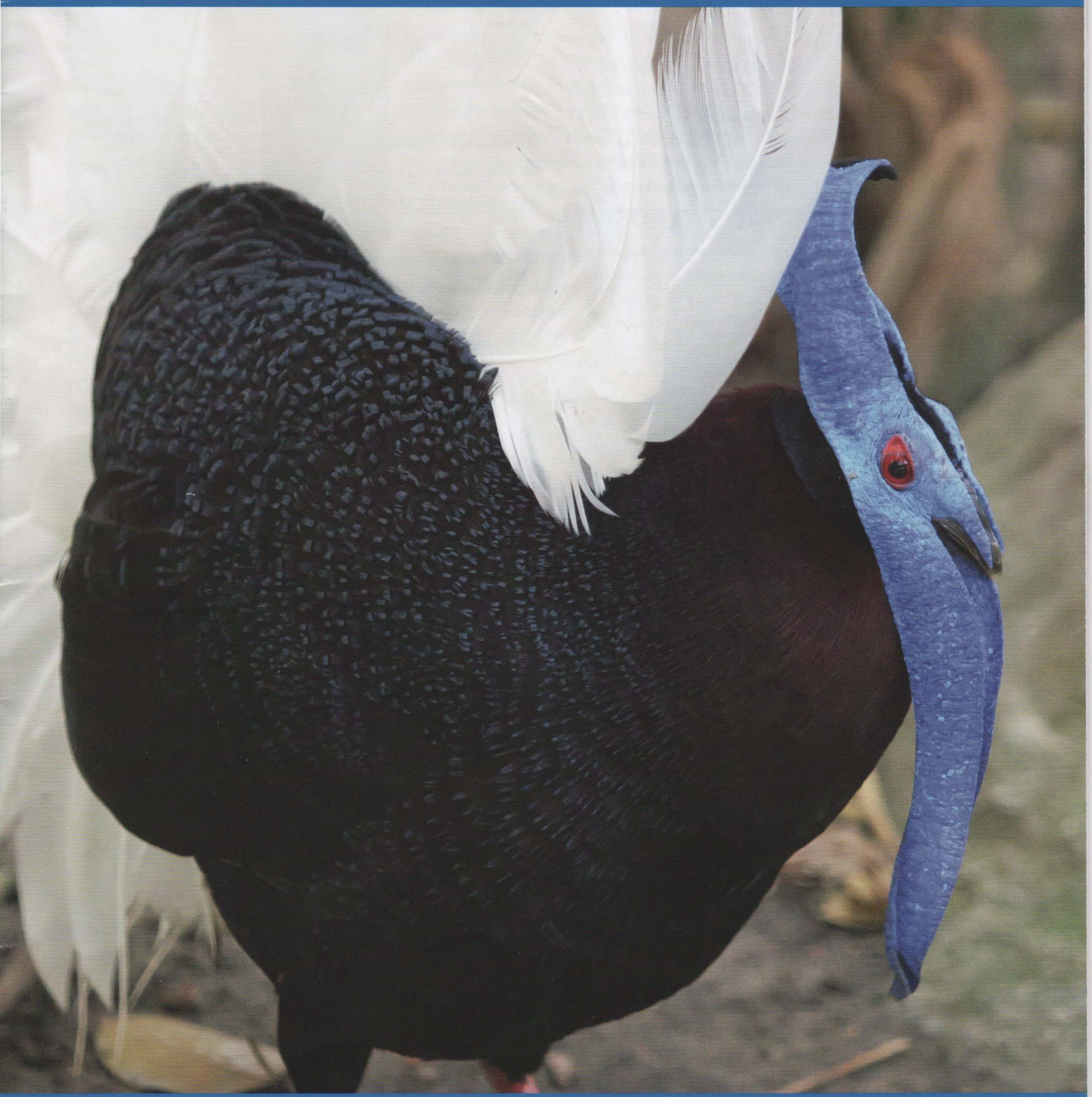
Spring 2018

WPA News 105 (2018)

World Pheasant Association

WPA news

The International Newsletter of the World Pheasant Association Number 105 Spring 2018



World Pheasant Association Middle, Ninebanks, Hexham, Northumberland, NE47 8DL, UK

Tel: 01434 345526 **Email:** office@pheasant.org.uk **www.pheasant.org.uk**

Registered Charity No 271203

FRONT COVER:

The front cover depicts a male Bulwer's pheasant and was photographed by Charles Alexander. Little-studied in the wild, Bulwer's pheasant populations on Borneo are believed to be fragmented and declining, thanks to recent widespread habitat destruction. An article on Bulwer's pheasant is featured on pages 17 - 19.

ECBG MEETING

The WPA Chapter in the Czech Republic are hosting an ECBG meeting in Brno and Olomouc from 12th to 14th October 2018. International participants should come on 11th October. The ECBG meeting will take place in Brno on Friday 12th October. There will be lectures in Olomouc on 13th October. Further information will be available on the website or from the office in due course.

WPA INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

WPA's 7th International Galliformes Symposium will take place in Vietnam in the second half of September 2019. Our colleagues at VietNature Conservation will be our hosts and they propose staging the symposium in Dong Hoi. Dong Hoi is a coastal city in central Vietnam's Quang Binh Province and is one of the four provinces where Edwards's Pheasant was originally found.

The first conservation breeding aviaries for the Edwards's Pheasant reintroduction programme will be sited at Le Thuy, about an hour south of Dong Hoi, and they can be visited during the symposium. There are also plans to visit the nearby Khe Nuoc Trong National Nature Reserve, where a number of very rare species are to be found and where the first Edwards's Pheasant reintroduction is planned to take place.

Pre-symposium visits to Hanoi and Halong Bay are being developed, and cultural and wildlife post-symposium tours are also planned. More details will follow in the next WPA News.

WPA COMMITTTEES

Conservation Breeding Advisory Group (CBAG)

Chairman	Billy Wilson
Vice-Chairman	Stuart Wilson
Treasurer	Nigel Hester
Secretary	Tim Lovel

Keith Chalmers-Watson	Jimmy Reekie	Belinda Moyle
Gary Robbins	Ian Elvin	Paul North
Robert Wilding	Will Harrison	Gavin Harrison

European Conservation and Breeding Group (ECBG)

Austria	Manfred Prasch	Franz Prisching	Thomas Lifka
Benelux	Ludo Pinceel	Paulo Raeymaekers	
	Frederic Verstappen		
Czech Republic & Slovakia	George Mrnka		
France	Alain Hannache	Laurent Fontaine	Bernard Giboin
	Edouard Jelen		
Germany	Reinhold Bauer	Siro Serena	
	Heiner Jacken	Bernard Marcordes	
Poland	Marcin Chrapowicki	Karol Sepielak	
UK	Nigel Hester	Tim Lovel	
	John Corder (Chairman)	Keith Chalmers-Watson	

Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

Tim Bray	Brian Bertram	Ian Clark
Ludo Pinceel	Nick Sotherton	David Baines
Alain Hennache	Edouard Jelen	Rahul Kaul
Roland Wirth	Prof Zhang Zhengwang	

MEMBERSHIP RATES

	UK	Non-UK
Individual	£ 30	£ 35
Junior	£ 15	£ 17.50
Family	£ 60	£ 70
Corporate	£ 120	£ 120
Supported	£ 30	£ 30
Life Membership, single payment	£ 600	£ 700

DIARY DATES

Convention in Krakow, Poland	27- 28 April 2018
Compton Manor Charity Clay Shoot	11 May 2018
Dunkeld Charity Clay Shoot	19 May 2018
Scottish Game Fair	29 June- 1 July 2018
Simulated Charity Clay Shoot	4 July 2018
WPA Germany 40th Anniversary Convention, Walsrode	31 August- 2 September 2018
WPA AGM & Convention Chester Zoo	8 September 2018
40th Anniversary WPA Nepal Trek	November 2018
CBAG Avicultural Weekend	2 February 2019

More details on events can be found on the WPA website www.pheasant.org/news.asp or contact the office on office@pheasant.org

Copy Dates

The next issue of WPA News will be produced in July 2018. Articles, stories, letters and adverts for consideration for publication should be with the Office by the end of May 2018.

Articles printed in WPA News may not necessarily represent the views of the World Pheasant Association

NOTES FROM THE CHAIRMAN

These notes are written during the week following our most successful weekend for many years at Burford organised by our Conservation Breeding Advisory Group. The meeting was attended by 50 members and guests and the programme contained something for everyone. Of particular note was the one-hour long question and answer session that generated a great deal of interest.

We received from Tim Bray the results of the recent blood tests on the mountain and Malay peacock pheasant project. We were all delighted to learn that the samples submitted from non-studbook birds of both species did not contain an impurity. This means that the mountain and Malay peacock pheasants in four European collections may now be included in the new studbook, almost doubling its size!

A surprise announcement excited many members. Ian Crutchley raised the subject of a hand held DNA sequencer that can be programmed for a particular species where benchmarks already exist. It allows analysis in the field to establish purity or hybridity in up to ten individual samples. This machine is technically a little way off, but I have asked some members of the Scientific Advisory Committee to appraise it.

This year we were joined in Burford by Dezsö Naszáli from Hungary who had been invited by John Corder following his recent visit to that country. Dezsö confirmed there is great enthusiasm to form WPA Hungary and that he will bring five more pheasant breeders to Poland for the European Conservation Breeding Group meeting and convention, organised by WPA Poland. The date is 27 to 29 April and all members are welcome. Please contact Barbara Ingman at the WPA Office if a trip to Krakow is of interest. Details of the proposed programme are also on our website.

Council has decided we would be very keen to hold our next symposium in Vietnam in 2020 and John Corder has volunteered to visit the country and explore opportunities. John has appointments to meet senior officials from the Quang Binh Province early in March and will be accompanied by Pham Tuan Anh from VietNature. Quang Binh is one of the four provinces where Edwards's pheasant was formerly found and will also be the location of the first aviary complex for the reintroduction breeding programme. We hope that the very complicated documentation for transferring the ownership of the breeding centre land to VietNature will have been completed by the time of John's visit, and that aviary construction can then commence.

