

## Chapter 8

# STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF GALLIFORM BIRDS IN KERALA.

### Introduction

Patterns of avian distribution and abundance depend largely on how individual birds perceive and use habitat at local, regional and continental scales (Cody 1985, Wiens 1989)

Kerala harbours a rich fauna of birds with about 400 species, but only few species of Galliform birds were reported from within the state. According to earlier investigators like Jerdon (1870) Ferguson and Bourdillon (1904), Baker (1930), Baker and Inglis (1930), Whistler and Kinnear (1937-39), Ali (1935-37) eleven species of Galliform birds occur in Kerala. They are the Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*, Blackbreasted Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*, Grey Quail *C. coturnix*, Bluebreasted Quail *C. chinensis*, Jungle Bush Quail *Perdica asiatica*, Rock Bush Quail *P. argoondah*, Painted Bush quail, *P. erythrorhyncha*, Travancore Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*, Painted Spurfowl *G. lunulata*, Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* and Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*. Most of these species are endemic to peninsular India or the Western Ghat country.

Recent surveys came across only seven species of Galliform birds in the Kerala, the Grey Francolin, the Grey Quail, the Jungle Bush Quail, the Painted Bush Quail, the Red Spurfowl, the Grey

Junglefowl and the Indian Peafowl. In a report on the endemic disjunct and globally uncommon birds of Kerala, Zacharias and Gaston (1999) recorded distribution of four species of Galliform birds in the state, the Jungle Bush Quail, the Painted Bush Quail, the Grey Junglefowl and the Indian Peafowl.

Natural forests of the Western Ghats in Kerala range from dry deciduous through moist deciduous (Champion & Seth 1968). Areas west of the main ranges originally supported evergreen and semi-evergreen forests while the rain shadow effects of the hills created drier forests in the eastern slopes. The transition is very abrupt in places (e.g. Wynaad, Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuaries). Currently many areas to the west of the Ghats support degraded evergreen forests that have many characteristics of moist deciduous, or even dry deciduous forest, so that original classifications are difficult to apply. (Zacharias and Gaston 1999)

Within Kerala the high hills of the Western Ghats are divided into two blocks by the Palakkad (Palghat) Gap, a significant pass at latitudes 10° 30'N. A less pronounced hiatus in forest cover occurs at the Achankoil Gap (8° 58'N) although this pass is higher and narrower than the Palakkad Gap.

### **Field Survey**

Results of field surveys conducted in different localities in 28 forest/nonforest areas by me and my research guide and reliable information gathered from forest staff and bird watchers are pooled together. The localities covered are given in Table 21.

**Table 22.** Areas Surveyed and habitat description (PA Protected areas)

Locality	Altitude (m)	Description
1.Chemunji	500-600	Evergreen,Sholas
2.Shenduruni	100-600	Semi-evergreen PA
3.Ranni	80-	Semi-evergreen
4.Peermade	900-	Evergreen,grasslands,plantations
5.Periyar	900	Semi-evergreen,moist deciduousPA
6.Pambadumpara	700-	Degraded semi-evergreen,plantations
7.Idukki	500	Semi-evergreen PA
8.Munnar (Rajamalai)	1700	Evergreen,shola,grasland PA
9.Chinnar	500	Deciduous,thorn scrub PA
10.Thattekkad	60	Semi-evergreen,moist deciduous PA
11.Athirappally	200-	Semi-evergreen
12.Peechi- Vazhani	50	Semi-evergreen,moist deciduous PA
13.Parambikulam (Thunakadavu)	800-	Moist Deciduous, Plantantions. PA
14.Nalliampathi	900	Evergreen,semi-evergreen
15.Nemmara	200	Deciduous forests,Scrub
16.Dhoni	200	Semi-evergreen,moist deciduous
17.Choolannur	150	Deciduous PA
18.Shornur	60	Open dry scrub
19.Nilambur (Karimpuzha)	60	Deciduous-secondary growth
20.Nilambur (Nedungayam)	60	Moist deciduous PA
21.Kunnamangalam	60	Open dry scub
22.Wynaad Ghats (Periya)	100-600	Semi-evergreen
23.Muthanga WWLS	700	Moist deciduous PA
24.TholpettyWWLS	700	Deciduous PA
25.Thirunelly	900	Semi-evergreen,moist deciduous
26.Aralam	100	Semi-evergreen,moist deciduousPA
27.Payangady	MSL	Sacred groves,coconut groves
28.Konnakkad	700	Evergreen,Semi-evergreen

