocotus ethologus*, yellow-bellied fantails *Rhipidura hypoxantha,* wallcreepers *Tichodroma muraria*, white-collared and grey-winged blackbirds *Turdus albocinctus* and *T. boulboul* and white-capped and plumbeous water-redstarts *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* and *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* become common right to the edge of the plains. Heavy snow may bring down more exotic species, such as variegated laughingthrush *Garrulax variegatus*, scaly-bellied wren-babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer,* spectacled finch *Callacanthis burtoni* and golden bush robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus*. In addition, there are a few longer distance migrants that winter in the Shiwalik zone of the Western Himalayas, namely blue-capped redstart *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus*, black-throated thrush *Turdus ruticollis atrogularis* and black-throated accentor *Prunella atrogularis*.

Two large man-made lakes created by the Bhakra and Pong dams are situated in the lower Shiwalik zone. Both support a variety of water birds, although that created by the Pong Dam is much the better and supports thousands of ducks, herons and waders, as well as being a regular wintering area for red-necked and black-necked grebes *Podiceps grisegena* and *P. nigricollis*. As the area of the lake varies considerably with the time of year and the abundance of monsoon rain, the best areas for birds vary considerably.

Much of the higher Shiwaliks (1,500-3,000m) would originally have been covered by oak forest (*Quercus glauca* and *Q. leucotrichophora*), but clearance for cultivation, and the policies of foresters in promoting the deodhar *Cedrus deodara*, mean that little lower-altitude oak forest remains. The remaining areas of oak and mixed forest are the most rewarding for birds and the sanctuaries at Chail, Majathal and Naina Devi provide examples. Characteristic birds of these areas include the two Himalayan jays *Garrulus* spp., the red-billed magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha,* the two local *Seicercus* warblers, several species of *Phylloscopus* and *Parus*, and a number of small babblers: black-chinned babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops,* white-browed shrike-babbler *Pteru thius flaviscapis*, chestnut-tailed *Minla Minla strigula,* rufous sibia *Heterophasia capistrata,* and whiskered yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*. In summer, several species of flycatchers also occur. Grasslands associated with these sanctuaries support the otherwise very elusive Cheer pheasant *Catreus wallichii*. Late summer, just after the monsoon, is a good season to visit these areas as the insectivorous birds form large mixed species parties. Once you have located one, it may be possible to follow it for hours, observing several similar species feeding together. This is very helpful for distinguishing the crowned warblers *Phylloscopus occipitalis* and *P. reguloides*, for instance.

The vegetation of the lower parts of the main mountain ranges is similar to that of the higher Shiwaliks. At about 3,000m, oak/spruce/deodhar forest gives way to a characteristic higher altitude forest of kharshu oak *Quercus semicarpifolia* on south aspects and fir *Abies* spp. on north-facing slopes. This zone is inhabited by a very

distinctive avifauna including, in summer, orange-flanked bush-robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*, ashy-throated, palerumped and buff-barred warblers *Phylloscopus maculipennis, chloronotus* and *pulcher*, grey-crested, dark grey, and rufous-vented tits *Parus dichrous, rutonuchalis* and *rubidiventris* (the latter rare), yellow-browed tit *Sylviparus modestus*, and white-cheeked nuthatch *Sitta leucopsis*. The warblers are found lower down in winter, but the tits hold their ground.

Photo: Jean Howman

Cheer pheasant

These forests, where undisturbed, also contain Himalayan monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Koklass pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha* and Western tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, although the last is mainly confined to the forests of the upper Ravi and Beas valleys. The best place to see the pheasants, and most of the other highaltitude forest birds, is the Great Himalayan National Park, at the southern end of the Kullu Valley (Gaston *et al.* 1993). Permission to visit the area must be sought from the Park Director, whose office is at Shamshi, close to the Kullu airport.

Above the forest, which ends at around 4,000m, there is a zone of subalpine vegetation dominated by birch and rhododendrons and interspersed with high-altitude meadows, most of which are occupied in summer by migrant graziers with herds of sheep, goats and buffalos. Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos,* lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* and Himalayan griffon *Gyps himalayensis* are all common in this zone, while blue-fronted redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*, scalybellied wren-babbler, whitebrowed fulvetta *Alcippe vinipectus*, white-throated tit *Aegithalos niveogularis* and elements of the upper forest zone community inhabit the scrub, augmented in autumn by large flocks of rufous-streaked accentors

Prunella himalayana and plain mountain finches *Leucosticte nemoricola*. On the highest meadows, the fortunate may find snow partridge *Lerwa lerwa*, grandala *Grandala coelicoloror*, where marshy, solitary snipe *Gallinago solitaria*, but none of these is common. The true alpine zone is not rich in birds, but rufous-breasted accentor *Prunella strophiata*, Himalayan snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis* and dark-breasted rosefinch *Carpodacus nipalensis* all occur.

The trans-Himalayan zone has been made accessible by the recent opening of most parts of Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur to tourists. My own experience of these areas is limited to Lahul, which provides a transition between the ecosystems of the front ranges and those of the Tibetan plateau. Open forests of pencil cedar *Luniperus macropoda* and kail *Pinus wallichiana* support mainly a depauperate selection of Himalayan forest birds, especially great tit (found here at much greater altitude than in the front ranges), dark grey tit, white-cheeked nuthatch, pale-rumped warbler and goldcrest *Regulus regulus*. brown dipper *Cinclus pallasii,* mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus*, black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, winter wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, firefronted serin *Serinus pusillus*, rock bunting *Emberiza cia* and red-billed chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* are common practically everywhere. Most people would probably visit Lahul en route to Ladakh, where they are likely to get a much better introduction to the true Tibetan avifauna.

There are no birds that are unique to Himachal Pradesh and the number of species endemic to the Western Himalayas is also small. A few species that breed in the state are listed in the latest *Birds to Watch* (Collar *et al.* 1994) as being of possible concern: Western tragopan, Cheer pheasant, wood snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* (all considered vulnerable), cinereous vulture *Aegypius monachus,* red-headed vulture *Sarcogyps calvus,* long-billed thrush *Zoothera monticola,* white-throated tit and orange bullfinch *Pyrrhula aurantiaca* (all listed as near threatened).