John will then go on to Fengtongzhai in China where the programme to improve the conservation breeding opportunities for the Chinese monal have recently been given a very high priority by the Sichuan Government. The world-famous Chengdu Panda Base has now been given some responsibilities and, with its immense scientific and financial resources, hopefully will help to shed more light on the breeding of this species. Our esteemed WPA Vice President Prof Zhang Zhengwang has been appointed as one of the Directors of the Breeding Centre, and Zhang Jing and John have also been given advisory roles.

On 8 September we plan to hold our AGM and convention at Chester Zoo where Simon Dowell, a long-standing friend of WPA who is now Science Director at the zoo, will address us. Simon is also Co-Chair of the Galliformes Specialist Group. On this occasion we shall have a report on one of our most successful conservation projects. This is the maleo, which is Sulawesi's mascot bird. WPA has given funds to meet the costs of providing 'nest guardians' in order to protect over 2000 maleo chicks over the next three years.

May I take this opportunity of wishing every success this coming season to all our members who breed galliformes.

Keith Chalmers-Watson

8 February 2018

BRIGHT SEEDS CONTINUED SUPPORT

Emma Zeale

Since 2016 WPA has been sponsored by Bright Seeds and have benefitted from the sales of the dual-purpose stewardship and game cover crop Pheasant and Finch. Bright Seeds donated £1 for each 25kg bag sold of the mix. The bags for the mix feature the WPA logo on them. In 2017 a total of £852 was donated to WPA from the sale of the seed mix. WPA are extremely grateful for the sponsorship and money raised by Bright Seeds.

Bright Seeds have confirmed that they will continue to support WPA in 2018 through the sales of the Pheasant and Finch mix. WPA would like to thank Bright Seeds for this continuing support.

For more information on the products and company, please visit the Bright Seeds website: www.brightseeds.co.uk

Left: Pheasant and Finch seed mix with WPA logo

CBAG WEEKEND

Paul North

The Conservation Breeding Advisory Group (CBAG) held its annual meeting for the eleventh consecutive year at the Cotswold Wildlife Park in Oxfordshire. The event was held over the first weekend of the month of February, a weekend that in the past has seen some severe winter weather but fortunately not this year.

The weekend began with a social evening in the Gateway Hotel in Burford for those members that had travelled to the Cotswolds on Friday and were staying locally overnight. On Saturday morning some fifty members and friends arrived at the usual meeting room in the Manor House at Cotswold Wildlife Park for coffee and a catch up before the proceedings began at 11am with a welcome by Reggie Heyworth, director of the Cotswold Wildlife Park and acting chairman of CBAG Stuart Wilson. This was followed by a one-minute silence to remember Andrew Sheppy, CBAG chairman who tragically died in an accident on his farm in May. The first presentation entitled 'The History of Breeding the Chinese Monal in Captivity' was given by Zhang Jing from Beijing Zoo and included some excellent photographs and videos of this beautiful bird.

Zhang Jing
Photo: Paul North

Jing began by describing the severe conditions where the bird lives, making it extremely difficult to study in the wild, and to explain the reasons for its endangered status and its protection level in China. There followed a history of its keeping in captivity in China with data from Beijing Zoo and elsewhere, explaining that at present the research centre in Fengtongzhai is the only place having Chinese monals in captivity in the world. We were then given an insight into the status of breeding technology including artificial incubation and rearing, disease, nutrition and systems biology: egg structure, digestive system and genetic research.

Fongtongzhai senior managers training workshop
Photo: Taken from Zhang Zing's presentation

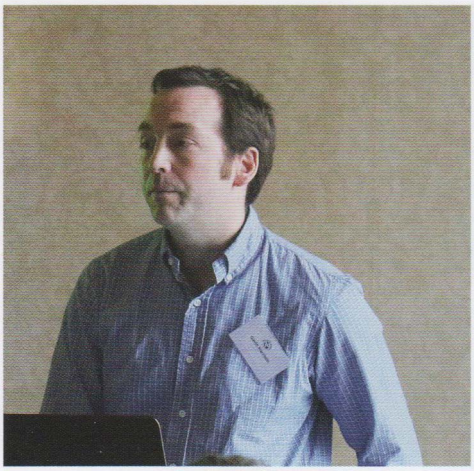
Jing explained the work done at Fengtonzhai that began in 2010 and has included staff training, redesign of the aviaries, technical exchange and workshops, and the establishment of a studbook in 2008 with Jing appointed studbook keeper. DNA testing began in 2010 to help establish relationships between individual birds and a first Chinese monal symposium was held in Chengdu in November 2017. The future conservation program will include regular meetings, field population surveys, introduce new breeding technologies and to continue to improve the ecological aviaries.

The second presentation of the morning was given by Dorset farmer Howard Mason and was entitled 'Grey Partridge conservation/reinforcement'. Howard began with an introduction to his 480-hectare farm that consists of rolling arable land, down land, permanent pasture and water meadow, on which he wanted to increase the numbers of grey partridge. His land is farmed as a wildlife haven with 43 km of hedgerows, 8 hectares of flower rich margins, 13 km of wild flower strips, 13 hectares of winter bird food, 21 km of wild bird strips and 6 hectares of grass margins. Being Initially disappointed with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust approach, and being a shepherd, he decided to apply this knowledge to breeding partridge and explained his journey from making catching pens, sourcing food, egg production, incubation and overcoming a worm problem to successful rearing and release. He is now much nearer to his dream of having a sustainable grey partridge population on his farm.

Grey partridge
Photo: Taken from Howard Mason's presentation

The third presentation of the morning session was given by Gavin Harrison, keeper for the national Trust and the Rothschild Foundation and entitled 'Waddesdon Manor Aviary'. Gavin began with an introduction to the estate. The manor was constructed between 1874 and 1885 for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild and gifted to the National Trust in 1957. The original Aviary dates from 1889 and takes the form of trelliswork pavilions and was fully restored in 2003. Originally the inspiration for Ferdinands paintings, today it is the only historic working aviary and houses the only National Trust's zoo collection.

In 1980 a trained aviculturist was employed and the aviary housed birds from parrots to pheasants on a gravelled floor with very little planting to allow for optimal viewing. It then developed into a modern zoological collection and by the 1990s the interiors were densely planted and conservation breeding was a key aim for a specialised predominantly South East Asian collection of species of conservation concern.



Gavin Harrison
Photo: Paul North

Gavin explained the connection between Ferdinand's second cousin Lionel Walter Rothschild and the Natural History Museum at Tring before going on to describe the galliformes in the collection, the peacock-pheasants in particular. Giving details of their numbers and lineage and how the WPA initiated genetic study had helped to identify pure birds. He explained the husbandry employed using dense aviary planting with high perches to reduce aggression and the inclusion of live food in the diet for the male to offer his mate when displaying. He also explained some initial incubation and hand rearing problems.

Tim Lovel gave the final presentation of the morning session with a talk on the illustrations in Beebe's Monograph. He described how he came to become acquainted with the book and showed and described some of the paintings it contains.

A buffet lunch was enjoyed by all while raffle tickets were sold by Jimmy Reekie and Ian Elvin for a good selection of donated prizes. The raffle raised £200 for CBAG funds. The CBAG Annual General Meeting followed the lunch break, beginning with the treasurer's report from Nigel Hester and followed by the election of officers. Billy Wilson was elected as chairman and the only other change was the election of Will Harrison as a committee member. Nigel Hester and John Corder remain as our representatives at ECBG as before.

The first presentation in the afternoon session was given by John Corder and was entitled 'Update on WPA projects'. John gave a brief background and details of the present status of green peafowl projects in Yunan and in Thailand. Continuing with the ongoing work on Blyth's tragopan in Myanmar and China and adding the latest information about the rearing centre for Edwards's pheasant in Vietnam.

One to one advice over lunch
Photo: Paul North

The next presentation was given by Nigel Hester and was entitled 'Drinkers and Feeders'. Nigel began with several slides of the many, usually brightly coloured, plastic poultry feeders and drinkers suitable for feeding our birds. He then asked the question, 'so why do we need another one?' Nigel explained that most of these drinkers and feeders are designed for either backyard chicken flocks or high intensity game rearing. They are not ideal for use with aviary birds where there may only be a couple of birds per aviary, or indeed for the smaller species of galliformes. He then explained the problems with manual drinkers. He began by saying that clean water is very important to a bird's health and welfare, and that providing fresh water every day is a legal requirement. Keeping the water clean and free from contamination will keep birds in the best condition. The problems with manual drinkers are that most are made from a thin plastic that goes brittle in the cold and UV, cracks, leaks, shatters. The translucent body to gauge water level promotes algal growth. They are labour intensive with cleaning and re-filling. The open cup design is a disease reservoir and transmission medium. Bird's beaks, feet, excreta, wild birds, rodents and slugs easily contaminate the water. Nigel also listed the problems with automatic drinkers as they are prone to possibility of continual leaks and each type needs specific conditions to work correctly. Some types cannot withstand being frozen. Single point failure, could run dry and needs to be checked periodically. They still require cleaning, more so the floor mounted type.

Automatic nipple drinker
Photo: Taken from Nigel Hester's presentation

Nigel continued by showing how to use horizontal nipple drinkers in several different forms. By fitting a horizonal nipple to a plastic container, the bird just needs to knock the spring loaded device whilst drinking from the tongue to get more fresh clean water delivered. Any grit or debris in the water falls to the bottom of the vessel, well away from the nipple so does not cause a malfunction. Nipples can be used from day old and are much more hygienic, both in zero contamination and no spillage to cause wet litter. Warm and wet shavings, full of chick poo and spilt crumb are a wonderful breeding medium for nasties. We then saw a video describing how to assemble the automatic drinker shown in the photo which can be mounted horizontally or vertically. The instructions include the use of a squash ball to prevent damage during freezing. If you need to continually supply water during prolonged cold periods you can put heater elements, like aquarium heaters in the pipe, to prevent freezing and ensure water flow.

