

Final Report

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Conservation action planning for Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) in Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan.



By

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) is currently listed as Vulnerable (BirdLife International, 2013) and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (Pakistan) is believed to still hold more important population pockets in other parts of the state. Current project was continuation of efforts to establish the status and distribution of Western Tragopan in AJ&K using the call count technique along with assessment of different threats.

Surveys were conducted on the eight newly established plots in the upper part of Neelum valley which has never been surveyed before. In total 2 calling males were recorded from the two survey plots i.e. 42 and 43.1 each. Unexpected heavy rains created hurdles during the surveys which may be resulted into low detection of calls. All the surveys sites are facing heavy anthropogenic pressures and forest cutting either for commercial or local use is at the top.

Acknowledgment

I am really thankful to Mr. James Goodhart and the Oriental Birds Club for granting me the donation of GBP1500 to continue the surveys and exploring the further sites holding Tragopan population. My special thanks are due to Mr. Francis Buner for his continued guidance throughout the project period and to further help analyze the data to understand the current status of the species in Azad Kashmir. Thanks are also due to Officials and field staff of the Wildlife department of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, for all the support they provided during the field work.

PROJECT SPECIES AND AREA

The Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) is currently listed as Vulnerable (BirdLife International, 2013) due to a number of threats throughout its range including

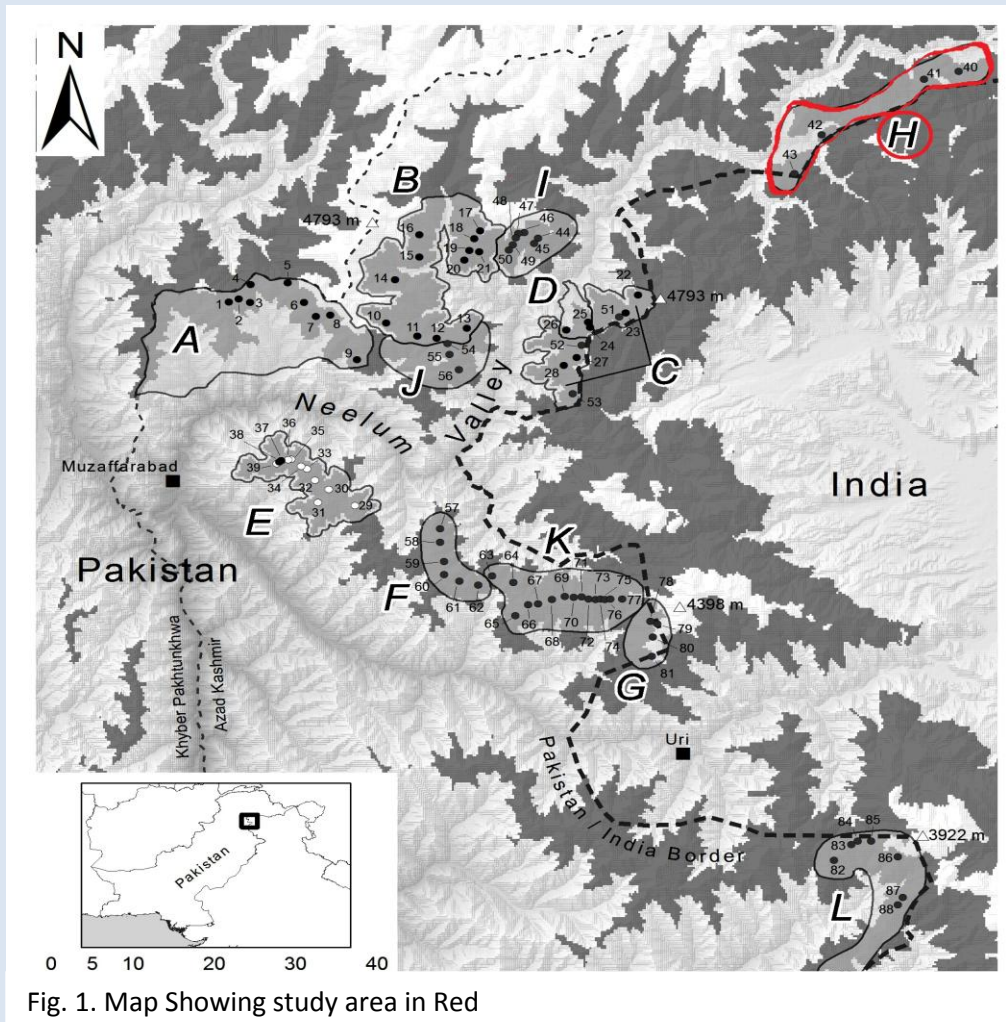


Fig. 1. Map Showing study area in Red

ongoing habitat loss and degradation through subsistence farming, firewood collecting, overgrazing of the understory vegetation by livestock, and unregulated non-timber forest product collection, hunting and trapping (Whale, 1996; BirdLife International, 2013). Islam (1982) estimated the species abundance in three main regions of AJK (i.e. Machiara National Park, Salkhala GR, Jagran valley). Current Potential distribution of Western Tragopan with surveyed and unsurveyed plots has been marked after collection of information from Wildlife field staff, locals and hunters and has been plotted in the form of distribution map (Fig. 1).

The project area (H, plot.40-43) lies in upper part Neelum Valley of Azad Kashmir supports a good habitat for Western Tragopan, but information about the distribution, population status and threats to the species remains unknown.

PROJECT AIMS or OBJECTIVES

- To confirm presence/ absence of Western Tragopan on survey plots between 40-43.
- To estimate the abundance of the specie on the selected survey plots.
- To build capacity of Wildlife Department staff in conservation planning.
- Development of conservation action plan for the better conservation and management of the target species in Neelum valley of AJK.

Results and Discussions

During the breeding season May-June, 2015, surveys were conducted in upper Neelum valley (proposed plots were 40-43). Additionally four plots (# 40.1, 40.2, 41.1, 43.1) were selected for

the surveys and in total eight plots were surveyed between May 15-22 and only dawn call count conducted.

All the plots were selected within the potential habitat and altitudinal range of the

species with N,NE and NW exposition. Out of eight newly established plots, calls were

detected from only two plots i.e. 42 and 43.1 with one calling male per plot whereas remain fail to detect any call from the rest of

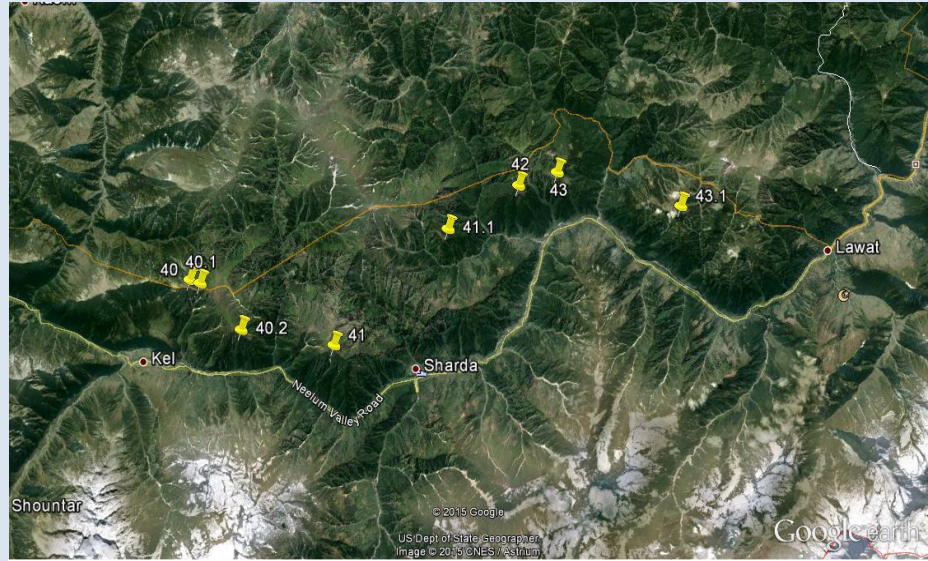


Fig.2. showing the Survey Plots

Date	Plots #	Altitude	GPS locations	No. of calling males
15.5.2015	40	3295	34°47'14.32"N 74°20'13.13"E	Nil
16.5.2015	40.1	3210	34°47'15.02"N 74°19'50.07"E	Nil
17.5.2015	40.2	3190	34°48'11.22"N 74°18'0.38"E	Nil
18.5.2015	41	3328	34°47'54.03"N 74°14'38.53"E	Nil
19.5.2015	41.1	3010	34°43'55.82"N 74°11'39.58"E	Nil
20.5.2015	42	2990	34°42'14.23"N 74°9'34.68"E	1
21.5.2015	43	2945	34°41.593'N 74°8.349'E	Nil
22.5.2015	43.1	3332	34°41.561'N 74°3.759'E	1

the six plots (# 40, 40.1, 40.2, 41, 41.1, 43).



Figure 3. Field expedition

Locals confirmed that Tragopan was present in the area of plots 40-41 some 20 years back and has been hunted by the local hunters but no recent sighting or hunting report from the area and also we didn't find any other evidences like feathers or dropping of the birds during the research period. One potential reason for low call detected could be that unexpected and heavy rains created disturbance during the surveys and we remain fail to listen the calls during the heavy rain sound. This further needs to work out through some more reliable and authentic evidences like camera trapping etc.

Capacity Building workshops

Workshops were organized for the wildlife staff to further build their capacity to monitor the Targopan population on established survey plots in their respective areas. Field staff was trained in using GPS and locating the plots along with call count. They were also trained in camera trapping especially for Tragopan to further collect evidences especially from the areas with no call detection.



Figure 1. Capacity Building of wildlife staff

Conservation Action Planning

The successful planning for the conservation of Western Tragopan requires a baseline study showing presence/absence for a complete analysis of its current status, threats and key site for Conservation. Along with presence/absence and status survey anthropogenic pressure data was also collected to assess impact on the breeding habitat of Western Tragopan. Base on the all the available information collected previously an assessment has been done by Awan *at al.* (2015) about the current status of the Western Tragopan in AJ&K and is published in Bird Conservation Journal with title **“A review of published and unpublished surveys of a redlisted ‘flagship species’, the Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan.**

Meeting with Director Wildlife and Fisheries, Govt. of Azad Jammu and Kashmir was conducted to present the results of our finding on Tragopan work in AJK. A Presentation was made on our recent work including recently published paper which holds first ever complete information on the status of Tragopan in AJK. He appreciated our efforts for the conservation of Tragopan in AJK. Discussion on the monitoring of the Tragopan in AJK was done and he has been briefed that most of the field staff has been trained in monitoring the population using the standardized protocol and established survey plots which he appreciated.

He was also briefed on the role of protected areas in the conservation of Tragopan and its habitat and first evidence of the local extinction in Pir-Chinasi outside protected areas was presented. He told that government is planning to declare Pir-Chinasi as National park and this evidence will further help strengthen the case towards the notification of the area as protected

which will not only protect the declining Tragopan and its habitat but also other associated wildlife.

Recent publication has also been shared with the Brig. Mukhtar Ahmad, Chairman WPA Pakistan and Vice-president Emeritus, WWF-Pakistan as well, who much appreciated our efforts. He also invited me and Director Wildlife, AJ&K in November 2015, to discuss the results of our research work and future planning for conservation of Trgaopan in AJK.

It is anticipated that all these efforts and after having joint meeting we will be able to develop a conservation action plan for the conservation of Western Tragopan and associated ecosystem in AJK.

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