The two pheasants are the subject of some conservation efforts. The creation of the Great Himalayan National Park was, in part, an attempt to safeguard the largest population of western tragopan known at that time. Currently there may be anywhere from 20-100 Western tragopans in the area and the total population of the State is probably less than 1000 (Gaston *et al.* 1983). The status of the Cheer pheasant may be a little less precarious, as it is widespread throughout the lower hills, albeit in small pockets (Sharma and Pandey 1989). As no hunting is allowed in the State at present, the main threat to these birds comes from habitat destruction, but that has also slowed with the current ban on the felling of reserve forest. Populations may be holding their own.

The wood snipe has been reported periodically, but possible confusion with solitary snipe makes its status hard to evaluate. As the solitary snipe is very sparsely distributed in the State, the wood snipe cannot be better than very rare. I have seen it only once to my complete satisfaction. Similarly, there is a scattering of recent

sightings of the cinereous vulture, but no definite evidence of breeding. Neither seems to have been common in the past (Whistler 1926a). Single red-headed vultures can be seen fairly regularly at Shimla and Kullu (and probably elsewhere), but the total number in the State is probably small. The species is more common in the hills of Uttar Pradesh.

The long-billed thrush inhabits heavy forest with dense understorey at about 2,000m. It can usually be found in the Great Himalayan National Park, but I have few records elsewhere. This species is likely to have been adversely affected by the extension of temperate agriculture into the deciduous forests.

The white-throated tit, on the other hand, is common - even abundant - in the subalpine zone, especially among birches: its habitat is unlikely to have been much affected by human activities. The orange bullfinch, one of the most spectacular looking birds you can hope to see, is so rare that I have never seen it in 25 years of visits to Himachal. The species is found mainly in Kashmir, although there are records as far east as Shimla.

There is no need to take lengthy hikes to find the characteristic birds of Himachal Pradesh. Most of the temperate forest birds can be seen within an hour's walk of the State capital in Shimla (ask for 'the glen') and the summit of Rhotang Pass (between Manali and Lahul) is an excellent place to see the alpine and subalpine species. Even the elusive Cheer can be heard from motorable roads in places. The birder with limited time will be able to see most of the same species and many more in Corbett or Rajaji Parks, across the border in Uttar Pradesh, but for those who prefer their birdwatching to be leisurely and are not concerned about maximising their world list, Himachal can be a very rewarding place to visit.

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Himalayan or Karakoram?

Mike Harrison

I attended boarding school at Mussoorie, the queen of hill stations in the foothills of the Western Himalayas. From an altitude of about 7,000 ft some exquisite scenery could be observed. Looking down to the south is the Vale of Dehra Dun, the Siwalik range of hills, and beyond, the plains of northern India. Looking north from the Cottage Hospital situated on Camel's Back is the perennial snows. My sister Dorothy was a nurse in this hospital whom I visited on the occasional Saturday.

It was on days like this that I stood and gazed across the horizon and became obsessed by towering mountains clad in satin robes. Yes, I promised myself, one day I shall be in a position to go over and embrace them.

I was a senior student going to town on a Saturday when I followed a coolie (porter) carrying, believe it or not, a piano strapped to his back and forehead! He stopped, rested the piano against the hillside and lit up a cigarette. I asked him as to where he was delivering it to which he replied 'Landour.' At this stage I noticed his face was horribly scarred and his ears almost in shreads. Old wounds of course. The question I asked about the wounds was no embarrassment to him. Unhesitatingly he told me it was the result of being mauled by a Himalayan black bear on the path leading to the Combined Military Hospital at Landour.

The conversation continued. He gave me his name as Lall Bahadur, a Gharwali by tribe, similar to a Gurkha, their territories adjoining. Anyway, I struck a deal with him for the coming winter of January 1944 to take me shooting to his village situated between Tehri and Gharwal.

Nearing the time when boarding school was closed for three months, I got the all clear from my Dad to go on the trip. On the appointed day I met Lall, setting off early next morning from Landour Bazaar and headed NE at first along the Tehri Gharwal hill track then to areas with a potential of meeting up with feathered game. I augmented our food supply with white-crested Kalij and Koklass pheasants, but the next day lost the opportunity of bagging quantity rather than quality. That being no other than a serow, a donkey-like animal of the goat family. Had I been carrying a rifle, the venison would have gone down a treat at the isolated huts we stopped over at for the night.

Recent heavy snowfall had driven wildlife normally inhabiting areas just below the snow-line to vast regions now blanketed with snow, therefore making it far more difficult to encounter a particular species which primarily I was after, that being what Lall called a 'Bharafani Murgi' (a snow fowl). We climbed up, down and across mountains, albeit not anywhere near the snow-line, but never did set eyes on this elusive fowl, although Lall on one occasion shouted "Murgi attah hai," meaning

Looking north from Mussoorie. Cheer pheasant country in the foreground, background the perennial snows where I failed to encounter the snowcock.

a fowl was coming my way. I saw nothing, yet he was convinced one came over me. I questioned him about his previous accounts that these birds were found in groups, so how come only one bird was seen by him. His explanation was feasible. A hawk can chase a bird unsuccessfully for a considerable distance, separating it from the covey in which case it will sit tight for a long while until the danger is over. From my own experience in later years, this was quite correct.

We arrived at his village, comprising some eight or ten mudden huts scattered over terraced fields from which the inhabitants scratched a living growing maize, wheat and vegetables during the summer, especially the monsoon season. We stayed a day there. Lall's wife was keen to kill a couple of their chickens in order to provide a sumptuous meal in my honour, a custom practiced by these hospitable people who can hardly afford the luxury.

Opposing the killing of livestock, I asked a few adults and kids to beat through a nearby narrow, thickly wooded valley. My gun was loaded with No 6 shot when I was taken by surprise by a 'kakar' (muntjack) running up the hillside about 20 yards away. I shot it dead then added a few Kalij pheasants to the bag, thus saving the necks of Lall's chickens, in addition to which the 'kakar' was a godsend to the village, far from providing a feast, but at least each household had enough for a curry!

Running out of time, I called off the search for the 'Bharafani Murgi' and we headed back taking a different route by crossing a range of mountains where Lall hoped we might still encounter these birds. No such luck. All that one continually

set eyes on was Mt Kamet, so near and yet so far, its summit more than 25,000 ft above sea level, visible on a clear day from the plains over 50 miles away.

