Final Report

on

Status and Conservation of Western Tragopan Pheasant in and around Salkhala Game Reserve, Neelum, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan

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Winter view of Salkhala Game Reserve.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Salkhala Game Reserve is an important Bird Area, internationally recognized as a site for Western Tragopan Pheasant. Salkhala Support a variety of important Birds especially Galliformes (Western Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, Kashmir Koklas, White crested Kalij, Himalayan Snow cock snow partridge and Chukar Partridge) and Large Mammals (Black Bear, Musk Deer Common Leopard and Grey Gorals) and important Plants of commercial and medicinal values. Cross border firing between Pakistan and Indian Army for a period of about 12 years has stopped any kind of Research or conservation activities in the area. Population of Western Tragopan was estimated in 1982 for the last time by K.Islam in Salkhala. In 2008, community Conservation awareness program was launched for the community of Salkhala and during the implementation it is strongly felt that Community is ignorant about the importance of Galliformes especially Western Tragopan. Keeping in view the current project was designed and implemented. During this project Population of Western Tragopan has been estimated in and around Salkhala after a long period of almost 3 decades and baseline has been established for future surveys. Beside population estimation Wildlife staff has been trained in Galliformes Surveys. Community living around Salkhala has also been educated regarding importance of Galliformes especially Western Tragopan and its conservation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am really thankful to Mr. James Goodhart and Oriental Birds Club for granting me the donation of GBP1500 for this project which has enables me to conduct survey of this important species in this far-flung area of the world after a long period of almost three decades. I am really thankful to Mr. Francis Burner for his continues guidance throughout the project period. Thanks are also due to Mr. Javid Ayub, Director Wildlife, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, for his encouragement and legal support. Last but not the least I am also thankful to all wildlife field staff appointed in and around Salkhala Game Reserve for their help during the Field surveys.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background
This was a step forward to the last project funded by OBC under grant No. P812, which was a conservation awareness project only. During the implementation of the last project, it is learnt that population of Western Tragopan pheasant and its habitat is under high pressure due to anthropogenic activities. In AJK Salkhala is one of the major sites having Tragopan Pheasant and its population was not estimated systematically for the almost last three decades. So combining the both approaches this project was designed with the following aims and objectives.

1.2. Aims and Objectives
- To conduct surveys on the current status of Western Tragopan Pheasant in and around Salkhala Game Reserve.
- To create awareness among the community about the importance of Salkhala Game Reserve, Tragopan Pheasant, its habitat and factors involve in the decline of Pheasant’s population (especially of Tragopan pheasants).
- To educate the community regarding the sustainable use of natural resources of Salkhala Game Reserve.

1.3. Study area
Salkhala Game Reserve, Study area, lies between the geographical coordinated of 340 33/ N and 730 50/ E, having an area of 2,000 acre and is 80 kilometer in North West of Muzaffarabad city, in Bandi Range of Keran forest division in Neelum Valley, Azad Kashmir. Salkhala was notified as Game Reserve in 1982, with an elevation ranges from 5000 feet to 10332 feet above main sea level. Major Wildlife consists of western Tragopan
pheasant, Himalayan Monal Pheasant, Kashmir Koklass Pheasant, White crested Kalij Pheasant, Himalayan snow cock, Musk Deer, Black Bear, and common leopard. The prevailing plant species of the Game Reserve include Cedrus deodara, Pinus wallichiana, Abies pindrow, picea smithiana, Taxus wallichiana, Acer caecium, Butula utilis, Berberis Spp., Quercus spp., Juniperus communis, Viburnum Spp., Indegofera gerardiana, Juglans regia, Aesculus indica, etc. Heavy rain and snowfall is the characteristic of the area.

1.4. Species (Western Tragopan Pheasant).

Western Tragopan (Tragopan melanocephalus) is classified as Vulnerable (Birdlife international 2003). Gaston et al. (1983) stated that two main blocks of habitat are currently occupied: (1) the Neelum valley Pakistan (2) Kishtwar National Park in the Chenab valley of Kashmir, India. Mirza et al. (1978) called the species "still common" in some "pockets" of Pakistani-occupied Kashmir. In Pakistan associated with mixed coniferous forest, takes particular use of forest with dense undergrowth (Gaston et al. 1983a,b, Islam and Crawford 1987), from as low as 1350 m in winter, to 3600 m in summer.