Turning to feeder problems, usual hopper feeders sit on the ground and so suffer the same contamination sources as the drinker. Mice are

prolific urinators and will do so all over the accessible feed. Mice will horde several kilograms of wheat in the aviary walls or in tunnels underground. The unnecessarily large feed aperture allows "raking" with either feet or beak to deliver excess food onto the ground. Spilt food is sometimes eaten but some will get wet and turn to mush or go mouldy. Again due to the unnecessarily large feed aperture, much of the exposed feed is never touched, as the birds tend to feed from the same point each time. As such the exposed food simply absorbs moisture and eventually goes mouldy so must be discarded. As with the drinkers, the requirements are much the same, lift off the ground, minimise the aperture, supply on demand, and separate the feed store from the feeding point. One of the options often seen on the continent is to make and use feeders from various diameters and bends of water pipe. These have the disadvantage that the feed orifice is a water trap, this may be all right indoors, and some of the pipefittings can be expensive. A feeder that meets all the requirements can be made using the components shown in the photograph. They are a suitable length of pipe and two end caps and a spiral feeder, a hole cutter will be needed to mount the spiral feeder into one of the end caps and solvent to glue this cap to the tube. This picture shows the completed unit. The feeder can be mounted at a suitable height for the birds and adjusted for size of feed and how much is given by covering the top part of the spiral with duct tape.

Completed pipe feeder
Photo: Taken from Nigel Hester's presentation

Lunchtime discussion
Photo: Paul North

After a break for refreshments there followed a Question and Answer session with a panel of five galliformes aviculturists. This was a new idea that attracted far more questions than the allotted time allowed for. A full report appears on page 11.

The meeting concluded with another of those excellent presentations we have come to expect from Stuart Wilson entitled 'Searching for Grouse in Yosemite National Park' and this is reported in full on pages 6-9.

The meeting came to its conclusion with thanks being expressed to all who took part and to our hosts Cotswold Wildlife Park. Some 30 members attended dinner that evening at the Highway Inn in Burford.

SEARCHING FOR GROUSE IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Stuart Wilson

Yosemite National Park lies about four hours drive from San Francisco, California. A huge park covering over 1200 square miles of the Sierra Nevada Mountain wilderness. It's one of the natural wonders of North America, with scenery made famous by the wonderful black and white images of photographer Ansell Adams. Yosemite Valley with its towering cliffs and waterfalls is engrained in the history of the Wild West. Landmarks such as El Capitan, Half Dome and the vista from the aptly named Inspiration Point have inspired writers and poets around the world and attract sightseers by the million each year.

In October 2017, accompanied by my wife, my sister and her partner, I made a much-anticipated journey to see Yosemite for myself. It did not disappoint. Ansell Adams' images are awe-inspiring but nothing can prepare you for the scale and grandeur of Yosemite.

The weeklong trip had been planned for a year. Lodge accommodation is limited in the centre of the valley and you need to book well in advance. The alternative is to stay outside of the park, but with potential queues at the entrance gate and a long drive in, I did not want to waste an hour each morning in the car.

Author in grouse habitat
Photo: Stuart Wilson

Much better to stay inside the park and be on the hiking trails at dawn when the wildlife is at its most active. Yosemite is famous for its flora and fauna. And when it comes to flora nothing can compare to Yosemite's trees. With three separate groves of giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), the park has some of the widest, tallest and oldest trees in the world.

Bobcat
Photo: Stuart Wilson

This specialised flora brings with it a specialised fauna. Yosemite has a surprising number of rodents. There are over forty species, from the tiniest deer mouse to gophers, squirrels, beaver, marmots and eight species of chipmunk. This in turn attracts most of North America's main predators, including bobcat, coyote, black bear and mountain lion. Birdwatchers flock to the park too. Over two hundred and fifty species have been recorded. From the tiniest St Anna's hummingbird to the majestic bald eagle. But there was one bird in particular I was hoping to see and possibly film, and that was of course a galliform. In this case a grouse species, but no ordinary grouse species, this was a recently described grouse species, the sooty grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*). Filming or even finding sooty grouse was not going to be easy, but then again filming galliformes never is. But in the case of sooty grouse this is because of their choice of habitat. They are high altitude specialists, foraging for food in forest glades and alpine meadows around the treeline. And in the high sierras that is between seven and ten thousand feet, which is around twice the altitude (and more) than Ben Nevis!

Sooty grouse habitat
Photo: Stuart Wilson

Yosemite Lodge where we were staying sits at 4,000 feet so to have any chance of finding grouse we had to gain around 3,500 feet in altitude. And to gain that extra altitude you have two options, you can either hike up or drive up.

If you choose to drive there are only two roads in the entire park that go anyway near sooty grouse habitat. The first takes you to the famous viewpoint over Yosemite Valley at Glacier Point, and the second takes you right over the sierras through the Tioga Pass and into the state of Nevada. However both roads suffer from heavy snowfall. With its close proximity to the Pacific Ocean, Yosemite suffers from high precipitation and consequently a lot of snow. So much snow that neither road is open to traffic until mid July, and closes again in October. This gives you a three-month window to drive into the high country, park up and search for grouse. However this is not as straightforward as it seems. The window does not come at the right time, as by mid July the breeding season is over and the grouse have already dispersed. They can travel up to thirty miles from the breeding grounds, surprisingly walking the whole way as they only fly if threatened by predators. The grouse are also not betrayed by their calls in the summer, as they tend to be vocal only in the vicinity of their display leks.

Female sooty grouse
Photo: Stuart Wilson

The alternative is to visit when they are vocal and at well know leking sites. But that is not as straightforward as it seems either. The males start displaying in late March and through into April when there is still a lot of snow on the ground. So even if you can drive in to Yosemite Valley, which is often snowbound, you then have to don snowshoes and trudge 3500 feet up the side of the valley to reach the leks. And with a nine-hour return hike, and the short early spring days, it leaves little time to find sooty grouse. Faced with the two options I decided to sit on my backside and drive up in late October. The birds would be harder to find but there were four of us, and we were intending to hike the trails at least five miles a day, so I packed my video camera and crossed my fingers.

Yosemite Valley can be very busy, but most visitors are concentrated around the famous landmarks such as the cliffs of El Capitan and Yosemite Falls which is the highest waterfall in North America. Wander half a mile from these hot spots and you seem to have the whole park to yourself and we certainly saw very few people on the trails in the high Sierra.

Over the week we hiked at various altitudes between four and ten thousand feet and were surprised at the constant change in flora and fauna. The valley floor, although thronging with visitors, has a surprising amount of wildlife. There are beaver (*Castor canadensis*) lodges on the Merced River and we had good views of an American dipper (*Circles mexicans*). A much greyer bird than its European counterpart and without the prominent white gourget. Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) are common and explains why there is a healthy population of mountain lion (*Puma concolor*) in the park. These cats are rarely seen and as expected we didn't have any luck with this elusive predator. Squirrels are common around the lodge with the Western form of the familiar grey squirrel (*Sciuris griseus*), and sierra ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) the most numerous. In the evening sierra flying squirrels (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) kept us awake peppering the lodge roof with acorns as they gorged themselves ready for the oncoming winter. Other notable mammals in the valley meadows were racoon (*Procyon lotor psora*) and a male bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) being mobbed by a pair of ravens (*Corvus corax*) at first light.

Least chipmunk
Photo: Stuart Wilson

The giant sequoia groves are found a little higher in the sierras at around 6,000 feet. Measuring almost thirty feet wide at the base and towering to almost three hundred feet in height the oldest trees are approaching three thousand years old. Their seeds are dispersed by a number of different rodents. The main culprit is the Douglas squirrel (*Tamiasciurus douglaii*), rather similar in appearance to our European red squirrel, and the golden mantled ground squirrel (Callospermophilus lateralis) whose stripes make it look like a giant chipmunk. There are chipmunks at this elevation too and both the lodgepole (*Tamais speciosus*) and long-eared (*Neotamais quadrimaculatatus*) species were busily gathering seeds in preparation for their long hibernation.

Shortly after leaving the Merced River sequoia grove we encountered one of the chipmunks main predators when a coyote (*Canis latrans*) crossed the road ahead of us. But the best mammal of the trip was reserved for the following day when we stumbled across one of Yosemite's most famous residents a black bear (*Ursus americanus*).

The vast majority of Yosemite's black bears are actually brown in colour and are relatively harmless. You wouldn't want to get between a female and her small cubs in the spring but in the autumn the bears are preoccupied with building up their fat reserves in preparation for their winter hibernation. I was able to get within twenty yards of this large bear but I certainly would not have approached a grizzly (*Ursus arctos*) in this manner. Fortunately there are no grizzlies in Yosemite. The bear was sporting a radio collar as a great deal of research is being done on their movements in the park. There are up to four hundred bears present, which means around one every three square miles. Considering the heavy tree cover we were lucky to find one. It was our only sighting despite walking over forty miles of trails in the high country.

The area around Glacier Point at around 7500 feet yielded different fauna. Stella's jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) are common and their raucous calls echo around the valley, along with other high altitude corvids such as raven (*Corvus corax*) and the rarer Clarke's nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*).

Glacier Point overlooks Yosemite Valley and the high sierra peaks of Mt Ritter and Mt Clarke that rise to almost 11000 feet. So called because glacial activity over two million years ago shaped the landscape creating the landmarks of Sentinel and Half Dome. The views are breath taking, as indeed are the steep hiking trails. The distinctive gnarled and twisted trunks of bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*) are the oldest living thing on the planet at over 5000 years old.

Now deep in sooty grouse habitat we spent two days looking for these birds in the early mornings. We had little luck at first but did see another galliform at this elevation, the mountain quail (*Oreotyx pictus*). I flushed one from a creek bed and a covey of five flew right over my head, but both sightings were too fleeting to capture on film and I never saw any on the ground. Failing to film mountain quail was the only disappointment on the trip.

But eventually we had more luck with sooty grouse when we encounted a group of eight drinking from a spring at daybreak. It was almost certainly a family party with a mixture of females and immature males.

Male sooty grouse
Photo: Stuart Wilson

Sooty grouse were originally known as the blue grouse, a species originally discovered for western science on the famous Lewis and Clarke Expedition of 1805. But that nominate species was found in

the Rocky Mountains in what is now Colorado and the population in the sierras remained unknown until much later. But recent DNA evidence has proven that the two populations are in fact two entirely separate species. So the birds have been renamed. The birds in the sierras are now known as sooty grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*) and those in the Rockies are now dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*). As well as the DNA proof there are a number of plumage and behavioural differences. As their name suggests the females of the sooty species are much darker in their mottled plumage than the dusky species. The males vary too, with the sooty grouse having a pale terminal band on the tail, which is missing in the dusky species. But it is in the breeding season that the differences are most apparent.

