

# Peafowl Feather Trade – A preliminary observation in Delhi

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## Introduction:

In 1963, the Indian Peafowl (*Pavo christatus*) was declared the national bird of India because of its association with Indian traditions and in many religious rituals (Krishnan, 2000). It occupies a sacred position in Hindu mythology, subject of voluminous folklore as well as in Sanskrit literature and poetry (Thaker, 1963). The Indian peafowl plays an important role in the Muslim story of creation as well (Thapar, 1998). This role of the peacock in different religions, folklore and mythology had traditionally acted as a safeguard against their being killed.

Although the Indian peafowl is listed under Schedule 1 of Wildlife (Protection) Act (henceforth WPA) prohibiting the killing and capturing of the species, Section 43 III (A) of WPA excludes trade in shed tail feathers of peacock and the trophies made therefrom due to its use in the religious rituals by many communities (Anon, 2003). Many people in rural areas collect shed peacock feathers and sell products made from them. However, there is a high demand for peacock feathers and a very thin line exists between sustainable use of a particular resource and commercial trade. In recent years, wildlife trade is perhaps the most critical threat to wildlife next to habitat loss and habitat degradation for the survival of wildlife globally (Fitzgerald, 1989). Commercial trade in wildlife causes overexploitation that has severe consequences for wildlife population and ecosystems (Hunter, 1996). A Peafowl population estimation done by WWF-India in 1991 revealed that India was left with only 50% of the total peafowl population that existed in 1947 ([www.wfindia.org/fly\\_to\\_the\\_sky\\_b.php](http://www.wfindia.org/fly_to_the_sky_b.php)).

## Methodology:

A pilot survey was conducted in Delhi at four prominent trade centres of peacock feather and its artifacts (Chandni Chowk, Kinari Bazaar, Lal Quila and Janpath Market) in a covert manner. During January 2005, fifteen shops were randomly visited and the volume of peacock feathers and artifacts present in the shops were estimated. In every business an arbitrary number of 15,000 feathers were asked to be supplied every week throughout the year to estimate an overall influx of peacock feathers into these markets. Secondary data was also collected from several available newspapers, reports, websites and postings into the internet.

## Results and Discussion:

During a pilot survey, in 11 out of 15 randomly selected shops, peacock feathers were available. About 10,700 loose feathers, 245 handmade fans, 100 brooms, 20 dancing dress, 25 matt, 1,000 brooches and 100 cards were found in these 11 shops [Table 1]. Peacock feathers are kept in bundles of 100 feathers and price of such bundles varies from Rs.90 to Rs.125. While bargaining for the whole sale price, the traders informed that they profit Rs.25 to Rs.30 in one bundle i.e. their profit margin varies from 20% to 35%. This is a good profit margin considering that the manufacturing and establishment cost of these traders are negligible. One kilogram of peacock feather contains about 750 train feathers and are sold in Rs.900.