Coming in sight of the river Ganges we kept above it, some mountain sides quite precipitous and devoid of trees. With yet another night to spend, perhaps in a cave, I took advantage to ensure we had a decent meal by adding a brace of Cheer pheasants to our meagre food supply.

We moved out of a sheltered valley, not far from sulphur springs, to climb up to Mussoorie. Following a stream, both sides reasonably well wooded, I was given an awful start by a bird flushing from almost underneath my feet. I got a very clear view of it, and straight away matched it with a large framed picture of a woodcock, amongst a variety of other game birds which hung from the Reception Hall of Charters Ville, our mansion at Roorkee. At a later stage I told my Dad, a shooting man from the 1880s, and many others about seeing the woodcock, none of whom had ever seen one in India. Other than Mussoorie I never came across woodcock any further east than near Rasht on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea.

Anyway, back to the Himalayas, Mussoorie to be precise I enjoyed the trip in spite of not seeing, let alone shooting, the so called 'Bharafani Murgi',,. I parted company with Lall Bahudar after making a provisional programme, all being well for the winter of 1945, but this time I wanted to penetrate the mountains north of Mussoorie, so he should try obtaining relevant information about the 'Bharafani Murgi.'

According to plan, we set off north in the first week of January. The start of the journey was absurd but necessary, in as much that he had to lose altitude straight away by descending from 7,000 ft to about 5,000 only to start again up another

Photo: Jean Howman

Himalayan snowcock

mountain which would link us to the area where the 'murgies' were to be found. Of course, in the vernacular this could mean anything from Kalij, Koklass, Cheer or Monal, though one robust chap did mention a specific name 'Bharafano Murgi' which meant fowl belonging to the perennial snowy ranges, in other words the same as sharafan.

A few stopovers in the lower ranges, we saved on our rations by eating with the locals, albeit snow pigeon and pheasants being our contribution. Having ascertained the locality as to where we would encounter the 'Bharafano Murgi' we moved upwards and onwards, our progress being hampered by deeper and rugged terrain. Nothing can be more disheartening than coming to the end of one's endurance and not accomplishing your mission. Yes, I did embrace those mountains I was obsessed with, but I failed to see the quarry. Perhaps it was a myth as far as I was concerned!

We were in harsh conditions, unable to live off the land so there was no alternative other than return to the lower regions to lap up the comfort offered by villages which was a treat compared with a cave or any sheltered place. Looking back at the snow, we followed a track down a ridge, the river Jumna to be seen entering a basin. It was late afternoon when we arrived at a village near Kempti Fall where we decided to spend the night.

On the opposite side of the valley stood enormous precipitous golden coloured cliffs shared alike by griffin vultures, eagles and honey bees, their hives the largest I've ever seen, at least 6 ft long hanging from sheltered inaccessible places. At the base of these cliffs the jungle was dense. Kalij pheasants, drongos, shrikes, bulbuls and a kingfisher objected to a panther sitting at the top of a large rock, slowly waving its long tail as if proclaiming itself boss of the territory. So it should, because it was out of the tiger jurisdiction.

I was awakened by the noise of barking dogs, bellowing cattle, humans coughing, children crying, all the characteristics of a flourishing village, so different to the ones we had left behind at much higher altitudes. However, once again we started climbing at a leisurely pace up to Mussoorie, passing Charleville, the Band Stand then down to King Craig, the bus terminus where after paying off Lall Bahudar I boarded a bus to Dehra Dun and onwards to Roorkee, regrettably without the 'Bharafano/Bharafani Murgi.'

While posted at Rawalpindi in 1951, I was introduced to a Pathan dignitary from Abbottabad (North West Frontier Province). When he came to know I was interested in shooting he enquired as to whether I'd shot 'Pharrer'? The word intrigued me, questions followed at the end of which my thoughts went back to link this bird with the unseen 'Bharafani/Bharafano Murgi'" . The discription given was vague, though the sexes looked alike, the female being the smaller and the birds would be found below the snowline in extremely treacherous and precipitous terrain.

Arrangements made, the journey commenced by car, followed by a horrendous Willy's Jeep trip, most of it in four wheel drive up a very narrow stony road, more

adaptable to beasts of burden than vehicular traffic. However, the day-long Jeep journey eventually ended at the Naran Rest House, situated in a picturesque valley with the river Yanhar roaring through.

On previous adventures, foot slogging was the order of the day or days, whereas in this case four wheels had done the work. Meeting the guide he pointed to the area immediately above the rest house where the 'pharrer' was to be found. Looking up at this almost perpendicular mountain was forbidding to say the least. The guide gave me a rough idea of our ascent, at first through the firs which looked comparatively easy or so I thought until early next morning when the steep climbing commenced! Clearing the tree line the terrain presented an unseen hazard, the surface of the rocks were coated with ice. One couldn't take risks. A fall in most places would mean dropping hundreds if not thousands of feet, especially when crossing glaciers. A few terrifying moments almost forced me to abandon my interest in this bird until the guide, Aslam, attracted my attention to a covey of 'pharrer' feeding amongst the rocks about 200 yards away. From that distance I couldn't identify them, but they were large buff coloured birds.

I cautiously crossed a ridge while Aslam climbed above me from where he signalled me to go forward, easier signalled than done. Enthusiasm overruled fear. I went forward and it was not before long these birds started to zoom down widely separated and out of range. I guess it was the last bird or two which rocketed down about 30 yards away at which I fired both barrels. A definite hit because the bird lost a few feathers before disappearing down the steep mountainside.

To my delight we eventually retrieved the bird I'd shot many hundred yards below. It had lost a lot of its plumage on impact before finally coming to rest amongst a landslide of rocks. Handling the bird which resembled a giant chukor, I was still unable to identify it, for the present at least, other than belonging to the galliformes.

Back in civilisation I was able to consult a book on the game birds of India and identified the 'pharrer' as the Himalayan snowcock. Sod's Law, if I may use the term. In the past I'd tried unsuccessfully in the Himalayas to encounter the 'Bharafani/Bharafano Murgi' whereas now, here in the Karakoram mountains, I shoot the Himalayan snowcock and what's more, after miles and miles of foot slogging over unhospitable terrain, I eventually fired two shots at these elusive birds!

Hard hit by angina for over ten years, I gave up shooting, and almost the habit of living. A by-pass operation, however, gave me a somewhat new lease of life for which I'm very thankful. I returned to see Mussoorie 40 years later, managed to climb up the track to the Cottage Hospital and stood on the same rock from where I'd gazed across to those mountains always clad in satin robes. Now reminiscing with sadness, I faced reality, thinking to myself, yes, those mountains are forever out of my reach. Unlike us, they will never grow old.