Sooty grouse habitat
Photo: Stuart Wilson

In late March the males of both species perch high in the pine trees to call the females to the display leks. Dusky grouse have a booming five syllable call reminiscent of our Eurasian bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), which carries around 100 metres. But in contrast, sooty grouse have a higher more complicated call, which is considerably louder and carries for up to 2 kilometres. Yosemite Valley echoes to their calls from March through to May.

Once the females have assembled at the lek the males descend to the ground, fan their tales and strut around. They are closely related to greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), and like that species they inflate an air sac in their throat which in turn exposes a bare patch of skin on each breast. In the case of sooty grouse the bare skin is bright sulphur yellow and in dusky grouse it is a deep burgundy red. The wattles above the eyes are also yellow in sooty grouse and tinged with red in the dusky species.

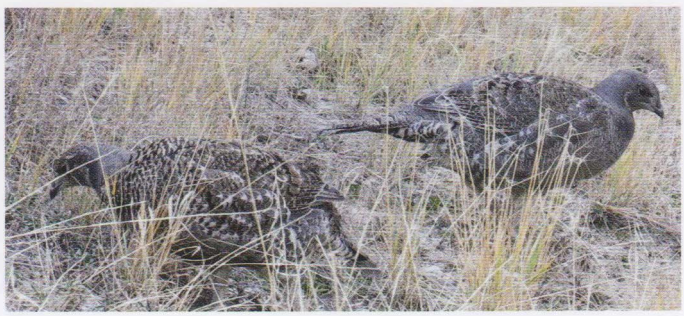
After mating, the sooty grouse females descend to mixed forests at lower altitudes. This not only provides more cover for nesting but richer insect life for the newly hatched chicks. The chicks grow quickly and are at full size by thirteen weeks.

Mule deer
Photo: Stuart Wilson

By October, which is when we encountered the birds, they had already ascended to a higher altitude and were feeding on seeds and fruit such as juniper and blueberry. They are also fond of the local black wood ants. With such heavy snowfall in the sierras in mid winter the wildlife has three options; migration, hibernation or descent to the valley floor to avoid the worst of the drifts. Surprisingly sooty grouse choose none of those options and actually climb higher in altitude. They perch high in the conifers and protected by the dense branches sit out the worst of the weather conserving their energy. When they do feed they live exclusively on pine needles and snow.

The group of sooty grouse I filmed were relatively tame as they rarely see people and consequently I was able to approach them very closely. It was certainly a pleasure to see this species in such beautiful scenery.

On the last evening of our stay in Yosemite Valley it snowed heavily in the high sierras and the Glacier Point and Tioga Pass roads were both closed to traffic. They have remained closed ever since and it is nice to think that this wilderness and the wonderful wildlife it holds will remain undisturbed until the roads open again sometime this summer.



Pair of dusky grouse
Photo: Stuart Wilson

CAPTIVE BREEDING ADVISORY GROUP AGM

The CBAG Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday 3rd February at Cotswold Wildlife Park as part of the avicultural weekend.

Apologies for absence were received from Belinda Moyle and Robert Wilding. The circulated minutes from the previous AGM were accepted as being a true record of that meeting and there were no matters arising from them. The acting Vice-Chairman's report is included below.

Vice-Chairman's Report

Mr Reggie Heyworth and Louise Peat at the Cotswold Wildlife Park and all the staff were thanked by Stuart for letting us hold our annual CBAG meeting here, and for their hospitality and making everyone feel so welcome. The meeting commenced with a minutes silence in memory of Andrew Sheppy, who died last year. Stuart was delighted to see so many people at the meeting and, once again, there were a number of new faces. This year's programme had a Question and Answer session and many questions were put forward so it is expected to repeat this session in future. Thanks were also given to Jimmy Reekie and Ian Elvin for raising further funds, the Raffle raised £200. Nigel Hester was also thanked for all his hours of hard work collecting census returns and collating the results and for organising the meeting and dinner.

Treasurer's Report

The balance brought forward from 1st May 2017 was £4137.99

The agreed payment of £768 was made to RZSS for the mountain and Malay blood testing.

We had one collection box return from Paultons Park for £132.06. The contents of a collection box from Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens are also due to be returned.

Interest payments from our deposit account raised £5.75. The current balance is £4532.30

This is slightly inflated due to the CBAG convention pre-payments made prior to today's meeting. Since the convention is done at cost, adjusting for the pre-payments gives us a working fund of £4276.80. There are no outstanding debtors or creditors.

Specific Project Reserves

There are no specific project reserves.

The Future

There is no other detailed planned expenditure at present.

Election of Officers

Chairman Billy Wilson	**Vice-Chairman** Stuart Wilson	**Secretary** Tim Lovel	**Treasurer** Nigel Hester
John Corder	Keith Chalmers-Watson	Ian Elvin	Belinda Moyle
Paul North	Will Harrison	Jimmy Reekie	Robert Wilding
Gavin Harrison			

Election of UK representatives for the European Conservation Breeding Group

Keith Chalmers-Watson Nigel Hester John Corder

Venue and Date for February 2019

Saturday 2 February 2019 Cotswold Wildlife Park

Any Other Business

There is further commitment of funds to the M & M project and funding for an incubator for the Bornean peacock pheasant project for Lawrence Kuah.

Although Census returns continue to decline, Nigel Hester was asked to continue to encourage breeders to return the forms and members of the CBAG Committee will be asked to phone six breeders each to ask them to return the forms.

JAMES BURRELL UPDATE

At the 2017 CBAG weekend WPA members heard an excellent presentation from James Burrell about brown-eared pheasant training at Sparsholt College. James trained a brown-eared pheasant to identify the king of hearts in a pack of playing cards. The pheasant managed to identify the card in a full deck of 52 playing cards. Since the conference, James has progressed in his career. He returned to the Channel Islands to complete his work placement and had the opportunity to train both a Livingston's fruit bat and two meerkats. After completing his placement, he returned to Dublin to work with giraffes at Dublin zoo and he is currently working in the elephant section. The video of the pheasant training has been put online and has been viewed over 57,000 times. The pheasant still takes part in training sessions at Sparsholt College and continues to impress students with her intelligence.

CBAG QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Paul North

As part of the Conservation Breeding Advisory Group (CBAG) meeting held on Saturday 3 February, a new idea was trialled in the form of a question and answer session. The original thought that a half hour slot would suffice was not realistic when the questions started rolling in as soon as the agenda was published.

The questions were many and varied. As one would expect some were about the practicalities of keeping and breeding pheasants, but many were inspired by the conservation aspect of the Association. Stuart Wilson chaired the session and the panel members were Keith Chalmers-Watson, Ian Clark, John Corder, Geoff Davison, Nigel Hester and Paul North.

The Q & A panel
Photo: Paul North

The first question was a practical one, asking about fox control and came with a novel answer. This has worked for one member of the panel who uses flashing lights as a deterrent. He explained that these are sold extremely cheaply for use as bicycle lights and can be enclosed in a jam jar and left in a suitable place.

The second question tackled by the panel asked what were the priority species for WPA and how do we choose between rare in captivity and rare in the wild. A clear answer was given by John Corder, as Chair of the European Conservation Breeding Group (ECBG) and is summarised here. Only those birds that are available can be kept in captivity. The ECBG have six priority species that it is practical for WPA to be involved with. These are Edwards's pheasant, Bornean peacock pheasant, Malay peacock pheasant, mountain peacock pheasant, green peafowl and Salvadori's pheasant. The European Zoo community include other priority species that are not held in private collections, for example the Congo peafowl, administered by Antwerp Zoo.

John continued by mentioning the Focus Groups within WPA. These are groups of individuals with a concern for specific groups of species. They began with the Junglefowl Group and the Ruffed Pheasant Group and have grown to include common pheasants, peacock pheasants, copper pheasants and tragopans. John concluded that there are some species we can't do anything about and perhaps the most threatened species, other than Edwards's pheasant, might be the sub species of the Malaysian crested fireback.

The third question was of a practical nature and asked what the panel recommends as a maintenance and breeding diet for tropical firebacks and peacock pheasants. Keith Chalmers-Watson replied by saying that the newly-introduced GARVO brand of proprietary feeds have a different concept by producing a feed that can be used all year round. It has 2% moisture as compared to the normal 8, 9 or 10 and it is lower in protein than normally expected and all his firebacks and peacock pheasants are now on this. John Corder said that he doesn't think there is a right or wrong way and that most of us keep pheasants in a way which is economical in the use of our time and what we can afford. With a particular interest in re-introduction, John is trying to breed birds that will have as natural behaviour as possible. Their diet is adapted accordingly and gives them a variety of food which helps if the birds are re-introduced into the wild such as fruit, vegetables and insects. Gavin Harrison from Waddesdon said that they feed their birds in a similar way, adding that the way to look at this is to ask if your birds are healthy, breeding well and live long, but if not check their diet.

The fourth question, again on a practical theme, asked whether grouse have to be kept on wire floors. Keith Chalmers-Watson said they have kept grouse in many different ways over the years but they are now not keeping them on wire and are currently experimenting with a system which gives the birds some medication on a regular basis so that they can be kept on sand floors. Stuart Wilson said that some European breeders have them on wire floored aviaries, but they have a lot of spruce branches so the birds aren't walking on the wire.

The session continued with questions about how to re-create a lek for black grouse and capercaillie in captive conditions, and how climate change affects our native grouse species. There were ideas about the need to get younger people involved in WPA in response to one question and the recommendation of The New Incubation Book by Dr. Anderson Brown and Gary Robbins, also Practical Incubation by Rob Harvey, in reply to another question.

In the subsequent week since the meeting all the remaining unanswered questions were circulated and replied to by email. Many thanks to those members who supplied the questions, many of which may help to shape the future course of the Association.

TRAGOPAN SURVEY AT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MYANMAR AND YUNNAN, CHINA

Wang Nan

Background

Blyth's tragopan are distributed along the boundary area between Bhutan, India, Myanmar and China. In 2014 and 2016 we surveyed Mount Kennedy and Mount Saramati at the boundary between Myanmar and India. In 2017, we surveyed the boundary area between Myanmar and Yunnan Province, China. We surveyed two locations within this area where Blyth's tragopan were thought to be present. The areas surveyed included Pianma and Tongbiguan nature reserve.

