



Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union of Tajikistan

Abstract of the report on assessment of population of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus bianchii*) and the current state of its distribution ranges in Tajikistan. Dushanbe - 2011

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There are three subspecies of pheasant in Tajikistan

Tajik or Bianchi's pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus bianchii*), Zeravshan pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus zeravshanicus*) and Syrdarya pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus turkestanicus*).

All three subspecies of pheasant are endangered taxa and listed in the Red Data Book of Tajikistan. Reduction of the pheasant's numbers and distribution range in Tajikistan is solely caused by the anthropogenic pressure that involves poaching and habitat destruction.

Data on the Tajik subspecies of pheasant was gathered during the period of October 2009 - June 2010 in :

1) Central Tajikistan the entire cultural landscape of the Hissar Valley (Hissar, Shakhrinav and Tursunzade districts) and in the lower reaches of Karatag, Shirkent, Hanaka and Kafirnigan rivers.

2) South-Western Tajikistan in the "Tigrovaya balka" nature reserve and in the small islets of riparian woodlands, located from the lower Vakhsh River to Kyzylkaly. There were 'tugais' surveyed on the right bank of Panj River, located between Hamadoni and Farkhor districts, and also the lower Kizilsu River (Surkhob).

According to A.Tugarinov and E.Kozlov in the early 40s of the last century the total distribution area of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant in Tajikistan was 1 million hectares and its total population reached 1 million 300 thousand specimens.

From 1950 to 2000, the range and number of Tajik pheasants have dramatically decreased and this subspecies completely disappeared in the valleys of Kizilsu, Yakhsu and Kafarnigan rivers as well as in the Hissar valley.

Reason for drastic reduction of population and distribution range of the Tajik pheasant

a) the habitat destruction caused by reclamation of wetlands that involves burning down

dense thickets of reed, cattail and bulrush as well as uprooting of floodplain riparian forests for cotton plants and other crops.

b) widespread poaching.

c) heavy use of pesticides and fertilizers in agriculture.

d) during the civil war (1992-1997) local people faced a lack of energy sources (fuel) and had cut huge numbers of trees and shrubs in riparian woodlands (particularly *dzhida* trees), which played an important role in protection and forage of pheasants.

To date, the distribution range of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant

1) the valley of the Vakhsh River : the number of pheasants within the Tigrovaya Balka nature is roughly estimated as 1200 birds.

2) the right bank of the Panj River and the lower reaches of the Kizilsu River.

3) Hissar valley : in the 1950s, pheasants have been completely wiped out in the Hissar valley as a result of the land reclamation for planting cotton crops in the riparian woodlands and also because of the poaching. The second expansion of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant in the Hissar valley occurred in the second half of the 1990s.

Conclusions

1. In recent years, we can observe the process of second expansion of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant in agricultural landscapes of Southwest and Central Tajikistan.

2. If protection of pheasants will be strengthened and effective anti-poaching measures will be implemented this species can form a stable viable population on the cultivated landscapes.

3. Settling down of pheasants on agricultural lands helps to reduce the number of crop pest insects.

4. To increase population of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant in Tajikistan a special nursery should be organized. Creation of an alternative population of pheasants through artificial propagation can be a basis for the restoration of their numbers within the former distribution range and on cultivated landscapes.



Habitat of the Tajik subspecies of pheasant (Phasianus colchicus bianchii). Turangathickets. Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve. Photo by S.Saidov.



Pheasant poaching west of Dushambe-feb. 2012

(Now in the Zoo of the city)



Pheasant in captive breeding (James Pfarr origin-US)

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