2. Methodology

2.1 Literature Review
A review was made of all the research which has been conducted so far on Western Tragopan in Azad Kashmir including Salkhala Game Reserve before starting the surveys. Abstract has been published in G@llinformed # 3 as “A review of the status, distribution and conservation of the Western Tragopan (Tragopan melanocephalus) in Azad Jammu & Kashmir”. Final version of paper is under review and will be submitted for publication soon.

2.2. Planning
Based on the pre-existing data and information collected after conducting meetings with the wildlife staff, local community and hunters survey protocol was designed. As no research has been conducted around Salkhala so far, it is considered as a baseline for future research. For conservation Awareness
program six villages were selected from around the Reserve area keeping in view their dependence on the natural resources of the area. Similarly workshops were arranged for schools children in conservation education from the same villages.

2.3. Techniques used

Gaston’s (1980) call count technique was used to estimate the population on the 6 selected calling sites in and around Salkhala game reserve (Map Attached). Before starting surveys, training of wildlife staff appointed in and around Salkhala was carried out to build their capacity in Galliformes surveys. Conservation education material was prepared to be distributed among community for awareness.

3. Results

3.1. Conservation Awareness

i- Preparation of Awareness Material

Awareness material was prepared before starting activities. One poster having Western Tragopan Picture with habitat was designed and printed and one pamphlet having full information on Tragopan, its distribution, Feeding, Breeding, habitat and threats was prepared. During each activity awareness material was distributed among the community and school children as a part of awareness.
ii- Community Organization.

a- Community meetings
Meetings were conducted with the community living around the Salkhala Game Reserve to organize them into village level committees. 4 village level committees were established while looking at their level of dependence on the natural resources of the area.

Community of Salkhala during community Organization

b- Formation of conservation committee
Combining these village level committees an apex body called Salkhala Conservation Committee (SCC) has been organized and representatives of SCC have been selected by the members of Village Committees. This committee is responsible for the conservation of natural resources of the Area.

iii- Education and Awareness

a- Awareness Workshop for community on the Tragopan, its Habitat and Threats in Salkhala
A one day awareness workshop was organized in Salkhala village to educate community about Tragopan, its habitat and threats. This workshop has very positive effect on community and they agreed to take positive position against
the hunting of the Tragopan. After this workshop they organize their village level committees and an apex body called SCC as mentioned above.

b- Workshop of School Children on Tragopan and its global importance

A one day workshop was organized for school children at Neelum Public School, Salkhala. Students from 3 schools were invited for this workshop and in severe weather condition students participated in the workshop. Awareness material was distributed among the school children for awareness.

c- Awareness campaign for Hunters

Hunters of the area were invited for this workshop. They were convinced to stop hunting of threatened species including western Tragopan. They were also invited to be a part of village level committees.

d- Quiz competition for school children

A quiz competition was organized as a follow up of the last awareness workshop of the school children. It is observed that the students are more conscious about the Tragopan than the past.
iv- Training of wildlife staff

a- Workshop for Wildlife Staff on the Importance of SGR & Tragopan

A one day workshop was organized for the field staff of wildlife appointed in and around Slakhala. Range officer Wildlife Malik Mumtaz also attended the workshop along with the field staff.

b- Workshop for Wildlife Staff on monitoring of Tragopan population in and around the Salkhala.

Before starting the surveys wildlife staff was trained in conducted surveys of Galliformes especially the Western Tragopan Pheasant. They were trained how
they will monitor the population of Western tragopan in and around Salkhala using the same survey plots identified during the current survey.

### 3.2. Status Survey

A total of 6 plots were selected for this study collecting presence/absence data on Western Tragopan in & around Salkhala Game Reserve. Population has been counted using the Dawn call count from all the 6 plots. Data on Himalayan Monal & Kashmir Koklass has also been collected along with Western Tragopan. The six plots were named as WT1, WT2, WT3, WT4, WT5 and WT6.