Pianma

Pianma is a small town inside Gaoligongshan National Nature Reserve. The border between Myanmar and China is along the ridge of the north part the mountain at around 4000m in altitude, with the southern part inside China. In 2016, a photo of Blyth's tragopan was taken in this area and a bird was on sale alive in the town, which indicated that there might be a population of Blyth's around Pianma.

In February 2017, we undertook some interviews at the villages around Pianma along the road at the border between Myanmar and China. Almost all of the people who identified Blyth's tragopan mentioned that the bird appeared on the Myanmar side at least 40km from Pianma town, and that just Temminck's tragopan appeared around Pianma. Only two villagers mentioned that they have seen the bird in the west mountain slope near Pianma town inside China. The nature reserve undertake an annual camera trap survey and as such it was considered that they might detect Blyth's tragopan if present, therefore we decided not to survey this area further. However we have 20 local people who will undertake DNA collection and collect more information of Blyth's tragopan in the area.

Habitat in Tongbiguan Nature Reserve
Photo: Wang Nan

Tongbiguan

Tongbiguan Provincial Nature Reserve is located 100km south-west of Pianma. It is characteristic of tropical rain forest and mixed broadleaf-conifer forest. Tongbiguan nature reserve is a new recorded area for Blyth's, and photos taken by another teams camera traps showed that both Blyth's and Temminck's tragopan inhabit the forest.

Temminck's tragopan recorded on a camera trap
Photo: Wang Nan

The forest patch we surveyed covered the largest area of the nature reserve above 2000m, which is the typical habitat for tragopans. In March and April 2017 we counted tragopan morning and evening calls at 27 points, with a density of 2±1.83(SD)(0-7) per point. All the calls recorded were from Temminck's tragopan and the density is similar to that of Blyth's tragopan in Mount Saramati in Myanmar. This indicates a healthy population of Temminck's tragopan in Tongbiguan nature reserve. We also recorded three encounters of Temminck's tragopan during the survey, but no Blyth's tragopan were recorded.

We set 62 Camera traps and 39 calling players at possible tragopan sites in the forest between 2200-2900m in an area between evergreen and bamboo forest. The camera traps were collected in August 2017, 50 cameras had worked well. Temmick's tragopan were recorded on 30 cameras a total of 124 times, indicating a high density of this species in the area. One camera recorded a tragopan like bird that is most likely a subadult Temminck's tragopan.

The cameras caught several other species of birds and mammals. For pheasant species; four cameras recorded silver pheasants, and 18 cameras recorded hill partridge 59 times. The cameras also caught several endangered species during the survey in high appearances, such as red panda and three monkey species. This indicates that Tobiguan Nature Reserve is a very important area for many endangered species.

Following the survey, 38 camera traps were redeployed in the field and will be collected in April-May 2018. We are hoping that they will record Blyth's tragopan.

We also recorded occasional hunting within our study area of Asiatic black bear, barking dear, muntjac, porcupine and pheasant species, although the area is well conserved by the local ranger. Some hunters have been hired by the ranger of the nature reserve to conserve the reserve and to help stop the hunting to a degree. They helped us collect DNA samples of two Temminck's tragopan from local people and will help us collect Blyth's samples before

our next visit. Fire is forbidden in the whole nature reserve, however fire from Myanmar is the main pressure on Tongbiguan.

From the interviews and the surveys in the two areas, we know that Temminck's tragopan occur in a higher density than Blyth's tragopan along the boundary area between China and Myanmar. However many records of Blyth's tragopan in Myanmar showed that this bird appeared very close to the boundary. It will be interesting to identify which factors contribute for the two species to exist in the same area, as well as if they can identify each other by the breeding call during the breeding season, and if hybrids occur.

Above: Survey team at a camping site in the field
Right: Silver pheasant recorded on camera trap
Photo: Wang Nan

Acknowledgement

We thank the World Pheasant Association for their support of the survey and many good suggestions for the field work. We are also very grateful to the staff of Tongbiguan Nature Reserve and Gaoligongshan Nature Reserve for their help during the field work. We thank everbody for their help finding the birds during the field work.

SHORT NEWS - WPA GERMANY

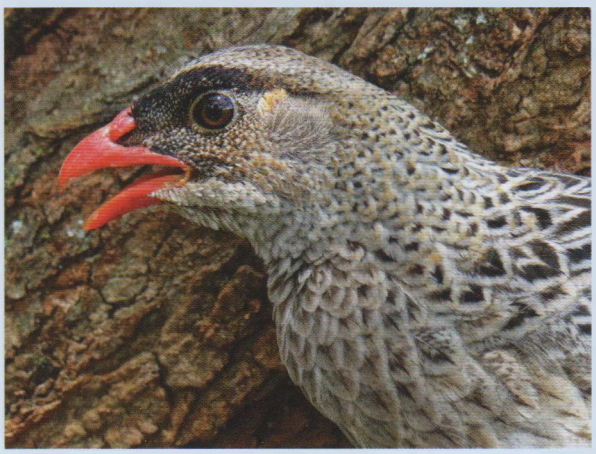
Heiner Jacken

Reproduced from WPA Germany Newsletter 'WPA Rundbrief 3/2018'

The Edwards's Pheasant Project

In the two work group meetings, in Berlin and in Antwerp, the representatives of all the part taking Institutions (EAZA, VietNature, IUCN-Galliform Specialist Group, TAG and WPA) agreed with the studbook keepers and population geneticists upon the next concrete steps regarding the captive populations and the planned breeding station in Vietnam. Thanks to the good cooperation of the studbook keepers and coordinators, and all those taking part in the studbook, it was possible to form or complete 40 new pairs from the 110 Edwards's pheasants that were traced this year in Europe, and transport them to their new locations. At the same time the plans for the new breeding station in Quang Binh province in Vietnam are proceeding.

Black-fronted francolin



Black-fronted francolin
Photo: Kai Gedeon

The status of the black-fronted francolin (Pternis atrifrons) seems to be much more endangered than previously considered. In a research project funded by the WPA, biologists from the Zoological Research museum Alexander Koenig in Bonn and from the Saxon Ornithologists Association, studied the distribution and population size of the species in south Ethiopia. The authors estimate that the population size is about 1100-2100 individuals, and that the distribution is limited to an area of only a few hundred square kilometers. The main reasons for the drastic decline are hunting, agriculture and over-grazing by domestic animals, commercial forestry for fire and building wood, as well as the increasing drought caused by the climate change.

The Authors suggest that the listing of the black-fronted francolin in the IUCN Red List should be changed from least concern (LC) to endangered (EN). This would make the black-fronted francolin one of the most endangered galliforme species in Africa, together with the Djibouti francolin and Udzungwa forest-partridge.

GLOBALLY THREATENNED PHEASANTS IN MACHIARA NATIONAL PARK: MONITORING AND CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Muhammad Naeem Awan

Introduction

The Machiara National Park (MNP) covering 13,532 ha is located 35 km from Muzaffarabad, the capital city of the state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in northeast Pakistan. The forest vegetation of MNP and associated biodiversity is characteristic of the sub-tropical/Temperate Himalayan mixed-forest/alpine scrub-rangeland ecosystem.

Machiara National Park
Photo: Muhammed Naeem Awan

Located within the Western Himalayas Endemic Bird Area, MNP is one of the Important Bird Area owing to the presence of three globally threatened IBA trigger species like western tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, cheer pheasant *Catreus wallichi* and Kashmir flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* (BirdLife International 2001). Other pheasant species include koklass pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*, Himalayan monal *Lophophorus impejanus* and kalij pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos.*

In the surrounding of the Machiara National Park there are three Union Councils with 30 main villages. There are 7,635 households with over 53,000 people. The average growth rate is 2.3% and each household, on average has seven people. The communities around MNP own various kinds of livestock (buffaloes, cows, goats, sheep, horses, mules and donkey). During the summer season, the livestock move to the pastures or subsist on fodder collected from the forest. There are about 90 pastures located in the upper parts of various forest compartments. The livestock survey revealed the presence of about 37,000 livestock heads in total.

The loss of wildlife species and associated flora, and the cutting of forest trees, have been some of the major conservation issues of the park. The situation of the past was not encouraging enough and demanded the initiation of the activities that could control the negative processes to save some of the species from possible extinction (Shafique 2008). Although the government is implementing a management plan for the overall conservation of the biodiversity in the park, pheasants have never been a priority of this conservation work and a system has not been established to monitor the population trends of some of rare pheasants like western tragopan and cheer pheasant. With the help from World Pheasant Association a long-term monitoring program of these pheasants has been started to help protect these pheasants of global conservation concern in Machiara National Park.

Machiara National Park
Photo: Muhammed Naeem Awan

Group work during the workshop
Photo: Muhammed Naeem Awan

Planning and consultation

Before starting the survey, a planning and consultation workshop was organized for park staff for the identification and selection of survey plots. About fifteen Park staff actively participated in the workshop and helped to map all the potential survey areas for cheer and other pheasants in the park area. They also shared their knowledge on pheasant's distribution in the park and their capacity for the surveys was tested. During the workshop all potential sites for surveys were mapped and most potential sites were selected for the current surveys keeping in mind the resources available.

Pheasants population surveys

A total of n=13 survey plots were established which recorded n=34 calling males of cheer pheasant, n=07 western tragopan, n=13 koklass pheasant and n=09 Monal pheasant. An average of 4.24 cheer/plot were detected during these surveys whereas average detection rate for western tragopan was 1.4 birds/plot, koklass pheasant 2.6 birds/plot and Monal 1.8 birds/plot.

