

PRESENT DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS OF PHEASANTS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH, WESTERN HIMALAYAS

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Introduction

Information presented in this paper is the result of surveys carried out in 1979 and 1980 by Himachal Wildlife Project. The main area of study was the upper Beas Valley in Kulu District of Himachal Pradesh, India (Figure 1), but surveys also covered adjacent parts of the Ravi and Sutlej valleys and some of the westernmost parts of the Yamuna catchment. The limits of surveys covered an area of approximately 25,000 km², about a third of which is covered by forest suitable for pheasants. Within this enormous area we were able to visit only a few, widely separated localities, and we chose to concentrate on those most likely to harbour pheasants.

Seven species of pheasants occur within our area; Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Kaleej *Lophura leucomelana*, Red Jungle Fowl *Gallus gallus*, Koklas *Pucrasia macrolopha*, Cheer *Catreus wallichii*, and Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*. We concentrated our attention mainly on the high altitude species - Western Tragopan, Monal, Koklas and Cheer. Consequently, our information for the other three species is very sparse and their distributions are described only in general terms. For the Monal, Koklas and Cheer we describe each locality and the numbers of birds observed so that future investigators can make valid comparisons to assess changes in status. For the Western Tragopan, however, which is thought to be endangered with extinction (IUCN 1978) we have refrained, on the advice of World Wildlife Fund - India, from specifying particular localities in case we might give aid to people interested in trapping the birds illegally. We therefore give only a general assessment of its present range and status outside the uppermost part of the Beas River catchment, an area already proposed as a National Park. We have included some information derived from reports of forest officials or local people, but only where we judged it to be reliable and recent, and to add significantly to our own observations. Unless otherwise specified, all records refer to observations made by members of Himachal Wildlife Project.

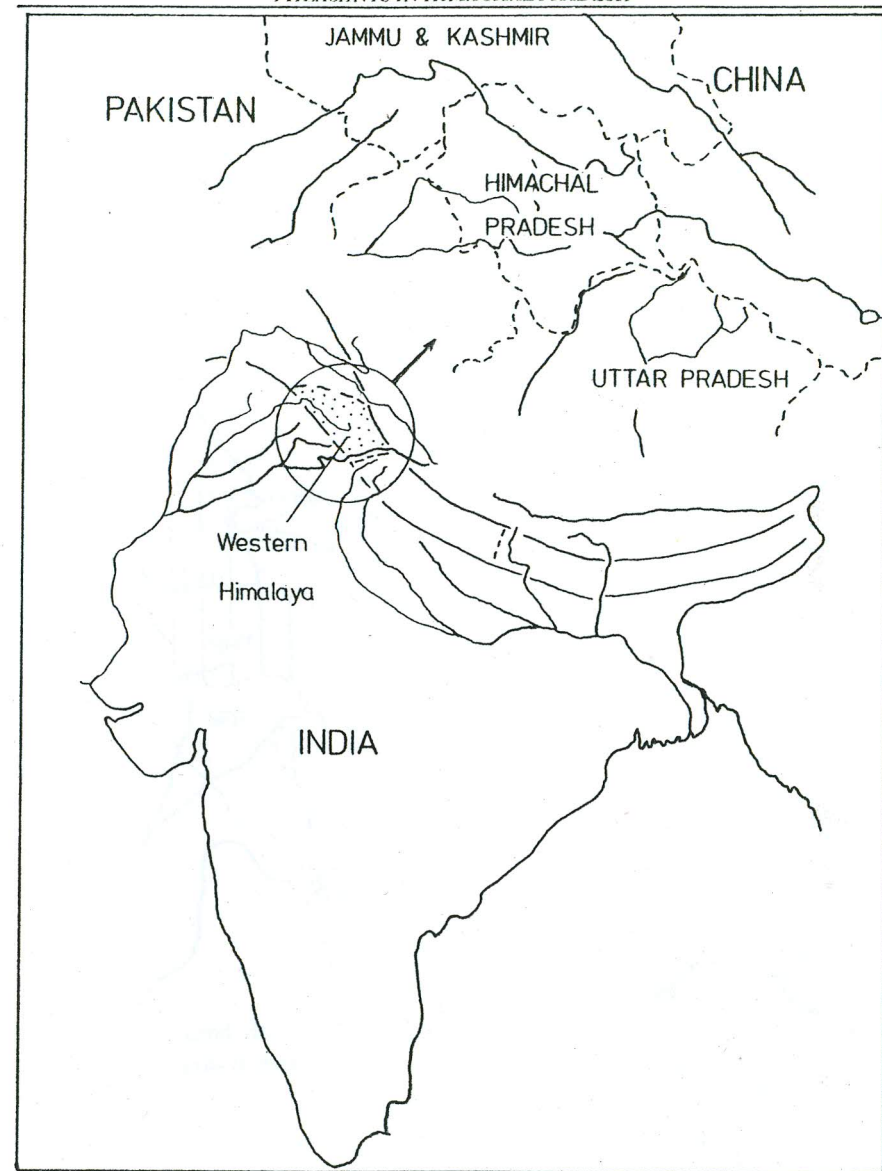


Fig. 1

Distribution and extent of forest types

The ecology of the area we surveyed is dominated by the effects of altitude and aspect which mainly determine the climax vegetation. Within the state of Himachal Pradesh, nine major forest types are present (Champion & Seth 1968), but only five of these concern us (Table 1, Figure 2). Generally, the

