

REPORT ON 1981 FIELD SEASON IN NEPAL

World Pheasant Association

A.D. Lelliott

Schedule

25-26 March	Fly London-Delhi-Kathmandu
27-29 March	Meetings in Kathmandu. Meet trekking group.
30 March - 19 April	Lead trek in Langtang valley for Peregrine Expedns. Visit Chitwan National Park.
20-22 April	Meetings with Dept. of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in Kathmandu.
25 April	Bus to Pokhara.
24 April - 4 May	Trek to Pinar with J.K. Tamrakar, official of Dept. Nat. Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Meet Col. J. Roberts (Chairman, WPA Nepal) and ecologists from Natural History Museum, Kathmandu, at Pinar.
4 -5 May	Return to Pokhara.
6 May	Bus to Kathmandu.
7-14 May	Kathmandu. Meetings with Dept. Nat. Parks and W.C., Col. J. Roberts, P.B. Yonzon. Preparations for next trek.
15 May	Bus to Pokhara.
16-22 May	Trek to Dhorpatan valley with A. Robertson.
23 May - 11 June	Survey for Pheasants in Dhorpatan valley.
12-18 June	Return Dhorpatan to Pokhara.
19 June	Bus to Kathmandu.
20-22 June	Meetings in Kathmandu.
23 June	Fly Kathmandu-Delhi.
24 June - present	Visiting Kedarnath Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh, India.

VISIT TO PIPAR STUDY AREA WITH J.K. TAMRAKAR, HMG OFFICIAL.

1. A report on the trip, including proposals for the establishment of a Wildlife Reserve, has been submitted to HMG Dept. of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation jointly by J.K. Tamrakar and myself. Copies of this report have been sent to WPA UK and WPA N.
2. Since then, the proposals of posting 2 private Wildlife guards at Karuwa village and the erection of noticeboards, have already been carried out by WPA Nepal.
3. During our visit to Pipar, the area was also visited by Col. J. Roberts, Chairman of WPA Nepal, and discussions concerning the area were held subsequently with the Ghachok Pradhan Pancha and the District Forest Officer (Pokhara).
4. The present 5-year plan of HMG Dept. N.P. and W.C. does not include the establishment of a reserve at Pipar. If it is to be established in the present period, special dispensation will be required by the Royal Palace Wildlife Committee. WPA UK should therefore assure HMG Nepal of their continued support for the formation of a reserve at Pipar.
5. Censuses of Koklass Pheasant and Satyr Tragopan were carried out at Pipar by the call-count method on 29 and 30 April. The results were as follows:

<u>Species</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of calling males counted</u>	<u>Area(km²)</u>	<u>Density(pairs/km²)</u>
Koklass	29/4	8	2.3	3.5
Koklass	30/4	7	2.3	3.0
Tragopan	30/4	13	2.3	5.6

The Koklass figures are an increase over spring 1978 (2.6 pairs per km²), and a slight decrease from spring 1979 (4.8 pairs/km²). The Satyr Tragopan figures are an increase over both the 1978 and 1980 censuses (4.4. and 3.0 pairs/km² respectively).

SURVEY OF PHEASANTS IN DHORPATAN VALLEY, WEST NEPAL.

The upper Dhorpatan Valley (Uttar Ganga river) was visited on trek between 23 May and 11 June 1981 by Andrew Robertson and myself. Cheer and Koklass Pheasants are known to occur there in some numbers (Roberts 1980), and we took the opportunity of carrying out a brief survey of both species.

Tonography and Vegetation

The upper Dhorpatan valley is situated South of the Dhaulagiri Himal, at approximately $28^{\circ} 30'$ N latitude; 83° E longitude. It runs roughly East-West, and has a considerably reduced rainfall as compared with the South Annapurna region (Lelliott and Yonzon 1980).