First record of cheer nesting

Although cheer were reported from Machiara National park in the history, no scientifically authentic record was present on its occurrence. This is not only first scientifically authentic record of cheer presence in the park but nesting evidence has also been recorded for the first time in the history of the park. A total of five (n=05) nests were observed with a total of n=25 eggs with n=9 as highest number of eggs. A full paper is in progress with title "Rediscovery with first nesting record of Vulnerable Cheer Pheasant in Machiara National Park (IBA), Kashmir Himalaya, Pakistan" which will be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Habitat Use and Anthropogenic disturbance

We recorded a total of nine settlements across all eight-survey plots established for cheer surveys, containing more than 200 houses each representing a separate household. Around tragopan and other pheasant habitat, a total of four settlements were recorded with around 15 houses. We recorded an average of 26 humans per survey plot and an average of 17 livestock per household. The number and size of human settlements within the study area appears to be increasing with previously uninhabited areas being opened up and existing ones expanded, resulting in a decrease in suitable habitat and an increase in disturbance for cheer, western tragopan and other pheasants. A new house needs on average 9-10 trees to be built and two-three fully grown trees are needed to repair a damaged house owing to heavy snowfall for example.

Capacity building of the park staff

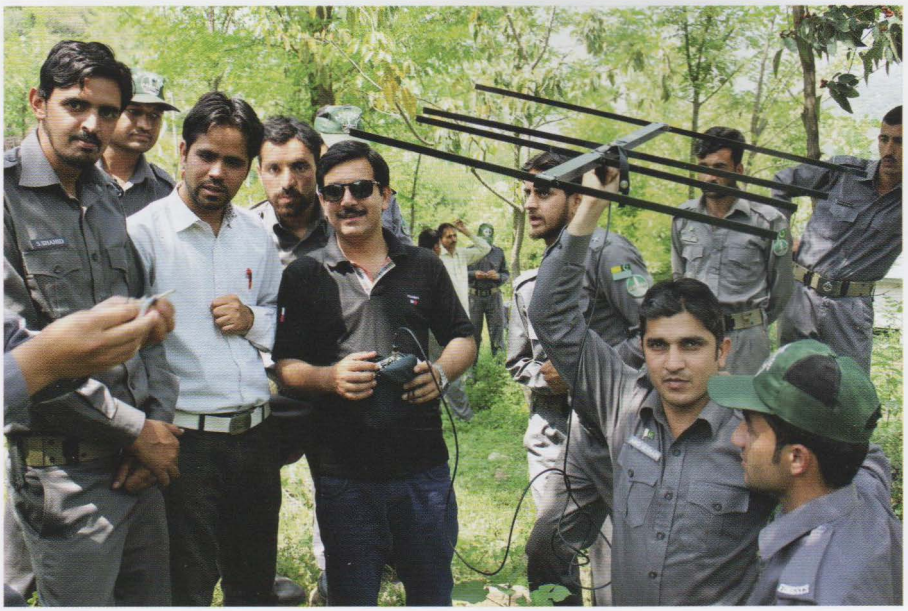
Park staff are generally trained in dealing with illegal wildlife trade cases and are unable to conduct pheasants survey through scientifically approved methods. As such staff capacity was built to help train them in call count techniques. They were additionally trained in using equipment like GPS, camera traps and radio telemetry for pheasants. Furthermore, park staff remained involved in all surveys, which further helped in understanding the techniques practically. Staff were also involved

Top: Nesting site of cheer pheasant (circled in red)
Bottom: Eggs in a cheer pheasant nest
Photo: Muhammed Naeem Awan

in conservation assessment surveys and community meetings which further build their capacity in conservation of pheasants. All in all, project activities fully involved the staff for the sustainability of our efforts for the conservation of pheasants in Machiara national park.

Monitoring and conservation implications

Machiara National Park is one of the most important sites for the threatened pheasants like cheer, western tragopan and other Himalayan pheasants. This study has first time confirmed presence of cheer pheasant from the park area and a seemingly still healthy population of western tragopan is surviving despite high human impact. However, this could easily change if the high pressure continues at the current rate. A long-term monitoring program of the pheasant population is very important to help understand the impacts of the increasing human population. National and local authorities, together with the local communities, need educating and more conservation efforts are required on all levels if we wish to conserve these important species, especially cheer and western tragopan, in this part of the Western Himalayas.



Forest staff during radio telemetry training exercise
Photo: Muhammed Naeem Awan

Inside the park area the movement of the communities and their livestock must be mapped so that safe areas can be identified and declared to help avoid disturbance to the breeding birds. Although wildlife field staff are better trained for field surveys than ever, they still lack the basic necessary equipment and training for effective monitoring of pheasants. Finally, more monitoring survey plots need to be established beside already established areas to identify more sites for pheasants along with developing a long-term strategy for the rare pheasants of global conservation concern of Machiara national park.

Group photo of the paticipants of the workshop
Photo: Muhammed Naeem Awan

Acknowledgement

I am most thankful to World Pheasant Association UK for financial support provided for conservation assessment surveys in Machiara national park. I am also thankful to Brigadier Mukhtar Ahmed (WPA Pakistan) for all his support and help in pheasant research. Many thanks are also due to Azad Kashmir Wildlife Department for their support during the surveys. We are grateful to the wildlife field staff for assisting the surveys and their hard work to achieve the objectives of this project.

A WORLD WITHOUT WALTER: REQUIEM FOR A BULWER'S PHEASANT

Charles Alexander

Native only to the island of Borneo, the Bulwer's pheasant (*Lophura bulweri)* is a threatened species in the wild and extremely rare in captivity. Until his passing in 2010, the cock bird pictured here was the last male Bulwer's pheasant in collections in the USA. In late April-early May 2007, I made a ten-day journey to photograph his astonishing courtship display at the San Diego Zoo, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In non-display mode, Walterresembled other Lophura cock birds.
Photo: Charles Alexander

The Bulwer's pheasant has haunted my imagination for decades now. In the early 80s, I was a novice aviculturist raising Swinhoe's and Edwards's pheasants in my backyard aviaries. In those days just a few private breeders were successfully propagating the Bulwer's, a species that became something of a grail bird to me. I recall a cover of a much-anticipated avicultural quarterly that featured a displaying male. The cover bird's snaking, electric-blue wattles and white disk of a tail, consisting of two translucent fans pressed together of 16 feathers each, looked like something dreamed up at the Skywalker Ranch.

Few birds had ever seemed so impossible. Published accounts of the species were peppered with words like shy, elusive, rarely sighted, and nomadic. Endemic to the 'Land Below The Wind' home of the Bornean bristlehead, proboscis monkey, and orangutan; the Bulwer's pheasant was reputed to follow the fruiting of various forest trees, moving down from higher elevations to lowland forest in an unknown, eruptive cycle, often in the company of bearded pigs. Almost every detail of its life in the wild was anecdotal, sketchy. I wanted to know more, to penetrate the mystery surrounding the bird. Would I ever witness its extraordinary display for myself?

I saw my first live Bulwer's on my initial, awed visit to the San Diego Zoo in October 1986, a trip mistimed for displaying Bulwer's. I recall glimpses of a pair housed among the airy fronds of tree ferns, a drab female standing quietly, her tailless mate looking stoned.

I didn't get a decent photo in 1986, or on my first visit to the Bronx Zoo in 1990. I snapped precisely one Bulwer's pheasant shot at the Bronx in 1990, a blurry image of a cock bird dashing into deep vegetation in the zoo's fabulous World of Birds. Sadly, the Bronx Zoo's Bulwer's colony died out years before the last of the San Diego birds, apparently victims of West Nile Virus. Second chances for photos there were never to be.

The tail of the male Bulwer's pheasant contains up to 32 translucent feathers, more than any other bird.
Photo: Charles Alexander

Nevertheless, pheasant dreams die hard. Still hopeful, I continued to check a now-defunct website called ISIS, the International Species Inventory System, for Bulwer's updates. The website was a handy tool, allowing the enthusiast to keep track of every species in every accredited zoo in the world. By 2004 I was getting anxious about locating the bird. ISIS revealed that two pairs of Bulwer's remained in US zoos in 2004; one pair in San Diego and one in San Antonio. I emailed the San Antonio bird curator about the Bulwer's there. He replied that the pair was in a very low light situation behind wire. So I thought, well maybe one day. Footnoted, shelved, but not forgotten.

Fast forward two years, a Christmas 2006 party for Memphis Zoo keepers. Though I hadn't worked at the zoo since 1995, I was invited by one of my former co-workers. A girl at the party was a former bird keeper at San Antonio, so of course I asked her about the Bulwer's pheasant.

The hen Bulwer's pheasant is an understated rufous brown, in marked contrast to the highly visible male bird.
Photo: Charles Alexander

"Walter!" she beamed, carrot stick in one hand, emptied wine glass in the other. "Oh I love Walter. He's such a sweetie!"

"Do you think I could get some good pictures of er...Walter... at San Antonio?"

"Why Walter displays all the time! He's sooo gorgeous!" Sigh.

So I thought about it, mulled it over, but didn't go. I checked ISIS again a few weeks later. Only one male was still listed at San Diego. Walter, the San Antonio male, was gone, presumably dead and removed from ISIS. I visited the Memphis Zoo soon after and happened to see the girl from the party as she was hosing down the black-footed penguin exhibit. I broke the news.

"Oh noooo, Walter! He was so cool. I'm sad now..."

I was bummed too. Photos posted on the web of the remaining male at San Diego featured a non-displaying, sullen-looking bird clearly past his prime. I figured my chances of documenting the Bulwer's display were blown for good, at least for this lifetime.

Then one afternoon in April 2007, what the heck, I did yet another Bulwer's pheasant Google search. To my amazement a bunch of new pictures came up from a website called SmugMug, where anyone can post web albums of photos. A California photographer had posted (smugged?) a mother-load of gorgeous shots of San Diego Zoo creatures, with a focus on San Diego's bird collection. Several of his photos depicted a male Bulwer's pheasant displaying to a female outdoors in good light. My jaw slackened, then dropped. This was no sullen old timer. Here was a bird that I had never seen before, fit and in immaculate, dazzling feather.

I wrote to the photographer and he responded that yes, the Bulwer's male is displaying every day, in full view in San Diego's Owens Rainforest Aviary. The bird had just recently arrived from some zoo in Texas to replace his brother who had died back in January. I was sitting at my keyboard, stunned, right at that crucial moment when reality bends and you realize that life will never be the same again.

I booked a plane ticket immediately and counted the days until departure time. I arrived at the San Diego Zoo at 2:30 pm on the 30 April, hurried down to the gigantic Owen's Rainforest Aviary, and almost immediately took several dozen pictures of the full display!

