

Ophrysia superciliosa



Common name: Himalayan Quail

Local names: Sano kalo titra (Nepal)

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Galliformes

Family: Phasianidae

Genus: *Ophrysia*

Species: *superciliosa*

Profile:

It is a medium sized bird (approximately 25 cm) resembling the partridge with coral red coloured bill (in males) and dull red legs. The male is slate grey in colour with a black head and throat, white forehead and black under-tail-coverts spotted with white. The female can be identified by brown upper parts, buff coloured headsides and underparts and dark streaks running from the breast to the vent. The call of the Himalayan quail is a shrill whistle. It can be identified from other quails by its longer tail, long feathers and the marked difference in colouring. This bird was first described by J.E. Gray in 1846 and lack of confirmed sightings since 1876 has led researchers to believe that the species may now be extinct.

Lifespan: Not known

Distribution: The Himalayan quail has been reported only from Mussoorie and Nainital in the state of Uttarakhand in the western Himalayas. Its habitat lies in the altitudinal range of 1650-2400 m in steep grassy slopes with breeding grounds probably situated higher. The habitat may be similar to Manipur bush tails (*Perdicula manipurensis*) and the Cheer pheasant (*Catreus wallichii*).

Population: Thought to be extinct. The last confirmed sighting was in 1877. If existing, the population of this bird is assumed to be extremely small (<50) and isolated.

Behaviour: The bird is extremely elusive and rarely flies. It keeps close to the undergrowth, grasses and bushes and its flight is slow and usually short. The bird could possibly be migratory, going to higher elevations for breeding in winter months.

- **Diet:** Grass seeds
- **Reproduction:** Probably, breeding occurs around September at higher altitudes.

Current status:

- **Status:**
 1. IUCN 2008: Critically endangered
 2. CITES 2008: Not listed
- **Threats:**
 1. Habitat degradation has taken place due to increased pressure from anthropogenic factors like land-use change (limestone mining) and deforestation. Also, tourism has served as an additional factor responsible for the deterioration of the habitat.
 2. Pre-independence hunting is another likely factor that has resulted in the decline and possible extinction of this species.
- **Conservation practices:**

Attempts of sighting the bird and confirming its presence in and around Mussoorie and Nainital have proved unsuccessful though the species was reported in Nainital in

2003. Unofficial and official searches, with local participation have been conducted but the results have been insufficient.