

First photographic documentation of Grey Peacock-Pheasant from central Assam

The Grey Peacock-Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum* (Linnaeus, 1758), Assamese; *Deodurug*, *Deodirrik*, is a sedentary, loud calling, ground-dwelling bird (Thunhikorn 2018). It belongs to the order Galliformes and ranges from Sikkim through Assam and Myanmar to Siam. It inhabits dense forests that are situated in hilly terrain. However, although it stays on or near hills, it is not a bird of high elevations and does not range above 6,000 ft (Finn 1911). It is a little-known bird that is more heard than seen. Male birds call and whistle loudly to mark their territory. The bird makes a repeating call by blowing the harsh whistle which can be described as 'trew-tree', 'taa-pwi', or 'phee hoi' (with a longer and rising second note) which is made at varying intervals. The alarm call is characterized by the sounds 'qua quaqua' or 'wakwakwak' which is loud, guttural, and deep (Wildlife Institute of India 2018).

The Grey Peacock-Pheasant is drab, finely speckled with

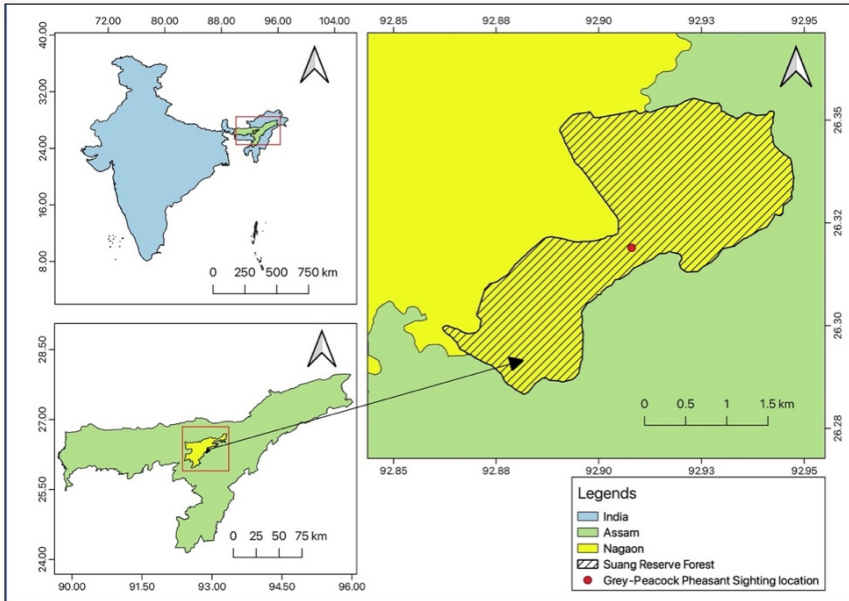


Grey Peacock-Pheasant. © Chiranjib Bora.

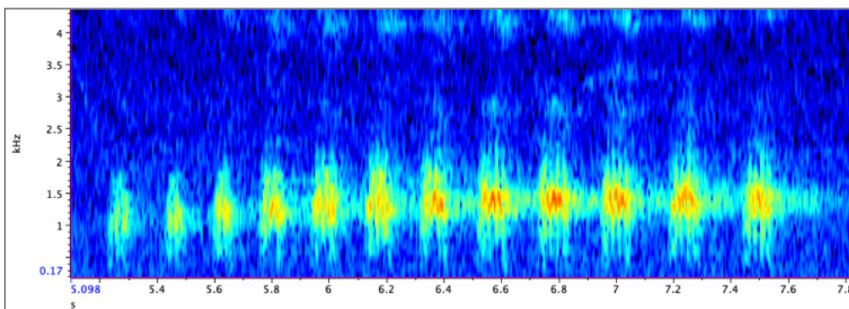
cream color that produces a grey impression when viewed from a distance. The wings, back, and tail are adorned with beautiful metallic "eye spots" of green and violet, shaded so exquisitely that they appear to stand out from the surface of the feather. However, this pertains only to the male of the species. The hen, which is smaller and has a shorter tail and crest, has the "eye spots" replaced by simple blackish spots which are slightly glossed (Finn 1901). Grey Peacock-Pheasant's global conservation status is Least Concern (BirdLife International 2023), as the population estimate does

not meet the threshold for threatened category. However, its population is declining mainly due to habitat loss and the practice of hunting by the tribal community of the region (Aiyadurai 2011). It is classified as schedule I species under the India Wildlife Protection Act of 1992 and CITES has listed it as an Appendix II species since 1975.

Although the Grey Peacock-Pheasant has been reported and photographed from various protected areas of upper Assam, no written as well as photographic documentation is reported



Showing location of Suang Reserve Forest and Grey Peacock-Pheasant sighting.



Spectrogram of alarm call of Grey Peacock-Pheasant, recorded from the study site.

from any part of the central Assam region. Here we are reporting a sighting and the first photographic documentation of the bird from Suang Reserve Forest located near the Karbi Hills of Nagaon District in central Assam. The Suang Reserve Forest (26.28329N, 92.86198 E & 26.35529N, 92.94753E) is a dense forest with scenic beauty and undocumented biodiversity. It is a moist deciduous forest with

evergreen vegetation. It is surrounded on the north by Lungsung tea garden, on the south by Chapong pahar, on the east by Chapanala tea garden, and on the west by Balijuri and Jiajuri tea gardens. A hill stream called Champawati runs through it.

The bird was observed while surveying the reserve forest for documenting the avian fauna of the area. During the field survey, we had instances to

hear the call of the bird from time to time and were also able to record the alarm call of the bird from the location. We only got glimpses of it once or twice but couldn't capture it on camera. However, on 10 May 2023 we encountered an individual from very near and were lucky enough to capture the elusive bird on camera. The bird was photographed very close to the hill stream (26.31897N & 92.90799E, 118.82m). Nikon D500 camera mounted with 200–500 mm lens was used for photography. Zoom H1 hand held recorder was used for recording the alarm call of the bird and Raven Pro 1.6.4 software was used to generate the spectrogram of the alarm call.

Pheasants are very useful biological indicator of the habitat quality of a particular area (Bhattacharya et al. 2009). Presence of the Grey Peacock-Pheasant in the reserve forest reflects a healthy ecosystem of the region. Furthermore, this observation highlights the significance of the region and creates opportunities for further exploration and research on avifauna in the region.

References

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