

## WESTERN TRAGOPAN



The Western Tragopan, also known as the Western Horned Tragopan, *Tragopan melanocephalus* is a medium-sized brightly plumaged, highly endangered and globally threatened, pheasant found along the Himalayas from Hazara in northern Pakistan in the west to eastward through India to Uttarakhand.

The male's body is dark grey and black with numerous black-bordered white spots. The sides and back of the neck feature deep crimson patches; the throat is bare blue skin, and the bare facial skin is red. There is also a small black

crest. The wavy pattern on the female's back is pale brownish-grey finely and spotted with black, and with central white streaks. The neck is reddish-brown. Young males resemble females, but have longer legs, are larger and show varying amounts of black on head and red on the neck.

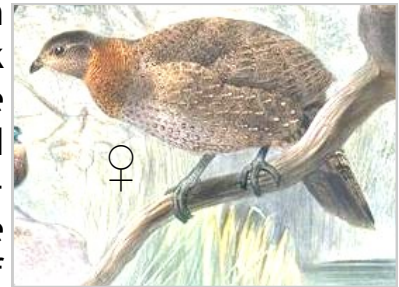
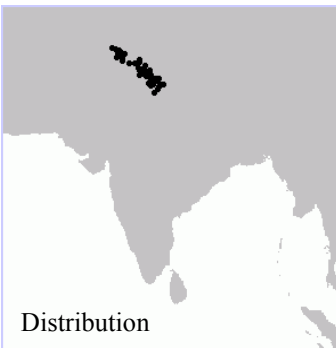


Illustration: D. J. Elliot— 1872

An average male weighs 1.8-2.2kg (4.0-4.9 lb), while females average 1.25-1.4kg (2.8-3.1 lb). Male Western Tragopans vary in length from 55-60cm (22-24 inches), females 48-50cm (19-20 inches).



Map: L. Shyamal

There are five known populations: Kohistan, Kaghan valley, Kishtwar, Chamba, Kullu and an area east of the Satluj river. Their preferred habitat is the dense understorey of temperate, subalpine and broad-leaved forest at an altitude of 1,750m to 3,600m, (5,750–11,800 feet). During the summer months they may be found at even higher altitudes.

The Western Tragopan is primarily arboreal, but forages on the ground for food. The diet is mostly seeds, leaves, and shoots, but insects and other invertebrates are also eaten. Like most pheasants, they are arboreal roosters, either singly or in pairs.

During their courtship display the males establish territorial calling perches, then inflate their throat lappets\* which are purple with pink margins. The display vocalisation is a loud repetitive two-note ringing *wou-weee*. They also display blue horns similar in appearance to those of the Greek mythological god Pan. It is from these horns that the name *Tragopan* (*Tragos* = goat + *Pan*) was derived. The breeding season is May-June. Nests are constructed under bushes or in low tree hollows. The clutch size is three to six eggs.

\*a hanging flap of flesh

The Western Tragopan is considered the rarest of all living pheasants. The world population is estimated at less than 5,000 individuals, including the few captive birds. In the past there was trade in the male's feathers, but this has declined in recent times, and CITES has listed the species on Appendix I to discourage the practice.



Sarahan Pheasantry

In an effort to save this colourful pheasant from extinction a captive breeding programme has been established by the government of Himachal State in India. Known as the Sarahan Pheasantry, the establishment had fifty-two Western Tragopan eggs laid in the 2007 breeding season; twenty-eight of which were found to be fertile and one chick was hatched under a natural breeding hen.

There are twenty-one Western Tragopans at Saharan, and plans are underway to increase the number of aviaries to cater for the increasing number of birds bred. Let us hope that the breeding programme is a success and this rare pheasant survives for many, many more years.

In the Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh, the local population call the Western Tragopan "*Jujurana*" which means King of Birds.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia