

## Rare sighting and conservation threats to Black Francolin in West Midnapore, West Bengal

The Grey Francolin and the Black Francolin belong to the “Francolin” group, which comprises 21 species and which has a worldwide distribution (Mahmood et al. 2010). The Black Francolin species is found in the various ecological zones of India starting from Kashmir to West Bengal and also in Nepal (Heidari et al. 2009). Black Francolin or ‘Kala Teeter’ in Hindi is also a state bird of Haryana. The Black Francolin is jet black in colour with streaks of gold and white cheek patches and a touch of copper near the collar. It is found in arid grasslands, forests, and agricultural tracts. It breeds from April to July; the breeding season varies in different ranges (Sharif 2014). The nests are constructed on the ground. The female makes a shallow scrape, concealed with vegetation, very difficult to be detected by predators (Khan 2010). It is frequently spotted in places that have thick vegetation as cover. It plays an important roles in the ecosystem by spreading seeds



*Francolinus francolinus* (Linnaeus, 1766). © Suman Pratihar.

of plants and pollination. Nests were situated in agriculture field’s border areas where there was thick grass cover and these grass and crop fields were surrounded with Shal *Shorea robusta* forest on one side and bamboo on the other.

Midnapore is located at 22.250 N & 87.650 E at 23m. West Bengal is a state in eastern India. It was early in the morning when we started our survey in Bhadulota jungle area in May 2020. We walked more than 2 km from

the main road deep into the forest. During our continuous bird monitoring, we spotted two black birds with cheek patches just beside a paddy field. One of them quickly disappeared, but we were able to photograph the other. Then we started visiting that place frequently.

We identified the bird as Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* though we were unable to identify the bird at the subspecies level. We identified the species with

the following morphological characters. Jet black bird with short tail; upper part and flanks spotted white and fulvous; white patch on cheeks, chestnut collar; brownish red leg, black tail had white narrow bars and male similar to female but paler. We also have spotted the nest in grass line depression in bare ground. We also found rice, dried peas, and grass seeds that are the main dietary items for black francolin. When we spoke to the farmers in that area we understood that they used to kill the birds for meat. They prepared a loop of rope near their nest to trap the first bird. Then by using the captured bird they trapped others. We convinced them not to kill the shy and rare bird.

The Black Francolin is one of the most valued game birds of Pakistan (Riaz et al. 2011) due its delicate flavour and important source of bush meat for poor people of Asia (Forcina et al. 2015). In many countries of Asia, Black Francolin is reared for meat, eggs and cock fighting among birders. According to media reports, despite the ban on hunting of francolins, illegal poaching continues. Illegal sale of bird meat happens clandestinely in many parts of the country. In Pakistan, hunting of francolins is extensive and their meat is available in hotels at a premium price. Despite its camouflage and swiftness, in India, people manage to capture this bird for sport, meat, and hunting. In West Bengal, village people illegally keep a pair of birds in cage as pets. A Calcutta High Court order in 2019 put a complete ban on ritual hunting in various districts of southwestern Bengal. The court also directed the civil administration as well as the police authorities to provide all possible cooperation to the chief wildlife warden to stop

the hunt. Illegal hunting, habitat destruction and their fragmentation were observed as the main reasons of its population decline in some areas of the Himalayan region. Black Francolins aren't uncommon, in fact they are classified as 'Least Concern' under the IUCN Red List. They were abundant earlier till they got hunted exceptionally.

It was in 2018, when the media flashed the report that a renowned cricketer-turned-politician got into trouble because of the gift he received from Pakistan, a Masala-stuffed Black Francolin. Keeping the stuffed bird is illegal under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act as it invites a jail term up to three years or Rs 25,000 fine or both.

#### References

- Forcina, G., M. Guerrini, H. van Grouw, B.K. Gupta, P. Panayides, P.T. Hadjigeorgiou, O.F. Al-Sheikhly, M.N. Awan, A.A. Khan, M.A. Zeder & F. Barbanera (2015).** Impacts of biological globalization in the Mediterranean: unveiling the deep history of human-mediated gamebird dispersal. *PNAS* 112(11): 3296–3301.
- Heidari, N., T. Arbabi, G. Noori & A. Shahriari (2009).** Distribution, population and ecology of black francolin *Francolinus francolinus bogdanovi*, on the Sistan Plain, in relation to plant coverage and drought. *Podoces* 4(1): 28–36.
- Khan, A. (2010).** Studies on the comparative ecology of the South Persian Black Partridge *Francolinus francolinus henrici* and the Northern Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus interpositus* in Lal Suhanra National Park, Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. (Unpublished) Ph.D. Thesis. PMAS Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, 218 pp.
- Mahmood, S., T. Mahmood, M. Rais, I.Z. Qureshi & M.S. Nadeem (2010).** A Comparative study on the populations and habitats of the Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* and the Black Francolin *Francolinus*

*francolinus* in Lehri Nature Park, Punjab, Pakistan. *Podoces* 5(1): 42–53.

**Riaz, M., A.A. Khan, M. Babar, N. Akhtar, S. Muhammad & I. Khaliq (2011).** High genetic diversity revealed by RAPD markers in the Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*, Galliformes of Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Zoology* 43(5): 889–896.

**Sharif, S.A. (2014).** Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* in Bangladesh: Breeding biology, status, threats and conservation. *Forktail* 30: 142–143.

### Suman Pratihar<sup>1</sup> & Niloy Mandal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup> Department of Zoology, Sukumar Sengupta Mahavidyalaya, Keshpur College, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal 721150, India.

Emails: <sup>1</sup>prathar\_vu@redifmail.com (corresponding author), <sup>2</sup>niloymandal1998@gmail.com

**Citation:** Pratihar, S. & N. Mandal (2024). Rare sighting and conservation threats to Black Francolin in West Midnapore, West Bengal. Bird-o-soar #246, In: *Zoo's Print* 39(10): 56–58.