



Save the Himalayan Quail!



Himalayan quail is one of the rarest species of bird native to India. Also known as **Mountain Quail**, Himalayan quail is a medium-sized bird belongs to **pheasant family** found only at **Western Himalayas** of **Uttarakhand** and **north-west India**. Researchers suggest that Himalayan quail prefer high altitudes **1,650-2,400 m** and is a shy bird that lives only in very thick and tall grass and undergrowth, hill bamboo and bushes. It only flies to the nearby areas, but it is unclear whether it is sedentary or a short-distance migrant. It feeds on the seeds of grasses, berries, insects etc.

Characteristics of the bird...

- The **red bill** and legs and **white spots** around the eye make this bird very unique.
- They have **covert tail** longer than other quails.
- Males are **dark grey** with black streaks and a white forehead, and females are **greyish brown** with dark streaks.
- Bill is thick and short, legs and claws are short but very strong for **scratching food** from the ground.
- Wings are short and rounded, makes its flight very **swift and strong** but incapable of going long distances.

Kinds of Quails...

- **New Zealand quail**

The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN)**, lists the New Zealand quail as **extinct** because of excessive hunting, predation by larger animals and humans burning the brush for clear land for agriculture, diseases from other birds etc. The last known bird died in **1875**. Like other quails, these birds lived in open area and grassy hills.



- **Manipur bush quail**

It is classified by the IUCN as **vulnerable** and was believed to be extinct. In 2006, a well known ornithologist, **Anwaruddin Choudhury**, said he spotted the bird during bird-watching, but no photos were taken. So there is no other evidence to support its existence. Most probably, the bird's territory covered a range from **Bangladesh to eastern India** and that the bird was approximately **10 inches tall**, streaked with grey and black.



- **Worcester's Buttonquail**

The IUCN lists this bird as "**data deficient.**" This bird is not a true quail but resembles them. Scientists considered the bird extinct, but the footage of one bird was recorded in **2009** in the **Philippines**.



- **Japanese quail**

The Japanese quail is originally belongs to **Asia**, but now found around the world. Adult Japanese quail is around **20 centimeters** long and is very popular for **domestic husbandry**.



**The International Union for Conservation of Nature is an organization that catalogs and preserves endangered species.
Can you name a few more like minded organizations?**



Threats ...

- Himalayan quail is critically endangered species mainly due to its **habitat destruction or degradation and hunting**.
- The species was last seen 60 years before independence is due to the excessive hunting during the **British period**. It was a popular game bird killed by British officers for their leisure hunting around the **1870s**. The first Himalayan quail to come to the attention of Europeans in **1846**. Too much of **land-use** and their changes for **open cast mining for limestone** and related disturbance are other factors for its decline.
- This species has not been recorded with certainty since **1876**, because it is difficult to spot as they favour dense long grass, due to **camouflaging colouration and behaviour**. Around **5** preserved specimens of the bird are kept in **London's Natural History Museum** and **11** preserved birds in India, all collected before **1900**.



Conservation efforts ...

- Himalayan quail is listed as '**Critically Endangered**' in the **Red List of Threatened Species** of IUCN.
- There have been few well-organized searches, there were possible sightings near **Suwakholi in Mussoorie hills 1984** and around **Nainital in 2003**, and a female was reported in **2010**. There is still hope that a small population survives in remote areas of the lower or middle Himalayan range.
- Latest surveys were conducted in **2002 and 2010** using posters, interviews with local people and habitat analyses.



Conservation actions proposed ...

- To conduct further surveys in areas with **Cheer pheasant** (*Catreus wallichii*) as it has similar habitat requirements to quail.
- To conduct **interviews** with locals and urgent need to launch a **massive search operation programme** in lower and middle Himalayan range involving the Uttarakhand Forest Department, ornithologists, wildlife experts, local people and hunters about possible locations and to explore the Himalayan quail.
- To continue a series of **field surveys** based on the interviews including on the old sites primarily in the vicinity of **Nainital, Mussourie and Jharipani**.
- To provide **posters and cash incentives** to local people to motivate search for the species.
- To locate the birds, suitable survey techniques should be adopted such as a combination of **flushing with trained dogs and grain-baited camera-trap stations** in selected localities.



Draw a postcard on 'Save the quail' with a slogan.

