

Tragopan melanocephalus



Common name: Western Tragopan, Western Horned Tragopan, Black-headed Tragopan

Local names: Jujurana (Himachal Pradesh)

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Galliformes

Family: Phasianidae

Genus: *Tragopan*

Species: *melanocephalus*

Profile:

The western tragopan is a medium sized brightly coloured pheasant. The males have greyish black feathers with black-bordered white spots and a conspicuous red collar and whattle (fleshy wrinkled fold of skin hanging from the throat). The lappet (flap-like structure at the neck) is bright blue with purple markings while the head is black and has two colourful fleshy “horns”. Females are mainly brownish-grey with none of the colourful appendages seen in males. The upperparts are spotted with black patches with white central streaks. The male body is 70-74 cm long and weighs 1800-2200 g while the female body is 60-62 cm long and weighs 1300-1400 g. The beak is rounded and short with feathers almost touching the nostrils.

Lifespan: Data unavailable

Distribution: The species is distributed along the Himalayas from Hazara in northern Pakistan to Uttarakhand in India, generally preferring dense montane vegetation. Populations of the western tragopan can be found in Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir in India and in the north West Frontier Province in Pakistan. They mainly inhabit north facing areas with temperate forests (coniferous and deciduous) at an altitudinal range of 2400-2600 m during the breeding season in summer and move to grassy mid-altitudinal regions (1700-2500 m) in the winter. The preferred habitat includes understorey of temperate, subalpine and broad-leaved forest. The species is endemic to the western Himalayas ranging from Kohistan in north Pakistan up to Himachal Pradesh in northwest India. Presently, five populations have been identified each from Kohistan, Kaghan valley, Kishtwar, Chamba and Kullu.

Population: The estimated population is 5,000 birds in India and 900 in India with a decreasing trend.

Behaviour: Tragopans are shy birds and predominantly arboreal. Like pheasants, tragopans roost on trees individually or in pairs. They are mainly sedentary and do not have much vertical movement with seasonal change. The species lives in small groups during winter, separating for breeding activities in spring. The bluish-green fleshy horns of the male members are erected during courtship and gave the bird its name (tragos = goat + pan = a Greek mythological god with horns). The call of the species is a nasal repetitive wailing *khunwaah* during the breeding season resembling the sound of a goat.

- **Diet:** Tragopans feed mainly on seeds, leaves, shoots, roots, flowers and berries with some intake of grubs and insects as well. They mainly feed on the ground.
- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: April-June; Incubation Period: 28-30 days; Clutch Size: 2-6 eggs; Sexual Maturity: 1 year. The species is monogamous. Mating pairs are formed in April and males demarcate territorial areas (perches) from which they attract female birds through loud calls. Courtship rituals include flashing of the vividly coloured lappet by extracting and contracting and erection of the fleshy horns on their heads. Mating takes place from April-June. The hen incubates the eggs. The nest can be on the ground or in trees and is lined by twigs containing sap.

Current status:

- **Status:**
 1. IUCN 2008: Vulnerable
 2. CITES 2008: Listed in Appendix I

- **Threats:**
 1. Habitat loss due to deforestation (illegal logging of timber species and collection of fuel wood and fodder) and change in land-use patterns (conversion of forest land to agricultural fields) is the primary cause for diminishing tragopan populations.
 2. Hunting of the bird for meat and for its vibrant plumage
 3. Increase in external pressures like decrease in undergrowth by uncontrolled grazing.
 4. Disturbances by grazers, farmers and people collecting fuelwood and forest products like mushrooms etc. also affect the bird during nesting and breeding seasons.

- **Conservation practices:**
 1. It is protected through laws in India and Pakistan and through CITES (an international treaty against illegal trade across international borders).
 2. Its main habitats have been protected through establishment of three national parks (Great Himalayan National Park and Kishtwar, Himachal Pradesh and Machiara, Pakistan) and ten wildlife sanctuaries. A joint conservation initiative, the Himalayan Jungle Project, has been started by BirdLife International, WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature), WPA (World pheasant Association) and the Government of Pakistan in the Palas Valley which is home to a large tragopan population.
 3. A captive breeding programme is underway in Himachal Pradesh though until now there has been no success. Facilities for raising nestlings from eggs have been set up by the Pakistan National Wildlife council.
 4. The government of Himachal Pradesh has named the Western Tragopan its state bird, thus creating a sense of pride in the local people and generating awareness about its conservation status.