



1.0 Megapode

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The megapodes are a unique group of birds as they utilise external sources of heat to incubate their eggs (Jones *et al.* 1995). The Megapodiidae, literally meaning big feet after the disproportionately large feet of the birds, were first described to science during Magellan's 1519-1522 expedition to the Far East (Frith 1956). The family Megapodiidae consists of 22 species in seven genera, most of which are island forms are mainly found in the Indo-Australian region east of Wallace's line (Jones *et al.* 1995). There are three exceptions to this: *Megapodius nicobariensis* from the Nicobar Islands, *Megapodius pritchardii* from Niuafo'ou Island and *Megapodius laperouse* from the Pulau and Marianna Islands. Thirteen of the 22 species are currently threatened by habitat destruction, introduction of predators, hunting and over-exploitation of eggs (Jones *et al.* 1995; Sivakumar 2007). In India, there is only one species, the Nicobar megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis*, which occur in the Nicobar group of islands (Abdulali, 1967; Ali and Ripley, 1983; Grimmet *et al.*, 1998; Dekker 1992; Sivakumar 2000). Species account of the Nicobar megapode is largely compiled from the following sources:

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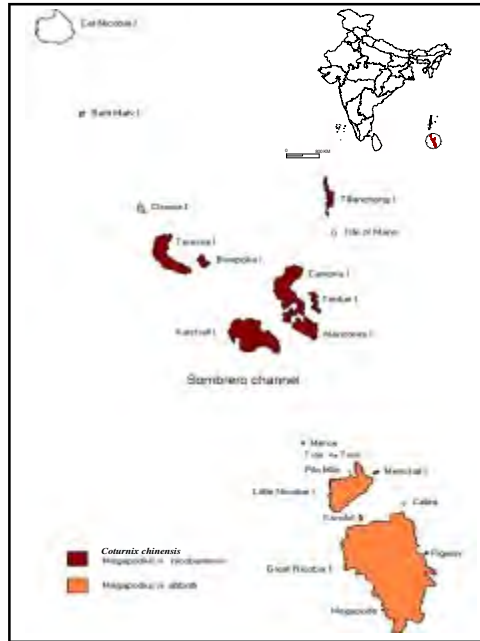


Nicobar megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis* Blyth, 1846

Vernacular Names: *Kongah* (Nicobar), *Jungle murghi* (Hindi),



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Distribution & Habitat

The mound nesting Nicobar megapode is endemic to the Nicobar islands. Historically, the Nicobar Megapode occurred on most Nicobar islands barring Car Nicobar, Chaura and Bati Malv. There were a few records from the Andaman group of islands and from the Coco Islands further north. None of the records from the Andaman group are of recent origin and the species is now believed to be absent there. Two sub-species of the Nicobar megapode occur in the Nicobar group of islands. *M. n. nicobariensis* occur in Nancowry group of islands and *M.n. abbotti* occurs in Southern group of Nicobar islands. After the 2004 tsunami, the Nicobar megapode continues to be found on all but two islands viz., Trax and Megapode where it had been reported earlier. The Megapode Island was fully submerged due to rise in sea water level after tsunami. The Nicobar megapode was not found on Trax Island and it was believed that the bird probably became extinct here due to tsunami waves. After tsunami, the global status of the Nicobar megapode is proposed to change from Vulnerable to Critically Endangered.

Conservation Status
IUCN : vulnerable
IWPA : Schedule I
CITES : Not listed

It inhabits forests and secondary growth, with greatest concentrations in coastal forests. Nicobar megapode prefer a narrow strip of flat coastal forest for mound nesting. Moreover, the distribution and density of the Nicobar Megapode and its mound varies within this coastal habitat. Small population of megapodes also occur in interior islands.

Description

The Nicobar Megapode is a terrestrial brown or reddish-brown bird with a pinkish-red bare patch around the eye and a greyish crown; the dorsal side of the leg is blackish-brown and the ventral side yellowish. Newly-hatched chicks have the crown, upperparts, and upper wing rufous brown, and the under parts a dull cinnamon-brown, sometimes with slight grey tinge, with the lower back inconspicuously rufous and black.

Size, Habitat & Altitude Range
Body Length : 43 cm
Weight : 595-1021 g
Habitat : Undergrowth in thick forests adjacent to sandy beaches on islands
Altitude : up to 800m

Behaviour

They are usually seen in pairs in forests close to the beach, the sexes looks alike. It incubates its eggs in nest-mounds close to the shore which are built from sand, loam and humus. This is presumed to rely on microbial decomposition. The species is primarily monogamous, although extra-pair copulations have been observed. Male gives loud territorial calls, rising in pitch and grading into a staccato series. Feeding birds give noisy, cackling contact calls. In a pair, both

Reproduction & Life Cycle
Call : *kyouououou-kyou-kou-koukoukoukou, kuk-a-kuk-kuk*
Egg Laying Season : November to May
Nest Site/ Type : mounds of sand and rotting vegetation
Clutch Size : 2 to 4
Incubation Period : 70-80 days

the male and female contribute to the mound maintenance. Unpaired mature males build and defend mounds to attract a partner. Several pairs often share nest-mounds, with a strong hierarchy apparent during egg-laying. Annual hatching success fluctuates widely (e.g. 87% in 1996 cf. 37% in 1997). Chicks are precocial.