



13.0 Status, Distribution and Conservation of Galliformes in Jammu and Kashmir

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Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is the northern most state of India and its location and the range of altitudes provides for three distinct biomes – the low land dry thorny scrub of Jammu, the mid level temperate evergreen forests of Kashmir and the cold arid climes of Ladakh. Therefore, along with the distinct vegetation types, the regions also exhibit distinct faunal assemblages.

There are no detailed studies on galliformes in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, except for Lamba *et al.* (1982), Kaul (1989) and Qadri *et al.* (1990) who documented the distribution and status of pheasants in the Kashmir valley, and Scott *et al.* (1989) in Kishtwar National Park (NP), the only area in Jammu region. Distribution of galliformes has been better documented in Ladakh region by travelers and ornithologists (Pfisher, 2001).

The state has 14 species of galliformes, which includes seven pheasants and others belong to partridge, quail and francolins. Being divided into three clear biogeographic zones the state has species of the Indian peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and the Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), of the cold arid in Tibetan Partridge (*Perdix hodgsoniae*) and the Tibetan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus tibetanus*), and the temperate species such as the Koklass (*Pucrasia macrolopha*), Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) and the Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*). Only two of the 14 species, the Western Tragopan and Cheer (*Catreus wallichi*) are threatened with extinction globally, although all are included in the Wildlife (Protection) Act of Jammu and Kashmir state.

Status and distribution of galliformes in Jammu and Kashmir state

1. Himalayan monal: It is a commonly occurring pheasant found in almost all Protected Areas (PA) within its distributional range in the state. It can be sighted in good numbers in Limber Wildlife Sanctuary (WS), Dachigam NP, Overa-Aru WS and Kishtwar NP besides other territorial forest areas of the state. No population estimates are available. Main threats were hunting in the past but much of that appears to have been controlled now although they are still trapped in pit-fall traps.

2. Western Tragopan: This threatened species is found at a handful of locations within Jammu and Kashmir state. The largest population is perhaps in the Limber-Lachipora area of the Kazinag range. Western Tragopan is also found in Kishtwar NP and are reportedly present in Sud Mahadev area of Jammu province. Abundance estimates are available from Limber area only which suggests a population of over 45 males. They appear to be fairly secure in Limber area although nothing is known about their status from Kishtwar NP.

3. Cheer Pheasant: The Cheer has a limited distribution in the state. In Jammu area, it is confirmed from Trikuta area while in Kashmir it is found in the Limber WS and Lachipora WS. Southern slopes of the Pir Panjal range need to be surveyed to locate more sites. The species appears to adapt to disturbed habitats and therefore may not be as threatened as thought to be.

4. Koklass Pheasant: This is a relatively common pheasant (as in the other parts of the western Himalaya) and is found in most forested areas of the state. Most significantly, it is found in Overa-Aru WS, Limber WS, Lachipora WS, Gulmarg WS, Dachigam NP and Kishtwar NP. Old records of the presence of this species from Boniyar area of the Kashmir valley (Lamba *et al.*, 1982) are available. Population estimates for this pheasant are lacking.

5. Red Junglefowl: This species is mainly found in the Jammu region of the state and is found in the Ramnagar WS, Jasrota WS and Nandini WS. They are also found in some Reserve Forests of Kathua. This species is largely absent from the valley.

6. White-crested Kalij (*Lophura leucomelanos*): This is also largely confined to the Jammu region of the state and is not found in any significant numbers in the valley although some reports indicate that they may be present in the lower parts of the Jhelum valley. However this needs to be ascertained. The distribution largely follows that of the Red Junglefowl within the state.

7. Indian Peafowl: This species occupies the areas adjacent to the Indian plains and is found in the Ramnagar



WS, Nandini WS and Nagrota WS in the state besides near agricultural farmlands in Sambha and Kathua areas of Jammu. It is not found in the Kashmir Valley or in Ladakh region.

8. Himalayan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*):

This is a high altitude species found in the higher reaches of the state in Ladakh region and also some high altitude areas of the Kashmir valley. It is also found in the higher reaches of Kishtawar NP. However no estimates of abundance are available for this species.

9. Tibetan Snowcock: The Tibetan snowcock is found in only some parts of northern and eastern Ladakh and is thus limited in its distribution within the state.

10. Snow partridge (*Lerwa lerwa*): This species is found in Ladakh and the higher reaches of the Kashmir valley. It may also occur in the Kishtawar NP, but there was no report to suggest this.

11. Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*): This species is spread across all the three provinces of the state and is relatively common in Ladakh and the Kashmir valley, migrating from upper reaches to the valley floor in Dachigam NP. They are also found in other PAs of the state.

12. Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*): This species is predominantly found in the Jammu province. Its recent distribution within the Kashmir valley is not known.

13. Tibetan Partridge: This species is confined to some parts of Ladakh region of the state. Its distribution and status remain largely unknown.

14. Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*): This species is believed to occur in the state but no recent records exist. This is perhaps a reflection of less ornithological work being carried out in the state.

Conservation issues:

There are only two species threatened with extinction in the state. The Cheer Pheasant is confined to the Kazinag range where it survives in the Limber WS and Lachipora WS. As apparent from surveys in other areas, Cheer survives well outside PAs also. Thus, we do not perceive any major threats to their population in the state. However, lack of surveys has meant that our knowledge about Cheer is restricted to only the two sites in Kazinag (Kashmir) and Trikuta (Jammu) areas.

The Western Tragopan is, on the other hand more dependent perhaps on the protection to its habitat and is thus safe in Kazinag range (Limber WS and Lachipora WS areas). Their status is unknown in Kishtawar NP though the

potential habitat here is larger than in Limber WS and Lachipora WS. More surveys are required to establish this.

Local hunting must take a toll of pheasant numbers near villages, especially when they are driven down in winters by bad weather. Impacts of such local hunting are not known but since there appears to be no trade in pheasants for meat in the state, this level of hunting should not pose too much of a problem although efforts should be made to stop this as any form of hunting is illegal under the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife (Protection) Act.

With the security situation in the state improving, it is expected that more surveys will now be undertaken and a more meaningful assessment of distribution and status of galliformes of the state will be available, for without such information, it is difficult to prepare better conservation plans.

Conservation Recommendations

The state is rich in galliformes and it is time that a concerted survey be undertaken to map the distributions of all the species. The state harbours a significant population of Western Tragopan and thus has an important role to play in its conservation globally and also in the national context. The main populations of this species need to be identified and protected from threats of habitat loss and hunting. Creating public awareness about galliformes by establishing state of the art display facilities could be one of the main tasks of the Department of Wildlife Protection, Jammu & Kashmir Government in the coming years. Keeping colourful pheasants such as Himalayan monal in well maintained aviaries with proper information could generate some awareness about this group of birds. The Department of Wildlife Protection could also join in the conservation breeding efforts of the Western Tragopan initiated by the Department of Forest and Wildlife, Himachal Pradesh and the Central Zoo Authority.

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