I'd never seen anything like this bird. He transformed himself into something so stunning, so "other", that it defied belief. People would walk into the aviary and nearly fall over.

"What IS that thing? It looks like a squid crossed with a chicken."

I became Walter's press agent. "This is a Bulwer's wattled pheasant. Native only to undisturbed rainforest on the island of Borneo..."

The hundreds of other species in San Diego's spectacular bird collection were barely on my radar. The majority of every day was devoted to Walter. There was so much to learn about this one extraordinary species, so many questions that needed answering. Every day, Walter's performance drew me in and became more and more captivating.

The cock Bulwer's with wattles only partially distended.
Photo: Charles Alexander

For starters, the call of the Bulwer's male sounds likes a steam kettle imitating the crack of a bullwhip, a loud hissing "wock-cheewwwwww". During the courting season, the male repeats this distinctive sound over and over again, perhaps as a warning to other males. When the female appears, however, he falls silent to concentrate on transformation and display. Theory has it that male Bulwer's are spaced throughout the rainforest in an "exploded lek", a system in which males can hear each other but cannot see their rivals, while females wander happily from male to male looking for the biggest and best to catch their fancy.

When not hulking out for display, Walter looked elegant and regal, his wattles similar in appearance to those of other cock birds in the genus Lophura. His deep purple-black body plumage sported a network of blue sparkles that resembled a spider web dipped in cobalt. His breast was a deep vinous purple, his legs red, like his pert and watchful eyes. Carrying his folded tail as a white scimitar behind him, his step was proud, his shimmering body spangles catching every ray of sunlight. Walter's dapper Clark Kent persona gave no hint of his latent talent for shape shifting. Even when not getting freaky he was a remarkably handsome bird. Pugnacious, he kept his keepers on their toes whenever they dared to enter his personal domain.

A rear view of the cock bird engaged in wing-whirring, showing separation of the two feather fans.
Photo: Charles Alexander

When a mating cock Bulwer's spots a hen walking his way, transformation is immediate. His white tail begins to extend laterally along the top length of his body (unlike a peacock's or a turkey's). His blue wattles engorge with blood, pulling taut enough to reveal the red underskin above his scarlet eye. The tail becomes an almost circular, shining disk, touching his black-tipped wattles at the top end, while the trailing filaments of the bottommost feathers scrape the ground. The cock bird stands very still throughout this metamorphosis, getting bigger and more alien looking by the second. As the female passes, the male whirls around in an instant to block her with the full effect of his brilliant white tail, as if taking her by surprise. If she takes another step, he whirls again, his feathers stiffening and his tail filaments raking the ground, sweeping his dancing ground free of leaves. He always shows the tail to best advantage, presenting it foremost as he turns.

I took thousands of photos of Bulwer's behavior during my time with Walter, including rare shots of him exhibiting typical Lophura wing-whirring, a behavior performed while vocalizing a plaintive "cheeping" call to draw the female back to his dancing ground. More often than not, she remained completely indifferent to his attentions. I saw her notice and approach him only once. He froze as she stepped nearer, his wattles engorged to the max, his incredible tail at full sail. She stopped, pecked at a bit of lint on his side, and then walked nonchalantly away, leaving him to slowly deflate. Alas, Walter's last-chance efforts came to nothing and the pair produced no offspring during their final hurrah together, sealing the immediate fate of the species in North American collections.

My ten days flew by quickly in 2007. Once they were up I had to literally force myself onto the plane. After takeoff, I scanned the ground below for the telltale dome of the Owens Rainforest Aviary, but didn't see it or the zoo for that matter. My world was suddenly Walter-less.

But I did return. In October 2009 I walked through the San Diego Zoo gate at opening time on a perfect Sunday morning and once more headed straight down to the Owens Rainforest Aviary, wondering if he'd still be there. He was, perched on a rock overlooking one of the Owens' many waterfalls, in the shade of a giant fig tree. Only now he had recently molted and had lost his magnificent tail. He seemed to be sulking, waiting for his mojo to return, looking about a third the size of the stunning creature that had entranced me so completely in 2007. I never saw him again.

In August 2010 I got word that he had died. To quote the San Antonio keeper verbatim:

"Oh noooo, Walter! He was so cool. I'm sad now..."

More than any creature I've ever observed, Walter forced me to put the blinders on and to look deeper into my subject than ever before. He was without question the most spectacular, bizarre, and charismatic creature that I have ever met outside the pages of science fiction.

The forests of his native Borneo are being cleared at an unprecedented rate. How long will we have the chance to better understand this little-known species and the rainforest world it calls home?

Two views of the dynamic Bulwer's display, the cock bird pivoting rapidly to show his tail to best advantage.
Photo: Charles Alexander

PROJECT TAMBUN

Wanji Chua

This is the third report of the project initiated by The Sabah Society in 2015, aiming to improve local understanding and appreciation of the Philippines megapode, *Megapodius cumingii*. Locally known as 'burung tambun', 'ayam tambun' or just 'tambun', this is the only species of megapode occurring in Malaysia. Previous reports have appeared in WPA News 102 (2017), with a follow-up appraisal in WPA News 103 (2017). Since the beginning of this project, multiple actions have been carried out, primarily on research and conservation, as well as community projects, school activities, and public awareness.

This project is located on Mantanani Besar island, the largest among the small group of three islands (with Mantanani Kecil and Linggisan Islands) off the north-west coast of Sabah, a northern Borneo state in east Malaysia. About 1500 people are now resident on the island, with the original population of fishermen supplemented by others involved in the tourist industry, with up to 600 day-visitors in season and several beach-side resort hotels.

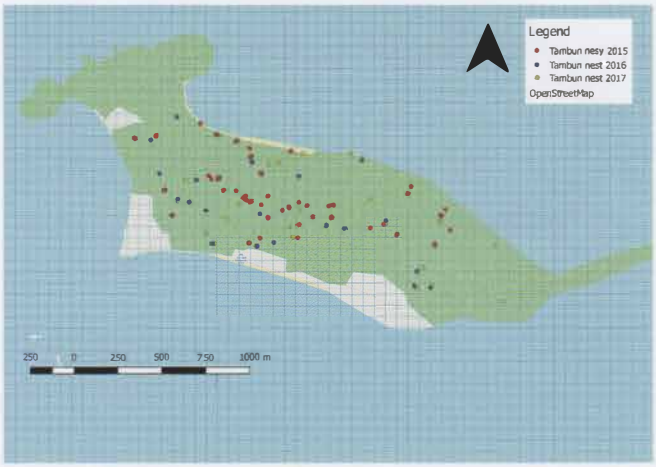


Figure 2: Tambun nest-mound distribution on Mantanani Besar Island, as discovered during year 2015 – 2017.
Source: Journal of The Sabah Society upcoming issue 2018 (yet to publish)

The Mantanani Islands have great potential for birdwatchers. The blue-naped parrot has been recorded, but is now thought to be locally extinct. As well as the Philippine megapode, other resident species of interest include Germain's swiftlet, the Mantanani scops owl, and a heady mix of Colum birds: pied imperial pigeon, grey imperial pigeon, black-naped fruit dove, metallic pigeon, pink necked green pigeon and, if you are lucky, Nicobar pigeon. The island is also noted as a stop-over for passage migrants, some of which winter in the grassy areas or taller woodland, according to their habits.

The lack of terrestrial predators (other than people) has probably been an important factor permitting survival of tambun on the Mantanani Besar island. Nevertheless, the small population is threatened by long established customs of the inhabitants of the two villages, most of whom have tasted tambun flesh and eggs, traditional foods for this community. Digging for the eggs, and setting snares for the adult birds are time consuming activities. The present surge of development on the island offers alternative employment and a variety of alternative foods, both factors that reduce the threat to tambun nests. But expanding demands on land resources for development has already destroyed or, degraded available nesting habitat for tambun.

Project Tambun aims to gain insight into the threats to the species, and to encourage a change of attitude among the people of the island. Ongoing activity includes the mapping of megapode nest mounds by GPS, with measurements and notes on activity status, noting evidence of egg-raiding and sometimes manually removing bird traps around nest mounds. Camera traps have been deployed, providing good records of bird (and sometimes human) activity. The employed field worker, Mohd Fauzi Jaini, is now registered for MSc at the Unviversity of Malaysia, under the supervision of Prof. Rosli Ramli, leading ornithologist.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the nest-mound distribution recorded through the three years. There were 48 nest sites plotted in 2015 (red) and 36 in 2016 (blue) with 16 of these sites overlap, indicating an additional discovery of 12 nests in 2016. Therefore, between year 2015 to 2016, there were 60 nests discovered throughout the island. Unfortunately, not all nests were active. In 2017 selected nests (yellow) were visited regularly for monitoring of activity. Despite no organised search being conducted, 17 additional nests were discovered in 2017, resulting in a total count of 77 nests in the island located during 2015 to 2017.

There may be undiscovered nests in certain areas of the island since there has been a lack of exploration in the western part of the island near the boundary of lowland and hilly region. Other potential nesting sites may be in the central swampy area, around the margin of which there may be tambun nests. The eastern side of the island which has few nests is now very open with few trees. The land is apparently too dry and hard for tambun to build nest mounds, let alone dig burrows directly into the soil. The lack of nest on the southern part of the island reflects the high density of human activities and settlement, in villages or tourist resorts.

In September 2017, Project Tambun received a grant from World Pheasant Association (WPA) who agreed to fund the project for three local assistants to continue monitoring the nest mounds distributed on the island and prevent disturbance, especially egg theft. The fund from WPA ensures the continuity of research work. The project now hires teachers from the local primary school on the island to undertake periodic surveys of tambun nest mounds. The teachers sometimes bring their students with them in their survey, thereby encouraging school children to become involved in positive conservation.

Head researcher, Mohd. Fauzi and local helpers working on one of the larger nest mounds.
Photo: Wanji Chua

Project Tambun also aims to include the establishment of protected areas for tambun (and, indirectly, other bird species). The project was visited by Alfons Patandung, from the WCS maleo project in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Following his advice, the team is now looking into developing an egg hatchery, to increase the local population of tambun birds.