Himalayan snow partridge

Al Lee

Mr Rohil Nana, big game hunter and conservationist, surprised me one day, when I received beautiful photographs of a rare and elusive bird, the Himalayan snow partridge *Lerwa lerwa*. I really couldn't believe my eyes, for we only hear and learn of this bird in the Western Himalayas and very rarely see it. The story of the Snow partridge coming into captivity is as follows.

Photos: Rohil Nana

Himalayan Snow partridge in well landscaped aviary.

In the summer of 1994, a Pakistani army officer, stationed in the Northern Areas managed to acquire a pair of young Snow partridges, which still had signs of reddish brown specks on their backs, a clear indication of being juvenile birds. They were trapped in the Hunza Valley at an elevation between 12-13,000 feet. The birds were later brought down all the way from the Hunza Valley to Abbotabad (a semi hill resort situated in the foothills of the Western Himalayas) and given to Rohil Nana.

Soon after their arrival, these birds were put in a planted aviary and it did not take them long to settle down. However, after a few weeks, one of the birds got sick and did not recover. Fortunately, the other survived and did very well. It soon became a favourite pet of the family, often let out in the garden to look for some natural food and became very tame and friendly.

Most mornings it would call at short intervals over a period of half to three quarters of an hour, slightly reminiscent of a Pariah kite *Milvus migrans* heard from a distance, but more musical. It was fed mainly on bajra (local millet seed). Green barseem *Trifotien* spp. was made available nearly daily. When it was loose on the lawn, it ate various greens and looked for insects.

A year passed by, then suddenly it developed a foot infection which could probably have been bumble foot. In spite of all the love and treatment given, the poor bird eventually died.

Dr T J Roberts, renowned naturalist of Pakistan, has emphasized in his book *The Birds of Pakistan* that the Snow partridge's habitat is from the Hazara District of NWFP extending eastwards towards India and Nepal. In Pakistan, it occurs in the Northern Regions of the Hunza Valley. There are reliable sightings of this bird in the Shimsal Valley and the Khunjerab National Park where it is found even at an elevation of 17,000 feet in the summer, sharing a habitat of steep rock strewn slopes with the Himalayan snow cock Ram Chukor. It has also been discovered above Ram Lake on the flanks of Nanga Parbat and in parts of the Kaghan Valley and the Safed Koh range, above Para Chinar at an elevation between 11-14,000 feet. In the wild their natural diet consists mainly of lichens, moss, vegetables shoots and some grit.

According to Dr Roberts these birds, when encountered, can be ridiculously tame which often gives away the presence of their nests with the result their eggs are regularly robbed by Gujar shepherds. Sadly because of their friendly characteristics, in the past hunters have even managed to bag every bird in a covey which is most unfortunate.

Due to their inaccessible habitat, few people have encountered these beautiful birds in the Western Himalayas. Thanks to Rohil, we are delighted to be able to visualize and see these beautiful Snow partridges on camera and grateful to know that we still have some of these pretty birds in Pakistan.

Tibetan partridges breeding in Ladakh, India

Col R T Chacko (Ret'd)

Reproduced from the Newsletter of the Partridge, Quail and Francolin Specialist Group Issue 8, Autumn 1996

The Tibetan partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae* is distinctive among all the species of birds that breed in Ladakh, which has a common border with Tibet. This area is located in the North-Eastern part of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) State, India. Any ornithologist would love to see these birds in their breeding grounds in those remote high altitude areas of Ladakh, but with the difficulties in reaching the area due to the harsh terrain and weather, poor communications, difficult logistics and the restrictions on entry into and movement with the High Altitude Cold Desert Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary in Ladakh, it remains only a dream to many of them.

Tibetan partridge nest and chick.

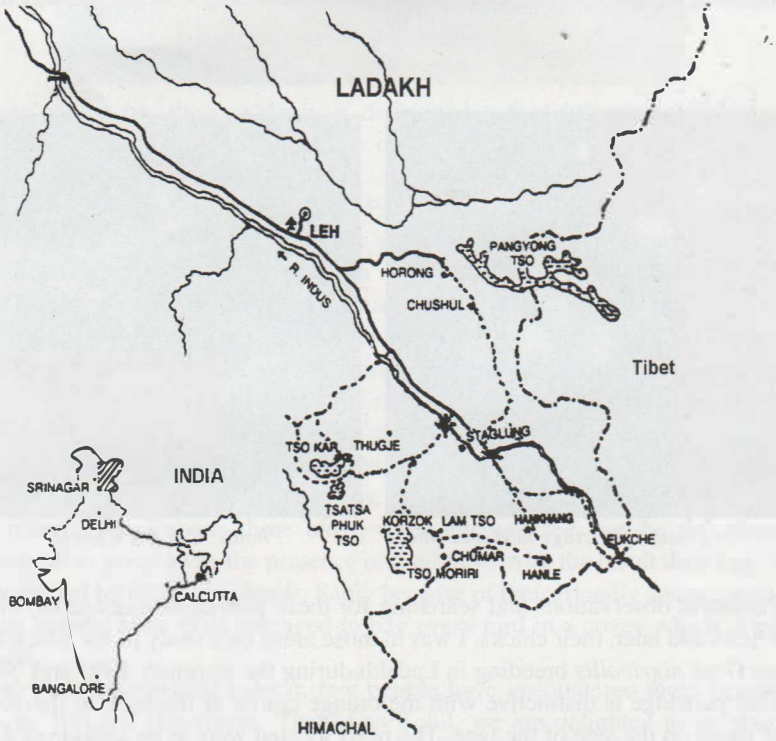
Photos: Col R T Chacko

Persistent observations and searching for these partridges enabled me to locate their nests and later, their chicks. I was in those areas on a study of the Black-necked cranes *Grus nigricollis* breeding in Ladakh during the summers 1995 and '96.

This partridge is distinctive with the orange colour at the back of the neck and white patch on the side of the face. The nests located were at an altitude of 4,400m, slightly away from the track joining Hanle to Chumur (see map). Five breeding pairs

were sighted. These birds being very shy, they quickly disappear behind the Caragana pigmea bushes. In Ladakh, they nested under these bushes. Nests are usually small cups on the ground with a few dry blades of grass and well hidden. All the nests located were fairly close to small flowing streams.