The vegetation of the valley is very interesting, since it is the most easterly extension of the coniferous forests of West Nepal. The area has been surveyed by Dobremez and Jest (1971), and broadly consists of pine-juniper forest, with fir and rhododendron on the upper slopes. Progressing westwards down the valley, other conifer species such as cedar, spruce, and cypress become evident, and on lower slopes, broad-leaved species such as oak, maple and rhododendron predominate.

Our surveys were concentrated in the pine-juniper forest of the upper valley (camps 1 to 4). Here, considerable deforestation is taking place, and secondary growth is predominant in cut areas where regeneration has been allowed. Generally, undergrowth and understory in the forest are light.

CHEER PHEASANT

Methods of Survey

Cheer Pheasants are reported to call at dawn and dusk. Lelliott (1981a) and A.J.Gaston (pers. comm.) note that calling is sporadic, but the dawn calling is more regular than dusk calling. To survey for numbers of Cheer, we used the call-count census method (Howman 1977): up to 3 members of our party (Nema Chotta, A. Lelliott, A. Robertson) listened for 1 to 3 hours at dawn from strategic points near each camp site. On return to camp, our results were pooled, and we could estimate the total number of Cheer heard calling.

For observations and evidence of Cheer Pheasants, up to 3 members would search potential habitat during the day. In this way, a total of 187 man-hours were spent searching in the field. In addition, since camp sites 2,3,4,6,7, and 8 were within Cheer habitat, we could potentially hear and see Cheer Pheasants at any time of day at these sites.

Results

A total of 8 survey camps were set up during our stay, and these are shown in Figure 1. The following table records the number of Cheer Pheasants heard and seen at each locality:

Table 1

<u>Camp No.</u>	<u>Height (feet(m))</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>No. of Cheer Pheasants heard</u>	<u>No. of Cheer Pheasants seen (males/females)</u>
1	9200 (2800)	22-25/5	7	2/2
2	9700 (2960)	25-28/5	11	3/4
3	9550 (2910)	28-30/5	5	1/1
4	9900 (3020)	30/5-1/6	8	1/1
5	8600 (2625)	1-2/6	0	0
6	9650 (2945)	2-3/6	0	0
7	9500 (2900)	3-5/6	1	0
8	9350 (2850)	5-6/6	0	0
2	9700 (2960)	6-12/6	(7)	2/0
			<u>32</u>	<u>17</u>

The 17 Cheer Pheasants seen probably represent a total of 17 separate birds.

Observations and Discussion

Cheer Pheasants were seen and heard almost exclusively in the upper valley (camps 1-4). They occurred in pine/juniper/fir/rhododendron forest on slopes of approximately 0 to 30° between 9300 and 10300 feet altitude (2840-3140m). This forest has been burnt and felled to a considerable extent, and Cheer were most frequently seen in and heard calling from the cut areas with secondary growth. They were not seen in thick forest or in clear-cut areas. These observations of habitat preference contrast strongly with my previous experience of Cheer .

habitat (Lelliott 1981b), and with the accounts in the literature (Hume and Marshall 1872, Beebe 1918-22, Ali and Ripley 1969, Gaston 1980). The latter state that Cheer are found in steep precipitous craggy areas or "dangs" with scrub cover and adjacent woodland, and my own observations East of Dhorpatan in 1980 confirmed this.

A total of 31 Cheer were heard in the upper Dhorpatan valley. Since we visited only a small proportion of the potential forest habitat, our results probably account for only a proportion of the total population. I would estimate that the total number of Cheer Pheasants present in the upper valley is between 50 and 100 birds. They appear to be patchily distributed however, and the overall density is probably low. Only one Cheer was heard in the 'lower' valley (camps 5-8), and it is likely that the habitat supports only a few birds.

Calling was heard principally in the early morning, but on 3 occasions it was heard at dusk. Unlike Koklass and Satyr Tragopan, the morning calls of Cheer were brief, usually lasting only 1 to 5 minutes. Calling appeared to function as communication between groups of Cheer: as soon as a bird began calling from one locality, others would call from nearby.

