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"A STUDY ON THE GREY FRANCOLIN - A GAME BIRD OF THE INDIAN DESERT."

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ABSTRACT: -

Grey francolin commonly known as grey partridge is a resident bird of the Indian subcontinent. The species was introduced for the first time in the Andaman Islands. Since then it has beautifully adapted itself to the country as well as its climate. Partridges are also kept as pets because of their loud calls and trained for fight. It was part time hobby of nobles and rich who used to arrange fighting of these pet partridges. In past few decades the population of Grey Partridge showing a downward trend. The reason for this was large scale hunting as well as trapping of bird. Not only the hunting is the sole reason for their decline but predation, weather, agriculture intensification and extensive use of pesticides and herbicides are also responsible for their decline in population of partridges.

KEYWORDS: Grey francolin, heavily feathered, Russet tail feathers, quail-like game birds, model game-bird, exhilarating ringing calls, faithful to each other in sharing their duties, kept as pets, hunted for delicious flesh, agricultural intensification.

INTRODUCTION:

Grey francolin of India is locally known by the name of Teetar and Bhoora (brown) Tittar. The name Teetar is based on the call of the bird which comes as 'ka-tee-tar-tee-tar'. Grey partridges are very, compact, heavily feathered, quail-like game birds. Their bodies are generally grey brown in colour with russet barring on the flanks and cinnamon markings on the face and head. Russet tail feathers provide excellent field mark for birds observed in flight.

Grey partridge has relatively small head, almost round in shape, the partridge has an orange face and

throat, green bill and red legs. In male, the white underbelly is marked with obvious chestnut colored horse shoe in the lower breast. The partridge was known in English as the Pertriche, in Scottish as the Patrick, in Dutch as the patrijs, and in French perdix, all from the Latin word Perdix. The English name properly denotes the species indigenous to Britain, nowadays called the Grey partridge in the USA. It is a species which may be regarded as the model game-bird, whether from the excellence of the sport it performs in the field, or delicacy of its flesh at the table. It is on all hands admitted to be wholly innocuous, and at times beneficial to the agriculturist. Sexes are very similar in appearance. Birds in hand can be sexed by the scapular and median wing coverts, with the male having a single



median buff stripe and the female having a wider buff stripe with two to four cross bars also the crown feathers on the males have a narrow median stripe, whereas in females the stripe expands to form a teardrop. In the past, many sportsmen have mistakenly identified the large horseshoe-shaped, chestnut-colored patch on the lower breast as an exclusive male characteristic in grey partridge. While this patch is most common on males, it is often found on females and is occasionally absent on males. Male has spur. Adult grey partridge are intermediate in size, between bobwhite quail and ring-necked pheasants. Young are creamish-yellow on the throat and belly, rufous-orange on top of the head and back, with black spots or broken lines around the eye and crown. Grey francolin popularly known as grey partridge is a resident bird of Indian subcontinent. The species was introduced for the first time in the Andaman Islands. Since then it has beautifully adapted itself to the country as well as its climate. It is locally known as Teetar or Bhora Teetar named after the sound produced by the bird.

Grey Partridge is bird which roughly weighs about 360-390 gms and approximately about 12-14 inches in length. It is commonly found in the vicinity of villages and agriculture fields. Its exhilarating ringing calls are among the most familiar bird sound in the country side. The bird found in the coveys of 4 to 6, running along with a upright carriage and spent most of the time in feeding. The bird feed on seed, berries, insects, white ants and maggots from human & animal excreta. Partridges obtain most of their food from land disturbed by man either by cultivation, ditch and road bed maintenance.

They usually fly in emergency conditions like when encounters a predator or face some threat. These birds spent their most of the time in foraging and can be heard frequently in the morning than in evening. Their calling frequency varies according to season. It has been observed that their calling frequency is at their peak during February to April.

They roost at night up in thorny trees. Grey francolin rise early from roost before sunset. It is an extremely noisy bird can be heard at day break and also in the evening. A covey would rise with a shrill, shriek and cackle; these sounds are produced when the covey is on the tree. After producing the repetition of this sound they come down from the roosting site to the ground. They are daytime feeders, feeding on cereals, grains and young insects. They spend their 50% of time in foraging and feeding. They are extremely busy birds and spent whole day in swift running and hiding themselves under bushes. The grey partridge, roost in pairs or small groups comprising of its young ones they roosts on trees. They fly to roosting site about 15-20 min. before sunset.

Grey partridge female choose their male partner. They establish pairs which may remain together for life; however, mortality of males is common. Dates of pair formation vary with region and weather conditions, but generally during January-February. Male stays with female throughout incubation and brood rearing. They are faithful to each other in sharing their duties during incubation of eggs and rearing of chicks.

The nest of the Grey Partridge is a single grass lined scrape in the ground under shelter of a thorn bush in fallow or grassland. It has been observed that they built their nest under the thorny bushes; scrape in the ground or between cultivated crops. The mating season of Grey partridge in India Falls in the month of April to September. During mating period loud calls of males are heard and fighting between males is very common site. The gestation period lasts from 21 to 23 days. The female lays 4-9 eggs at a time, which are brownish cream in colour without any markings. The incubation period of grey partridge is 21-26 days, average about 25 days. Nestlings start feeding after a few hours of hatching and their first food is primarily crop milk mixed with a few small seeds. Chicks usually leave nest with adults within a day. It has been observed that the young ones feed on protein rich diet; which includes larva, caterpillar and white ants. Chicks are capable of short flight by 6-8 weeks. Young remain adult up to late winter or early spring.

CONSERVATIONAL STATUS:-

Partridges are captured & hunted for delicious flesh. Grey partridge's 100gm of meat contain 151 Kcal. energy. Partridges are also kept as pets because of their loud calls and trained for fight. It was part time hobby of nobles and rich who used to arrange fighting of these pet partridges. The past few decades saw the population of Grey Partridge showing a downward trend. The reason for this was large scale hunting as well as trapping of bird. From the days when men learned to shoot flying until the later half of 19th century, dogs were generally used to point out the covey of partridges. From the late 19th century several modes of shooting partridges had to be

employed of which the most popular methods is trapping. However, after the Indian government imposed a ban on its hunting, the situation has improved to quite an extent. It has been observed that the villagers and nomadic castes still not aware of government restrictions. They freely hunt and trap these game birds; still awareness among these people is to be created.

Grey partridges are placed in the priority of species list due to its rapid decline. Factors that have been blamed for the national decline in Grey Partridge are :

1. Loss of nest sites due to agricultural intensification.
2. Reduced food supplies and source for chick food through the use of pesticides and herbicides. [As chicks for first two weeks exclusively feed on insects only.]
3. Loss of winter stubble feeding grounds by over-wintering birds.
4. Vulnerability of nests to predators in farmland with poor cover.
5. Nest destruction caused by early mowing and other farm operations. (UK Biodiversity Partnership,2006)

Although, Grey Partridges are still hunted, predation and weather appears to have the greatest impact on their population. There were strict Wildlife Protection Act in 18 century also, which are strictly followed but after the independence, these laws were replaced by wildlife protection act 1972. During this period also, the rapid decline of their population was noticed. Not only the hunting is the sole reason for their decline but predation, weather, agriculture intensification and extensive use of pesticides and herbicides are also responsible for their decline in population.



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