Their eggs were seen during July and one clutch had eight eggs. After hatching, the chicks follow their parents and stay together as a family group. If a human or any predator approaches the brood, the parents give continuous alarm calls and run in different directions to hide behind Caragana bushes or run up the stony hillsides. Some chicks follow their parents and others scatter and hide themselves among the bushes or among the stones. As they remain absolutely still, it was very difficult for anyone to chase them up the hill because of the altitude and lack of oxygen in the air. The chicks remain still and silent, even if one goes near them, till they hear an 'all clear' call from their parents. Then they get together. Human activities like road building and livestock grazing in these areas are on the increase in the high altitude habitat of the Tibetan partridge. This will have an adverse effect on their population in Ladakh.



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Status and ecology of Black and Grey francolins in agricultural land in the Punjab, Pakistan

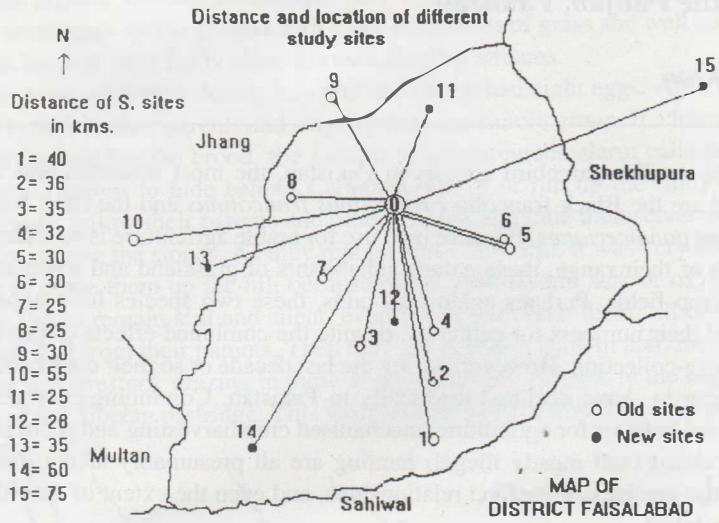
Rashid A Khan

Among the smaller gamebird species in Pakistan, the most abundant and widely distributed are the Black francolin *Francolinus francolinus* and the Grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*. Because land use for arable agriculture is so widespread over much of their range, these natural inhabitants of grassland and scrub are also found in crop fields. Perhaps against all odds, these two species have apparently maintained their numbers for centuries, despite the combined effects of guns, nets, traps and egg-collecting. However, during the last decade or so their distribution and density seem to have declined drastically in Pakistan. Continuing encroachment into marginal habitats for agriculture, mechanised crop harvesting and pesticide use, and unregulated (and mostly illegal) hunting are all presumably taking their toll. However the precise cause-effect relationships, and even the extent of their decline are unresearched.

I started a study investigating some of these problems as my PhD research project at the University of Newcastle (UK), under the supervision of Dr Peter Garson, in late 1994. I have been seconded from my permanent job of teaching wildlife and forestry science at the Agriculture University at Faisalabad in the Punjab Province of Pakistan, so I used my local knowledge to establish 15 study

All photos: Rashid Khan

The author and research associates on a general feasibility survey of an area to be kept as a study site.



sites in intensively farmed areas 20-100 km away from Faisalabad city (31° 20' to 31° 40' N; 73° 5' to 73° 20' E).

During my field season, which runs from spring in March, through the heat of May and June (49°C!) and into the monsoon until September, I estimate the francolin populations in each study area with the help of two colleagues, using three techniques: 'stripping' areas using three pointer dogs, locating calling positions just after dawn and before dusk, and counting undisturbed birds out feeding in the morning. Dog flushing counts are repeated in March to obtain adult breeding numbers, and in August to estimate breeding output through chick counts. Nests are located with the help of local farmers to observe clutch size, nest structure and specific nesting microhabitats. Habitat mapping is made very easy (for a change!) by the fact that crop lands in this area are precisely divided and marked on completely flat ground as a grid of individual acres (0.39 ha). Thus it is simple to assign areas to particular types of crop in all seasons and to map all marginal and uncultivated areas. In the 1996 season I also collected sweep net samples of invertebrates and faecal samples from roosts, so that I could assess the abundance of main items of chick diet. I am also keeping records of all pesticide applications by interviewing the farmers, and collecting what data I can on shooter's bags and

The Black francolin nest with egg shells placed in centre of sirkanda tussock grass. It is the most commonly used nesting cover.

poacher's netting performance. Daily, we face scorching heat (or heavy rain!), muddy tracks and trails, poisonous snakes and wild boar during the course of this work. Confronting poachers with guns can also be dangerous, and once we had all our watches and money snatched whilst returning at night after a long day in the field finishing with a dusk call count.

These two francolin species seem to have somewhat distinct habits and habitat associations. The Black francolin typically roosts on the ground and frequents moist areas dominated by mesquite shrubs *Prosopis juliflora*, tall sirkanda grass tussocks *Saccharum*, reeds *Typha* and shorter dhab grass swards *Desmostachya*, all normally in the marginal corners amongst the cultivated fields. The males start calling before I arrive in the field areas in spring, and have a marked chorus at dawn with a lesser one just before dusk. I have found most nests in sirkanda clumps and hidden in dhab cover a little off the ground, which may protect them from flooding. On one very hot day in July 1996, I flushed a female from her nest and found the eggs and nest lining to be wet: incubating females may be visiting water sources to wet their breast feathers in order to cool the nest contents, it seems. The male takes no part in nesting attempts and local people have described observations suggesting that some birds may pair with a second female nearby and become polygamous.