During our visit, Cheer should have been breeding, and we hoped to find either nests or young birds. In the event, we found no direct evidence for breeding despite intensive nest searching in areas where Cheer were regularly heard and seen near camp 2. One villager reported (second hand) of a Cheer nest found further up-valley in late May, but no details could be ascertained. Due to the very limited sightings we made of Cheer, little concrete data on behaviour or ecology were obtained. Birds observed feeding were seen to walk slowly and warily over a hillside, pecking at vegetation. Digging was not observed, but digging holes were found on several occasions, and 5 droppings were collected for analysis of contents.

Direct human interference was limited. The upper Dhorpatan valley is peopled partly by Tibetan refugees (who are Buddhists and do not hunt pheasants), and partly by Bangar Nepalis (some of whom hunt). No pheasant traps were seen in the area. The forests are subjected to considerable disturbance during the day, by local villagers cutting firewood, felling trees, and grazing their livestock. However, as noted previously (Lelliott

1981b), Cheer Pheasants appear to be habituated to such disturbance. The most serious threat by Man is the deforestation of the valley sides. Although Cheer seem to prefer cut areas within forest, they clearly cannot exist where clear-cutting has occurred. The forest is slowly being cleared for agricultural land, and unless restrictions are imposed by HMG, the upper valley will lose most of its prime forest, to the detriment of humans and wildlife alike.

KOKLASS PHEASANT

Methods of Survey

As for Cheer Pheasant.

Results

Table 2 lists the numbers of Koklass heard around each camp locality:

<u>Camp No.</u>	<u>No. of Koklass males heard calling</u>
1	1
2	3
3	4
4	5
5	0
6	3
7	11
8	5
2	-
	<hr/>
	32

No sightings of Koklass were made throughout our visit.

Discussion

In the upper Dhorpatan valley (camps 1 to 4), Koklass were heard calling from mature fir-juniper-pine-rhododendron forest between 10,000 and 11,000 feet (3050-3350m), which was clearly above the usual range of the Cheer Pheasant. Koklass and Cheer were never heard calling from the same locality. Further down the valley, at camps 7 and 8, Koklass were heard calling from mature spruce-pine and cedar-spruce forest between about 9500 and 10,000 feet (2900-3050m). In this area, we heard only a single Cheer Pheasant calling from mixed deciduous forest at approximately

8700 feet (2650m). It appears that where both species are present, the Koklass occupies more mature forest above that of the Cheer, and where only the Koklass is present (lower valley) it occurs at a lower altitude.

A total of 32 Koklass were heard in the Dhorpatan valley, with numbers increasing down-valley. In view of this, I estimate a total population of more than 150 pairs of Koklass in the section of the valley that we visited. Densities are probably moderate in the lower valley (camps 5 to 8), where there may be 5 to 10 pairs per km² of suitable habitat.

Human influence factors are similar to those of the Cheer Pheasant. However, disturbance within the forests appeared to decrease down-valley where Koklass numbers were greater. Here, cutting for fuelwood and clearance for agricultural land is minimal; if this remains so, the future prospects for the Koklass are good in this area.

OTHER GALLIFORME SPECIES

Blood Pheasant - no evidence for the presence or absence of this species was obtained. However, Nema Chotta (Sherpa) reported seeing it in a valley (trail to Dolpo) on the northern side of Dhorpatan in spring 1976.

Satyr Tragopan - 1 male was heard calling, and 2 birds were seen at about 9700 feet (2960m) near camp 8.

Himalayan Monal- 3 were heard calling from approx. 10,000 feet (3050m) above camp 6. 1 was heard calling from roughly the same height above and opposite camp 7.

No partridges or Snowcock were encountered during the survey.