During the 9th Borneo Bird festival in October 2017, organized by Sabah Tourism and Borneo Bird Club, project manager, Melissa Matthews gave a public talk on Tambun birds and elaborated on the activities of Project Tambun to create public awareness on the bird conservation. Melissa acknowledged all funders including WPA and invited members of the public to join in the effort and contribute in terms of being volunteers, photography skills, etc. Besides direct participation from local villagers, the project hopes to see more involvement, awareness and support from the public and funders as an appreciation to our local megapodes in year 2018.

TEMMINCK'S TRAGOPAN

Emma Zeale

Temminck's tragopan (*Tragopan temminckii*) are distributed across South Asia, from southwest China to northwest regions of Burma and Vietnam. The males have a bright orange chest and pale blue face and the females have a dull grey brown plumage. Temminck's are shy birds and unlike most pheasant species they prefer to nest in trees. They are found in damp evergreen forests and migrate up and down the slopes of the Himalayas depending on the time of year and temperature. The mating season starts in March and lasts a month or so. Males will perform a courtship display to attract females. The females lay three to five eggs per clutch from early May. Incubation lasts for 26 to 28 days and is undertaken by the female. The female raises the chicks alone and remains with the chicks for four to six weeks.

The following photos are taken by Jonathan Pointer and show Temminck's tragopan chicks.

WPA ONLINE AUCTION

WPA is hosting its first online auction on our website www.pheasant.org.uk.
The auction list and photos of items will be posted on the WPA website at the end of March and the auction will run until midnight on 4 May 2018.

The list will be managed by the WPA office who will update the website with prices as bids come in and contact those who have been outbid. Full instructions will be on the website when the auction goes live. Any items that do not reach the guide price will go into the auction at the Compton Manor Charity Clay Shoot on 11 May 2018.

The auction will include items such as:
A box of Highland Cattle beef and a box of a whole Hebridean lamb from Borland Farm
One week's stay at a Perthshire self-catering cottage for 2-4 people
A 'collector's' stick of two woodcock heads carved by Paul Colbert
Artwork by David Mead
A day's trout fishing for up to 3 rods on Broadlands Estate
An evening ringing woodcock with Owen Williams
Artwork by Timothy Greenwood
A photographic safari with wildlife photographer David White at the edge of the Marlborough Downs

The full list of items with details, guide prices and photos will be available on the website at the end of March.

AVIAN FLU

Findings of H5N6 HPAI in wild birds in UK/Ireland and LPAI in poultry in France

14 February 2018

Situation assessment

Previously there have been six findings of HPAIV H5N6 in wild birds in England, but none in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, despite widespread testing of wild birds. Since the last report (January 2018), there have been a further five outbreaks in wild waterbirds in England.

This takes the current total of events with HPAI H5N6 in wild birds in England to 12. As with the previous wild bird events, these findings are at sites with high numbers of waterfowl and other water birds. To date preliminary results indicate that a single strain of H5N6 HPAI is associated with these infections.

The wild waterfowl migration to the UK will now have peaked for this winter in terms of numbers of overwintering waterfowl although the birds will remain at their wintering sites till next month at least, before returning to their breeding grounds in late March/April.

Between December and February, five cases of H5N3 LPAI and four of H5 LPAI were reported in commercial duck farms in Gers, Loire Atlantique, Lot and Garonne, Morbihan and Vendee regions, and two H5N3 LPAI in turkey breeding farms in Maine et Loire, west and southwest France. The infected ducks did not present any clinical signs, the infection being detected by screening prior to moving into a gavage unit. In addition, a case of H5N2 LPAI was also detected in fattening ducks in the Landes region. These latest detections show that the surveillance in France is working: early detection of LPAI virus strains in regions of high poultry density where there are multiple contact routes is important to limit incursions and maintenance of LPAI in these wider regions.

Mutation of H5 LPAI to HPAI is a relatively rare event, but further virus diversity may arise through LPAI viruses reassorting with HPAI strains (especially in wild waterfowl populations), where both are circulating, as suggested for the emergence of the H5N6 HPAI strain in Europe, also making the early detection of LPAI virus strains a critical tool in controlling these risks.

Conclusion

Given that HPAIV H5N6 infection is now present in wild birds at a number of sites across England, the probability that further events will occur in wild birds in the UK is assessed to remain as "HIGH". It is not possible to be certain at what time point in the H5N6 epidemic curve these current wild bird cases represent. Thus, further outbreaks could include as yet undetected ongoing infections at other sites in the UK and also future infections through movement of birds from currently-infected sites to new sites. Since the wild waterbird migration has peaked it is now less likely that H5N6-infected birds will be entering the UK from Europe but local movement between sites may be

influenced by colder weather. Indeed, as the birds start to migrate north next month, some cases may occur further north in the UK. The presence of LPAIV in western France currently presents a "LOW" risk of entry to the UK through wild birds. This is because LPAIV has not yet been detected in wild birds in France and birds will not be migrating north from France until April/May.

On the basis of the presence of multiple H5N6-infections in wild birds, and the HIGH risk of further wild bird findings, Avian Influenza Prevention Zones are now in place across England and Wales meaning that poultry keepers must maintain enhanced biosecurity (excluding housing, but using every other means to prevent contact with wild birds). The risk of introduction of infection onto individual poultry premises in the UK remains "LOW" for those poultry farms which have strong biosecurity measures in place, but "MEDIUM" for those with poor biosecurity.

We strongly recommend that all poultry keepers (including backyard keepers) should familiarise themselves with government guidance on good biosecurity and how to report suspicion of disease appropriately.

Authors

Dr Helen Roberts Dr Paul Gale Professor Ian Brown

More information on Avian Flu and the Avian Influenza Prevention Zones can be found on the government webiste https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu

OBITUARY

David Malaperiman

David Malaperiman sadly died on 17th January 2018 at the age of 74. He was a Life Member of WPA and served on Council and as a Trustee from 2006 to 2010. In 2014 David and his wonderfully supportive wife Kerry were awarded Honorary Life Membership for their services to WPA and in particular for their contribution to the successful fund raising for WPA Projects at the Compton Manor Clay Shoots. David was a delightful person with an easygoing manner and was great company at all events whether it be Newbury Races, a days shooting accompanied by his Labrador, which he adored, or a WPA fund raising event. He never kept Gamebirds or had any interest in so doing but he was a great conservationist and in particular supported WPA's Pipar Project to which he was a very generous contributor. He was one of a group of conservation minded shooting people who liked what we were doing and the way that we were doing it. We are fortunate to have them. All his many friends will sorely miss him.
Our sympathy goes to his wife Kerry and his two sons Patrick and Nicholas.

Sir William McAlpine

Sir William McAlpine died on Sunday 4 March aged 82 following a period of illness. He was a council member and a trustee of WPA from 2012 and hosted the 4th biennial party of the Golden Pheasant Club with a tour of his Fawley estate followed by a champagne reception and lunch. Part of his estate became a sanctuary for animals that zoos and wildlife parks could not house, he always regretted that he could not accommodate carnivores as the animals run free, and for many years he was on the board of ZSL.

Sir William was probably better known for single-handedly having done more for the preservation of railways, trains and railway artefacts and buildings than any other. He was responsible for the rescue of the steam locomotive the Flying Scotsman, bringing it back to England from America after it was set to spend the rest of its days in a museum.

As a partner in the family building company, railways could only ever be a hobby and he adored the construction industry. He started visiting sites with his father aged four and while at 23 he was responsible for the construction of the world's first commercial atomic power station (at Bradwell), his favourite job was the construction of massive oil platforms for the North Sea. He was High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, nominated as Chief of the Clan McAlpine, a school governor and a director of many companies and he will be missed by the many.

PRESTIGIOUS RSPB AWARD PRESENTED IN MEMORY OF DICK POTTS

Emma Zeale

The RSPB has made a posthumous medal award to eminent scientist Dick Potts. Dick made huge contributions to conservation science from the 1970s onwards, particularly in the studies on farmland birds and grey partridge.

Dick sadly passed away on 30 March 2017, however he was made aware of receiving the award shortly before he passed away. Dick's wife Olga received the award on his behalf at a ceremony in October 2017. Olga said that "Dick would have felt truly honoured to have received this award. In true Dick Potts fashion, he would have seen this as not just an award for himself but for all those who, over the years, have worked for the issues he cared so deeply about. We will ensure his legacy lives on."

The RSPB medal is a highly prestigious award and recognises the outstanding contribution to nature conservation.

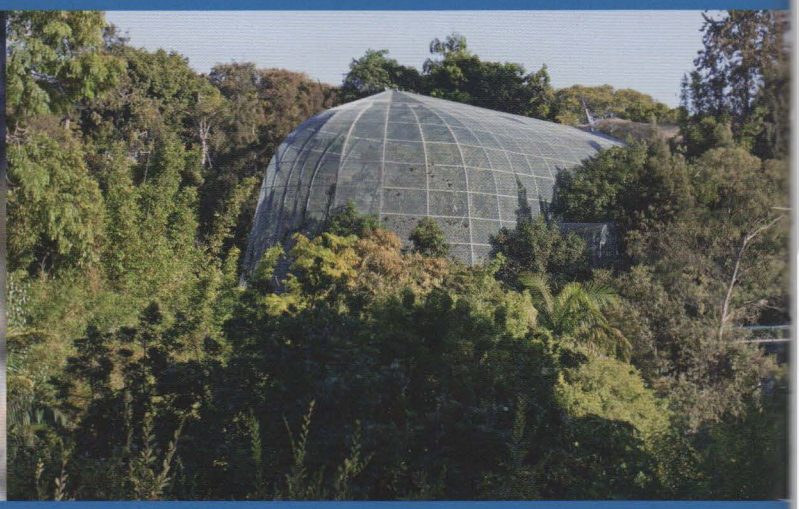
Bulwer's pheasant - wing-whirring is accompanied by plaintive cheeping
Photo: Charles Alexander

A calling male Bulwer's seeks to attract females to his display ground.
Photo: Charles Alexander

Female sooty grouse
Photo: Stuart Wilson

Male sooty grouse
Photo: Stuart Wilson

Walter's (Bulwer's pheasant) iridescent body plumage from above
Photo: Charles Alexander



San Diego's Owens Rainforest Aviary, originally constructed in 1937
Photo: Charles Alexander