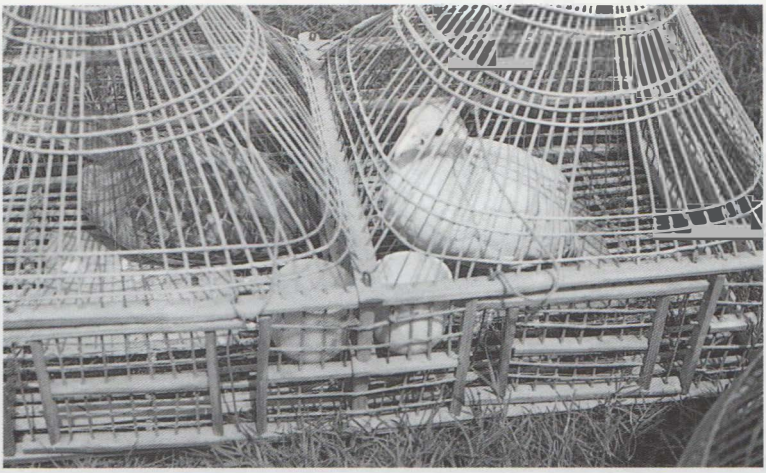
The Grey francolin roosts in trees but is less specialised in terms of habitat use. It uses drier areas of mesquite scrub, jujuba *Zizyphus*, sirkanda and jawhan shrubs

Suaeda, again in a small scale mosaic within farm crops. These birds start calling in the half light of dawn and continue sporadically all day, and for most of the year, also calling later in the evening than Black francolins as they go to roost for the night. This species can probably breed in all months of the year, but the majority of attempts are made in March-September. The pair bond is stronger than in the Black francolin, with both sexes incubating and looking after the brood even after fledging, when familes feed and roost together.

Radio tagged Grey francolins (male and female) ready to be released for an experiment on habitat utilization analysis.

In early May 1996 I was able to fit necklace radiotags to both members of a pair of Grey francolins, thanks to Dr Aleem Chaudhury (Punjab Wildlife Research and Training Centre) who provided the equipment. For 12 days in June, after the pair had reared a brood of five chicks, their positions were recorded on a grid map by triangulation, with four observations daily between 0600 and 1800 h. These observations will be analysed to determine habitat preferences of this covey within their home range of 22 acres (8.6 ha).

My count data indicate that dawn call counts for both species provide quite a precise index of breeding numbers, with strong correlations against total counts made using the dogs on the same morning. Call counts require an early arrival in the study site, but they are a quicker (and cooler!) way of collecting census information. Late summer counts and observations indicate the pattern of chick mortality. I have yet to process my data on habitat distribution in the search for relationships with densities of either francolin species, but hope to present my findings at the International Symposium in Malaysia next year, just after completing my third and final field season.



Grey francolin with an albino grey companion in a specific bamboo cage used to keep the pet birds.

On the basis of two years in the field, some other general points have emerged:

- In 1995-96 across all 15 study sites, nearly 50 acres (>3% of the total 1,550 acres) have been cleared of scrub and/or converted to crop land, indicating how severe the problem of habitat removal and degradation is for these birds.
- Monocultures of crops like cotton, rice and vegetables evidently require heavy use of pesticides and herbicides, although the effects of this on francolins is not known.
- Good prices exist for live francolin chicks and adults, which are kept as pets, used in calling and fighting competitions, employed as decoys by hunters with guns, and eaten. Thus illegal netting continues throughout the year.
- The licensed shooting season (15 October - 30 February) is too long, especially for the Grey francolin which can breed during this period; illegal gun hunting is common both in and out of season, and the Wildlife Department does not have the capacity to police this.
- Large scale harvesting of wheat crops in April and May causes nesting losses.

I thank Dr Aleem Chaudhury for help with the fieldwork programme, and also Brigadier Mukhtar Amhed and Dr Ejaz Ahmad of WWF-Pakistan for helping me to secure financial support for this project. This work is only made possible through my tenure of a Central Overseas Training Scholarship from the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan.

Dept. of Agricultural and Environmental Science, Ridley Building, University of Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK.

Notes and News

Cabot's tragopan

Radio-tagged Cabot's tragopan nests in the Cryptomeria *tree.*

Ding Chang-qing writes: "This female Cabot's tragopan is the first radio-tagged bird that also successfully bred in the wild. She reared three broods successfully during the years I worked in Wuyanling from 1990 to 1993. We learnt from her that Cabot's do not only nest in the broadleaf forest but also will nest in the commercial *Cryptomeria cryptomeria fortunei* wood of the mixed broadleaf-conifer forest. We found 12 nests in that kind of habitat later. We learnt too from her that Cabot's can renest if the first nest is lost in the early period of incubation. We obtained from her literally a whole year's information about the female Cabot's (including the hatching of chicks) and contributed so much to our knowledge of the wild Cabot's tragopan."

Juvenile Malleefowl fail to survive

Reproduced from the Avicultural Magazine, Volume 102, No 2 1996

Captive-reared three to five months-old Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata* failed to survive beyond 104 days when experimentally released into Yathong Nature Reserve, NSW. The principal cause of mortality was predation by the introduced red fox. It accounted for at least 50% and may have accounted for as high as 92%. Twelve older Malleefowl released into the reserve fared better - three of them survived beyond 15 months. Foxes, habitat clearance and fragmentation, habitat degeneration and changes to fire regimes are considered to be the main

causes of the overall decline of this species. Details of the experiment were published in *Emu*, Vol. 96:32-41.

International summer school Edinburgh Zoo 7-18 July 1997

If you would like further information please contact Hamish Macandrew, UnivEd Technologies Ltd, UnivEd Training & Conference Centre, 11 South College Street, Edinburgh EH8 9AA, Scotland, UK.

1996 Bhutan tour

The following quote from Ben King on his 1996 tour to Bhutan may whet the appetite of members for his 1997 tour.

"A loud goat-like sound issued from the forest about 150 yards ahead - Satyr tragopan! I gathered the tour group about me and pondered. Because there was little vegetation on the forest floor, we could probably get a look at the bird by walking toward it and spooking it. On the other hand, if he were responsive to the tape, we might get a better view. After a bit of mental anguish, I played the tape once. The tragopan answered. I waited, then played the tape once more. Another answer. This went on for about five minutes, as we scanned the area. Suddenly we saw the tragopan running down a nearly horizontal tree trunk. For a few moments there was panic on the part of those who missed that brief glimpse. Where is he? Where is he going? Soon it became clear that the tragopan was walking directly toward us at a deliberate pace. As he got closer, the amount of time he spent in the open increased and everyone locked on. Closer and closer, this unbelievably spectacular fiery red pheasant came, eliciting gasps from all of us. As he neared us he veered upslope and passed just 20 feet away, pausing long enough to stop and give his call while facing us, before walking away. We were beside ourselves. This was only the second day of the tour and yesterday we'd had superb views of several Ibisbills. "

For further information on this and other tours please contact King Bird Tours Inc, PO Box 196, Planetarium Station, New York, NY 10024, USA.