Summary

The upper Dhorpatan valley was surveyed for pheasants from 23 May - 11 June 1981. A total of 32 Cheer Pheasants were counted, and the upper section of the valley is estimated to support up to 100 birds. A total of 32 male Koklass Pheasants were heard calling, and the total extrapolated population of the valley may reach 150 pairs. Cheer were commoner in the upper section, while Koklass were more abundant in the lower. The most serious factor of human influence is deforestation, which needs to be controlled if serious loss of habitat is not to occur.

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FIGURE 1:

SKETCH MAP OF DHORPATAN VALLEY SHOWING SURVEY CAMPS

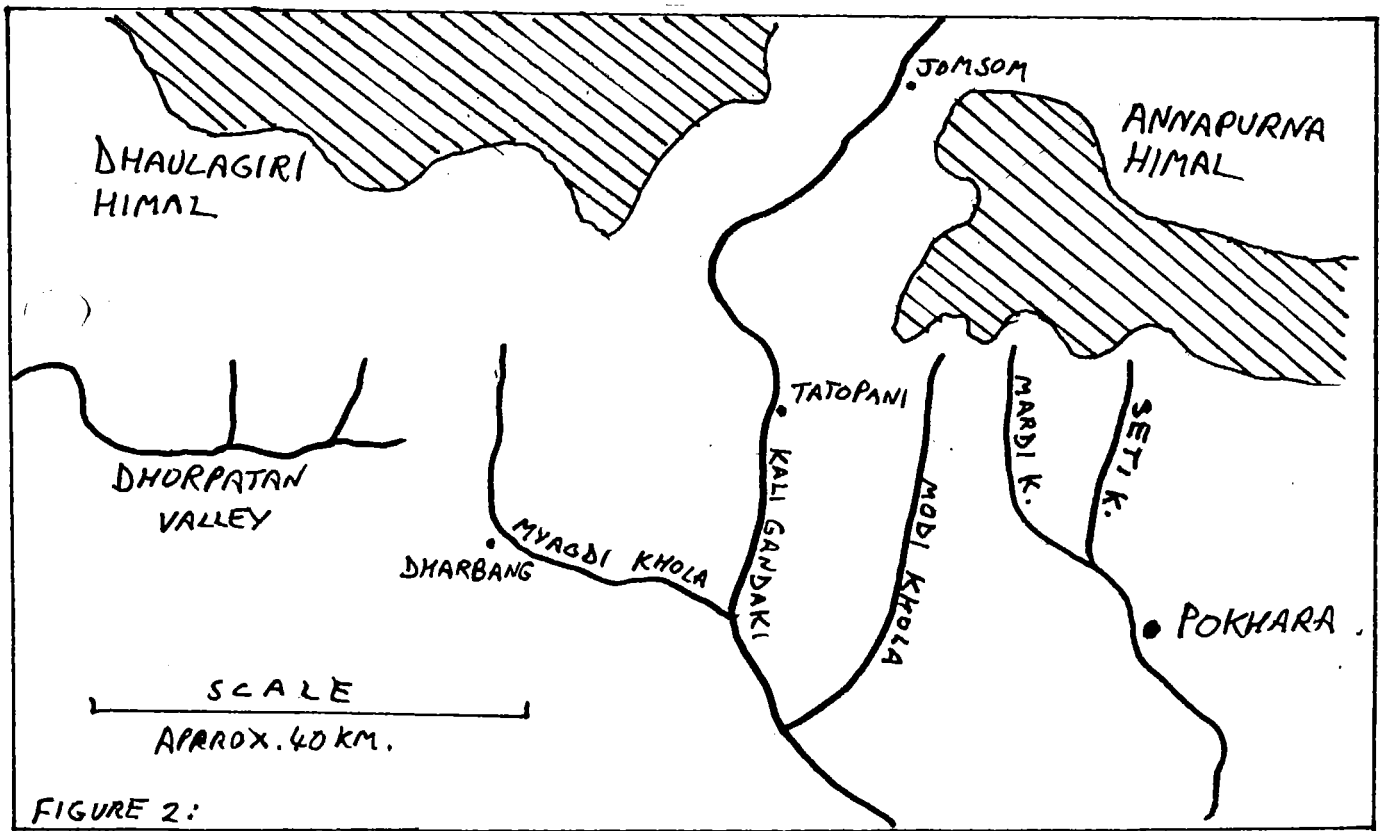
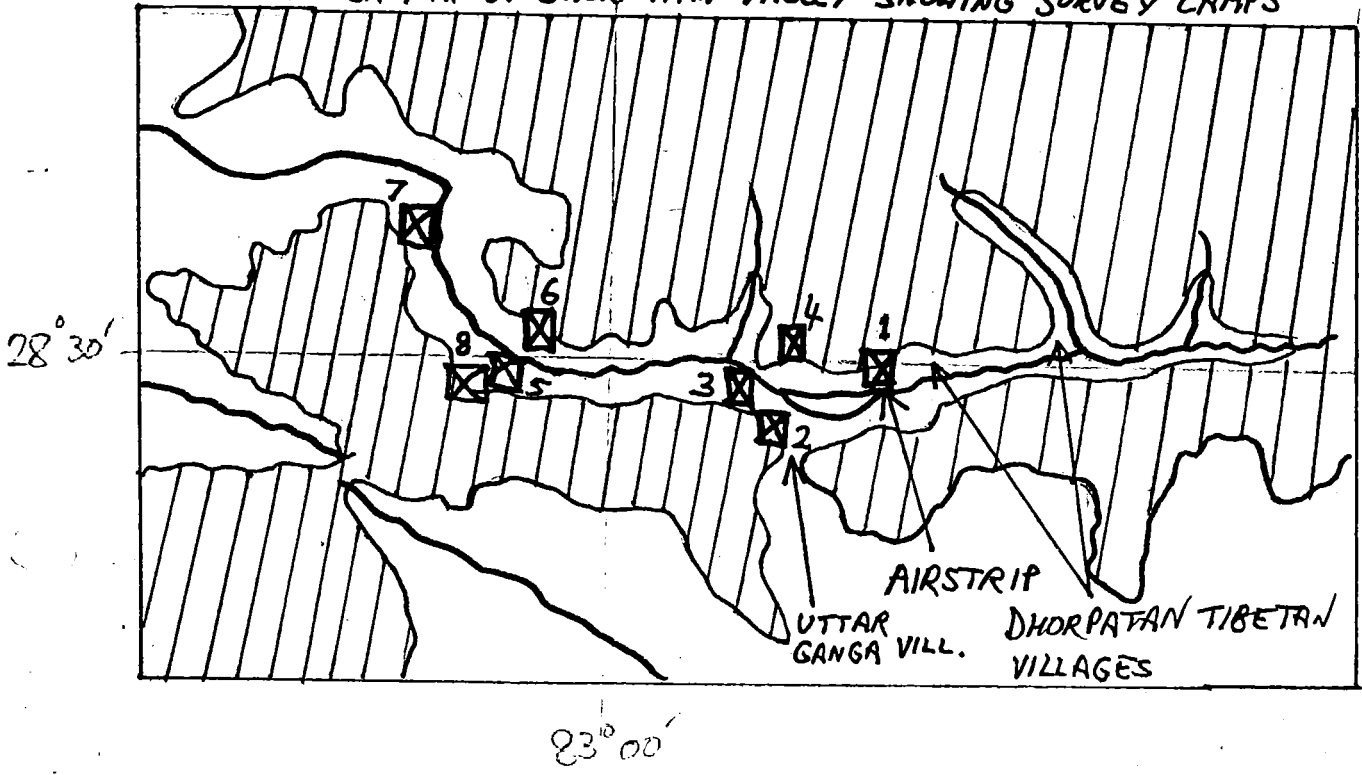


FIGURE 2:

SKETCH MAP SHOWING POSITION OF DHORPATAN VALLEY AND POKHARA.