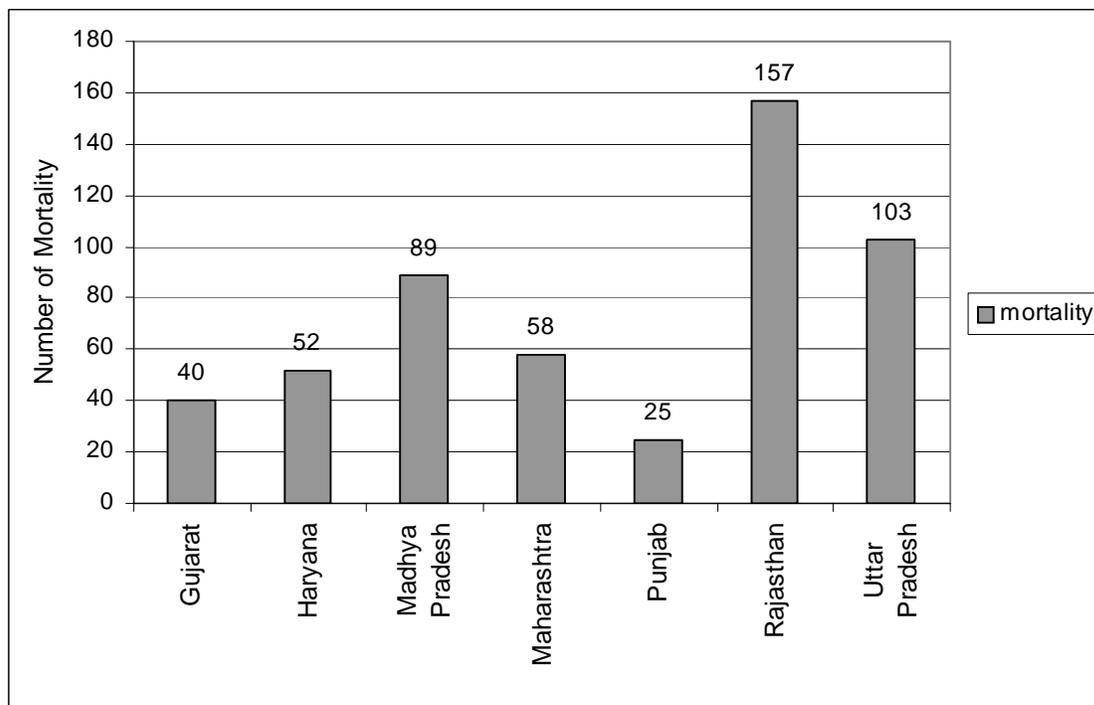
With one exception, when asked, all the traders agreed to supply 15,000 feathers individually at only two days notice which implies that only 10 of these traders per week can supply 1,50,000 feathers in total throughout the year [Table 1]. Covert study also revealed that there is a regular supply of feathers throughout the year and the supplier comes once in a week or even sometimes 2-3 times in a week. According to the traders, demand increases and the price of peacock feathers and their artifacts increase during 'Holi' in March, as this festival of colour is related to Lord Krishna who used peacock feather to decorate his turban. As a consequence, out of religious belief, demand for peacock feathers run into lakhs. A proper guideline to distinguish between the shed and plucked feathers of Indian Peafowl is lacking. However, during the pilot survey, several feathers were found which are clearly from young birds. Peacock feathers and the products made thereof were also found to be traded in Alwar, Dholpur, Dosa, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Shiakar and Swai Madhopur in Rajasthan; Guna, Gwalior, Jhabua, Morena and Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh; Faridabad and Hisar in Haryana; Haridwar and Saharanpur in Uttaranchal; Agra, Badayun, Bijnore, Bulandsahar, Firozabad, Gonda, Jhansi, Mahoba, Mathura, Meerut, Moradabad, Udham Singh Nagar and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh (Sharma, unpublished). One street side hawker at Janpath informed that feathers come from Agra, Mathura, Meerut and some unknown places in Rajasthan and are stored in Delhi. Majority of the traders had informed that the main source of the raw material is from Rajasthan. Studies done in other parts of the country also reflects similar results. Many traders, mostly from Rajasthan, sell their products or raw material to Bangalore. Each feather is sold for somewhere between Rs.5 to Rs.6, which adds up to Rs.10 when it reaches the end-user. Also, hand held fans made out of the plumage are sold for anywhere between Rs.35 to Rs.50, depending upon the size of the fan (Satyanarayana, 2003).

To substantiate this information, mortality data for peafowl was collected. Though the complete figure of peafowl mortality throughout the country was not available for this study, the mortality data collected over the years from different newspaper reports, internet and other unpublished reports over a time span of 2000 to 2002, shows that in Rajasthan maximum mortality of the peafowl occurred (157) followed by Uttar Pradesh (103) and Madhya Pradesh (89) [Fig 1]. The mortality data collected so far reflects that 42% of the unnatural death is due to pesticide poisoning [Fig 2]. Sometimes death is caused due to accidental exposure to the pesticides but sometimes mass poisoning is also done in order to kill and collect feathers from the dead birds. Mass poisoning becomes easier due to the territorial nature of Indian Peafowl. Males spend most of the time on or adjacent to 2 or 3 display sites within their territory, known as alocaves (Hillgarth, 1983-84). At night, peafowls roost in specific trees (preferably Acacia sp. ) within their habitat, at a height of 18-26 m (Sathyanarayana and Veeramani, 1992). Poaching is another major threat responsible for 22% of the available information of peafowl mortality [Fig 2]. Moreover, the available data shows that the