Cork tip

Mrs Christine Metcalfe from Argyll contacted WPA concerning Red junglefowl and her own similar looking cockerel. In the course of the conversation, she came up with the following tip for preventing excessive damage to hens by over enthusiastic cock birds when treading them. Fix a wine bottle cork over the spurs secured with a spot of superglue.

Not a bad idea for aggressive cock Reeves pheasants. Ed.

Nutrition of wild and captive wild animals

A joint meeting of The Nutrition Society, The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and British Federation of Zoos is being held at Edinburgh Zoo on

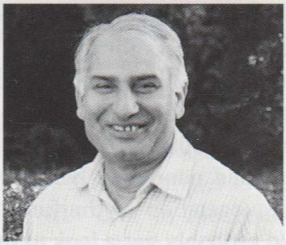
16-18 May 1997. For further information, registration details and guidelines for preparation of abstracts please contact: Mr Rodney Warwick, The Nutrition Society, 10 Cambridge Court, 210 Shepherds Bush Road, London W6 7NJ, UK. Tel: +44 171 602 0228, fax: +44 171 602 1756, e.mail: 100672.2151@compuserve.com.

The Sixth Annual Conference of the South-East Asian Zoological Parks Association (SEAZA) 22-25 October 1996

The Sixth Annual Conference of SEAZA was hosted by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia, Zoo Melaka, the Melaka State Government, and the Malaysian Zoological Parks Association. The conference was attended by 140 delegates representing the following 16 countries and territories: Australia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Netherlands, Laos, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, United States of America, United Kingdom, and Vietnam. The President of SEAZA welcomed all the participants, and he extended special greetings to the Australasian Zoological Parks Association, the Captive Breeding Specialists Group, and the World Pheasant Association. On behalf of all SEAZA members, President Ashari thanked Melaka Zoo for hosting this conference, and he thanked the Organizing Committee for their diligence in making all the Conference arrangements.

SEAZA and the World Pheasant Association signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate in both in-situ and ex-situ measures to preserve biodiversity, particularly of galliforme birds. The cooperation will include forming a Taxon Advisory Group co-chaired by both associations, producing studbooks, conducting workshops and training sessions and other relevant action to improve conservation of the galliformes.

New WWF Pakistan President



Congratulations to Brigadier Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairman of WPA Pakistan on his appointment as President of WWF Pakistan.

Winter tragopan survey - Palas

Guy Duke

We learn from Guy Duke, project coordinator for the Himalayan Jungle Project Palas that Rob Whale, who has been based at Dhodial pheasantry since 1995, and has been carrying out pheasant surveys throughout NWFP this

year, has just completed c.20 days in Palas. His survey team has focused on the core breeding area of Kabkot and the warmer south-facing slopes across the Musha'ga (as recommended by last year's team, see **WPA News** 51).

Facing much less severe winter conditions than last year's team, they managed, with just one dog, to flush c.70 tragopans, all on the south-facing slopes. Some birds were flushed within a few minutes' walk of settlements and Rob thinks he could have flushed 200 tragopans given three dogs. The team did not flush a single tragopan in Kabkot despite several days there. This seems to confirm a wholesale seasonal migration of tragopans from the breeding areas south of the Musha'ga to the warmer slopes north of the Musha'ga in winter. This has significant implications for forest management in Palas. A full report will be published in the next issue of **WPA News**.

Book Reviews

A Natural History of the Pheasant - Peter Robertson

Published by Swan Hill Press
ISBN 1 85310 564 3
Available from mid-March

Pheasants are different things to different people to hunters they are a bird to respect for their quality as a quarry species, they are the livelihood of countless gamekeepers and managers; to bird watchers they are often an unwelcome, alien intrusion into the countryside; to biologists they are a fascinating bird in their own right. Whatever ones starting point they are a hard bird to ignore, and one that has had a real impact on the way that farmland is managed throughout large areas of Europe and North America.

A Natural History of the Pheasant is an in-depth study of the bird, its habits, territories, breeding and management. The author believes that instead of seeing pheasants in a British woodland as a different bird from those living wild in China or on the open plains of Kansas, that it is far more interesting to try and understand why the same bird should behave differently in each area. In fact, they are not different species, they have just adapted and, in the meantime, given us a valuable insight into what is important for them.

In the spring of 1995, Peter Robertson finished 12 years work on pheasants, a fair proportion of his life devoted to the study of one species of bird. He came to pheasants purely by chance when during the final part of his degree at the University of Reading he had an interview with Professor Gwylym Evans from University College Dublin. He offered Peter the chance to start a doctorate 'either on pheasants or rats, we're not sure which we'll get the money for.' The money for rats did not come through.

Available from WPA HQ, price £24.95 plus £2.49 p&p.

The Wood Duck and the Mandarin - Lawton Schurtleff and Christopher Savage

Published by University of California Press ISBN 0 520 20812 9

WPA's first Chairman, Christopher Savage, has co-authored this beautifully produced new book, which is excuse enough for it to be reviewed in these pages. Christopher's first book was on the Mandarin duck and is a book that has stood the test of time. He began his researches some 40 years ago and he has joined forces with great success with Lawton L Schurtleff.

The photographs are in most cases, quite stunning and help to make the very lucid text a very easy read. This is a book that has had a long incubation period as is evidenced by the introduction by the late Sir Peter Scott who wrote of it "The two authors aspire to achieve the preservation of these two species in the wilds of their native habitat for the joy of future generations of mankind. This is by no meams a forlorn hope, as the authors show. Their magnificent colour photography enables the reader to share the spectacular beauty and lifestyle of these two birds. They have also brought together a wonderful collection of cultural and biological interest".

The long incubation period has certainly not done any harm - indeed the trouble taken in the layout and quality of design of this publication is clear to see. A quite beautiful and comprehensively informative book which will both enhance the coffee table and requite the thirst for knowledge on these species of even the most ardent Wood duck fanatic.

Available from WPA HQ, price £ plus £28.00 plus £2.80 p&p.

The Gamebirds of China: their distribution and status - Li Xiangtao

Published by International Academic Publishers ISBN 7 80003 366 X

Written by Li Xiangtao the author of two detailed booklets on the Temminck's tragopan and the Brown eared-pheasant, this new book provides a valuable background to the gamebirds of China.