**Table.** Recorded Number of Western Tragopan and other Galliformes in & around Salkhala.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Western Tragopan</th>
<th>Himalayan Monal</th>
<th>Kashmir Koklass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WT1</td>
<td>21-06-10</td>
<td>4:25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT2</td>
<td>22-06-10</td>
<td>04:10.27.50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT3</td>
<td>23-06-10</td>
<td>04:13-05:03</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT4</td>
<td>24-06-10</td>
<td>04:38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT5</td>
<td>25-06-10</td>
<td>04:17.47-05:02.33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT6</td>
<td>26-06-10</td>
<td>04:29.53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Out comes

1. Establishment of preliminary baseline survey regime of Western Tragopan Pheasant in and around Salkhala Game Reserve which can be used as reference for future surveys.
2. Population estimation of Western Tragopan in and around Salkhala after almost three decades.
3. Organization and involvement of locals in the conservation of Natural Resources of Salkhala especially Western Tragopan.
4. Capacity building of wildlife staff in planning and conducting surveys of Galliformes especially Western Tragopan.
5. Created Awareness among locals especially school children about the importance of Salkhala, Western Tragopan and its Habitat.
6. Awareness Campaign has been stated for women of Salkhala for first time. They were educated regarding the importance of Salkhala and western Tragopan.
Scientifically sound documentation of Western Tragopan population distribution and trends in and around Salkhala Game Reserve.

**Figure.** Map showing calling sites (WT1-WT6) of Western Tragopan in and around Salkhala Game Reserve. Azad Kashmir.
5-Conservation Recommendations.

Current surveys has revealed that a handsome population of Western Tragopan and other Galliformes is still surviving in and around Salkhla Game Reserve under a colossal pressure of different anthropogenic activities. No doubt current study area is one of the major site for Galliformes including Threatened Western Tragopan but the human population growth rate demanding more and more natural resource utilization resulting into the increasing pressure on the Galliformes habitat. To address these issues it is the right time that to start some community based Galliformes Conservation project to uplift there socio-economic condition through enterprise development specially for women as a key target group. This enterprise development could be used as alternate livelihood to minimize the pressure on the Natural Resources of the area. Similarly strong Galliformes conservation awareness program could be launched to educate the community regarding the importance of the Galliformes would be defiantly helpful in this regard.

While looking at the table it is very clear that a major population of western Tragopan and Other Galliformes is recorded outside the reserve area i.e. survey plots WT1, WT2, WT5 & WT 6, and commercial harvesting is carried out in these area destroying the Pheasant’s habitat. It is recommended to extend the boundaries of the salkhala Game reserve on left side to the rawta Nallah touching the LOC and on right side to the Gail area would be better conserved under protected area system resulting into bring to an end of the commercial harvesting of the forest resources, lethal to Galliformes Habitat.

A regular monitoring of the Galliformes especially Western Tragopan population is very important in and around Salkhala for the assessment of the current conservation awareness activities carried out during the project period. Similarly long term monitoring projects are required to be carried out in different part of Azad Kashmir to monitor the population trend of Galliformes especially the Threatened Western Tragopan.
Fig. Survey plots WT1 –WT6 used for Western Tragopan Survey Salkhala.
1- **Others (Additional Progress)**

- A brief meeting was arranged with relevant wildlife officials to seek their views on the project.
- Meeting was conducted with the head of Zoology Department, University of AJK to involve the MSc students in the monitoring of this threatened species within AJK.
- Collection of Feather samples and fecal pellets of Western Tragopan and other Galliformes from AJK for Different studies.
- Discovery of traditional trap used for capturing pheasant from Salkhala and an article on the above said has been published in Gallinformed 2.
- Collection of data on human Carnivores conflict in and around Salkhala Game reserve.
- Wrap up meeting with the Director, Azad Kashmir Wildlife and Fisheries Department and presentation on activities of the project, outcomes and conservation Recommendation on Galliformes of Salkhala Game Reserve.

![Livestock in Salkhala Game Reserve](image)
**Fig.** A Goat killed by Black Bear inside Salkhala

**Fig.** Traditional Technique for damaging green trees in Neelum valley.
Fig. A piece of Burnt Forest around

Fig. Traditional Traps used for capturing Pheasant in AJK
6. References