\* The localities covered are given in brackets

Endemic species were grouped into those endemic to the Indian Peninsula (South Asian Endemics SAE) a group of open country species and those endemic to the Western Ghats and associated hills (WGE). The definitions given here are based largely on the range maps and distributional information given by Ali and Ripley (1987), and Grimmet et al. (1998). Nomenclature follows Ali and Ripley (1987).

### **Species details**

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*. A dry country species. Uncommon or rare. Two birds were observed at Nemmara. According to Ali (1968), small numbers in dry open scrub country in southern and northern Districts.

Blackbreasted Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*. SAE Not recorded in the survey. According to Ali (1968) two specimens collected from Trivandrum neighbourhood-frequents and scrub bordering cultivation

Bluebreasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis*. Not recorded in this survey. Ferguson and Bourdillon (1904) saw them at Peermade on the grasslands and believed them to breed there. Ali (1935-37) didn't come across with them

Grey Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. Observed once from coastal Calicut.

Jungle Bush Quail *Perdicula asiatica*.SAE. This is a bird of dry country and observed from Periyar at Mangaladevi and from Muthanga (part of Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary) suspected to occur at Prambikulam.-rare.Ferguson (1904) observed them in southern Kerala.

Rock Bush Quail *Perdicula argoondah* SAE. Not recorded in this survey. It is a dry country species and occurs in grasslands according to Ali (1968)

Painted Bush Quail *Perdicula asiatica* WGE. Observed at Periyar (nests were observed), Nilambur, Nelliampathi and Thirunelli- uncommon or rare, though Elwes (1870) recorded them abundant at Periyar and Kinloch (1921) found them numerous at Nalliampathi- Undoubtedly declining in numbers throughout its range and thrive only in protected areas.

Travancore Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*. SAE Common at low elevations like Shornur, Karimpuzha (Nilambur) and Kunnamangalam (near Calicut city) in degraded vegetation where there is some plant cover and on all the hills except Chemunji (Shola) Munnar (montane grasslands / shola) and Chinnar (Dry / thorn) scrub. Not a threatened species.

Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix lunulata* SAE Not met with during the survey. Whistler and Kinnear (1939) reported about a specimen collected by Rhodes Morgan from Palakkad Hills. Fletcher(1911) recorded them from Wynaad.

Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* SAE. Recorded from all localities except from montane grasslands at Munnar and dry/thorn scrub at Chinnar; from sea level to high hills. They have declined considerably at Periyar and become rare at Nelliampathi and Wynaad, though Elwes (1870) saw them numerous at Periyar, Kinloch (1923) found them abundant at Nelliampathi and Baker and Inglis (1930) saw them plentiful at Wynaad. Interestingly Pollock (1894) saw them scarce at Thunakadavu, in Parambikulam, probably due to the unsuitability of the habitat. They, no doubt have been declining throughout their range.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* SAE. A dry country species-occurs on the rain shadow region of the Western Ghats, most of the Palakkad district and eastern part of Trichur District (in the drier areas) at Thannikudy (observed once), Periyar, Chinnar, Peechi-Vazhani, Parambikulam, Nemmara, Choolannur, Muthanga and Tholpetty. Koelz (1947) has observed the species at Nilambur. They are declining in numbers in the Palakkad and eastern Trichur where they enjoyed a wide distribution in the past and protected through religious sentiments. They are also declining in numbers in Muthanga, a part of Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary. Recently a Sanctuary has been set up by the Govt. of Kerala at Choolannur near Alathur in the Palakkad district, to protect the species.

Although the survey was not designed to determine population sizes, some comments could be made on the likely status of those species regarded as rare. All the species except the Spurfowl, *Galloperdix spadicea* warrant concern. They are all

vulnerable to habitat destruction. The Grey Junglefowl is threatened with poaching throughout its range. An intensive survey of the Galliform birds in the state would provide with information on the current status of this group of birds.