China is home to no less than 61 species and 81 subspecies of gamebirds including grouse, quail, partridge, francolin, snowcock, tragopans and other pheasants. This is over one fifth of the world's total number of species.

The book provides a baseline of information on the current distribution and abundance of all species. It is illustrated with 63 distribution maps and numerous line drawings. Li Xiangtao and International Academic Publishers are to be congratulated on their production of the useful reference book.

WPA have specially imported copies of The Gamebirds of China which will be available from WPA HQ, price £24.95 plus £2.49 p&p.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Editor,

Lady Amherst pheasants in Yunnan, China

In September-October 1996 I was a member of a botanical expedition to Yunnan where we spent five very productive weeks. We were guests of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and were working with scientists from the Kunming Institute of Botany. Our particular quest was to collect seed of species of plants which would be of horticultural value in British and other temperate region gardens. During our 4000 miles of road travel we covered quite a lot of the ground explored by the famous plant-collector George Forest during the early years of this century.

On 26 September, whilst working on the Cangshan Mountains to the west of the old city of Dali (approx 100° W; 26° N) we had a superb view of a cock Lady Amherst pheasant, resplendent in his new season's plumage. He was close to the dirt road, at 2600m (8500 ft) altitude, at the edge of a small stand of *Pinus armandii*. He disappeared before any camera could be brought to bear. The Cangshan held quite a lot of pheasants but all other sightings were very fleeting and one could not be sure of any certain identifications. This sighting is about 70 km NE of the Mekong Valley which marks the SW edge of the known distribution area in Johnsgard.

In tourist areas around the three ancient pagodas at Dali and also at Kunming, we saw small numbers of tail feathers and whole dried skins of cock Lady Amherst's for sale. However, at the tourist stands and shops at the Stone Forest, some 60-70 km ESE of Kunming, I was horrified to see literally hundreds to a few thousand cock Lady Amherst tail feathers for sale. The Stone Forest is a spectacular area of karst limestone formations which are renowned throughout China and this is a major

tourist area for affluent Chinese from all over the country, as well as for more local visitors from Kunming and elsewhere in Yunnan. It is inundated with visitors essentially every day of the year and the sale of tourist goods is potentially huge.

The area is home to the Li, one of the many ethnic minority peoples to be found in Yunnan. The colourful native dress of the Li includes for the men a headband proudly sporting several cock Lady Amherst feathers. Guides, dressed in native costume show one around the marvels of the area and many tourists queue up to be photographed wearing the colourful headdress and clothing. The many tourist shops and stalls nearly all have pots full of Lady Amherst tail feathers for sale. On site at any one time there must literally be thousands of tail feathers. What the annual sale of tail feathers might be, I have no idea.

One is prompted obviously to express concern. Are these tail feathers all gathered from wild cock birds and if so, does this involve killing of the birds or are moulted feathers collected? A worst case would lead one to conclude that hundreds to several thousand cock Lady Amherst's might be being killed every year. Would our colleagues from WPA China be able to answer these questions and more importantly to tell us about the conservation status of this beautiful pheasant?

David J J Kinsman

Perhaps one of our friends in China could comment on this letter. Ed.

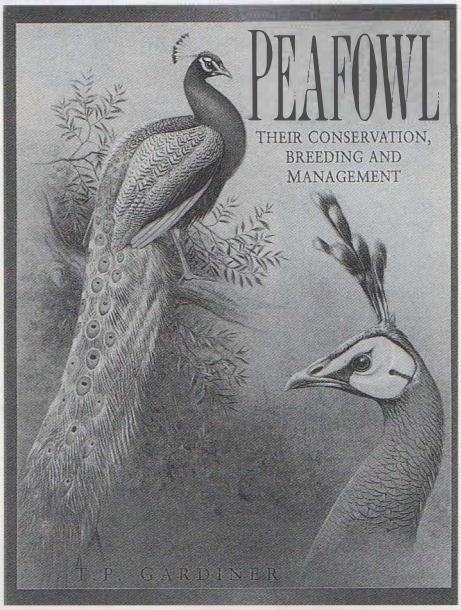
OBITUARY

Martin H Moynihan 1928-1996

Many members will remember the summary of the researches made by Martin Moynihan into the Reeves pheasant in France which appeared in **WPA News** 50. We were saddened to learn from Ira Rubinoff, Director of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute that he died in Albi, France on 3 December 1996.

Ira Rubinoff writes "Martin eschewed public recognition of his achievements and chose not to have a party in his honor when he formally retired from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in 1994. On that occasion, I put down some of my thoughts and recollections about his career as a scientist and administrator to share with a larger community and express my appreciation of Martin for his vision and leadership.

Evolutionary biology and classical ethology owe much to Martin's research. He was indefatigable in his efforts to promote comparative studies of tropical organisms around the world. All of us who knew him will greatly miss him."



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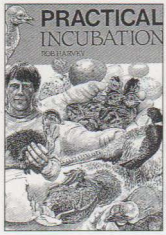

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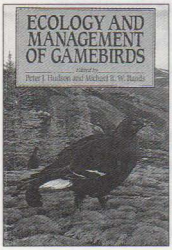

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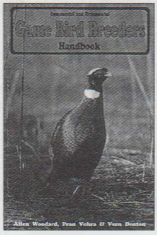

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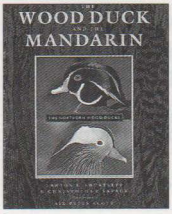

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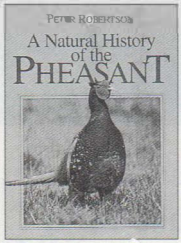

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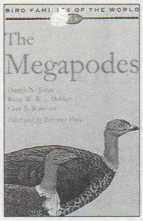

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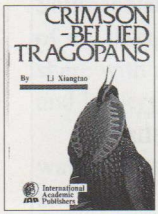

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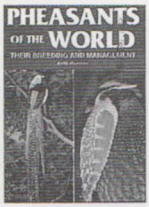

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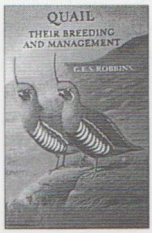

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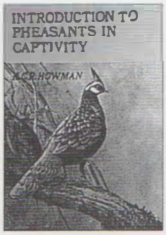

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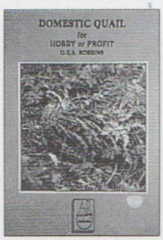

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