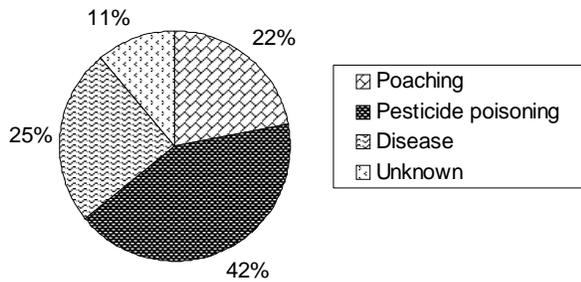
**Table 1: Results of pilot survey on peacock feather trade in Delhi**

Sl. No.	Location (Name and address)	Peacock feathers and artifacts present	15000 feathers can be supplied in:	Prices of the products sold
1	Street-side Shop, Kinari Bazaar, Dariba	a. 1500 loose feathers. b. 100 fans	1 days notice	Each feather- Rs.1.20. Single layered fan-Rs.20-30. Double layered fan- Rs.80
2	Lal Quila entrance. 10 hawkers sell peacock feathers here everyday between 5pm-7pm	25 fans (Approx)	Within 2-3 days	Fans- Rs.35
3	Street-side seller, Janpath	a. 1000 loose feathers (Approx) b. 50 fans (Approx)	Within 2 days (can supply up to one lakh feathers)	Fresh feather- Rs. 1.25 Old feather- Rs.1.00
4	Street-side seller, Janpath	2000 loose feathers (Approx)	Within 2 days	Loose feathers Whole sale price- Rs.1.75 per piece Retail price- Rs.1.50 per piece.
5	Munish Chandra, Satyendra Kumar, 26, Gali Parantha, Niraha Bazaar, Chandni Chowk	Broom ~ 50	Can supply 100 pieces of brooms within 10 days	Wholesale price- Rs.15. Retail price- Rs.20.
6	New Swastik Collection, 2693, Kinari Bazaar, Chandni Chowk	a. Loose feather- 2000 b. Fan. ~ 30; c. Card ~100; d. Mat ~ 25; e.	Within 2 days of notice	100 feathers- Rs.90 Fan- Rs.25-30 Mat- Rs. 200
7	Vardhman Kala Kendra, 2277, Kinari Bazaar, (near Gali Anar)	50 pieces of broom each with 15 feathers 500 loose feathers	2000 pieces at any time.	Broom- Rs.20 Loose feather- Rs. 90 for 100 pieces.
8	New Shatabdi Fashion: 2921, Kinari Bazaar, Delhi- 110006	No feathers were kept outside, kept secretly	At 1 days notice	Loose feather- Rs. 90 for 100 pieces; varies between Rs. 75-90
9	Golden Zari Unit, 2195-A, Kinari Bazaar, Dariba Side, Delhi	1200 loose feathers (Approx)	At 2 days notice	Loose feather- Rs. 90 for 100 pieces
10	Bharat Fine Art Palace; 2177, Kinari Bazaar; Delhi – 110006	a. 1000 loose feathers b. 40 fans c. 10 dance dresses	At 2-3days notice	Loose feather- Rs. 90-125 for 100 pieces; Dance dress Wholesale price – Rs. 60-70 Retail price – Rs. 90-100
11	Divya Palace; Kinari Bazaar	1500 loose feathers (Approx)	Not asked	Not asked

**Fig 1: State-wise mortality of Indian peafowl in the available data (2000-2002)**



**Fig 2: Ratio of Peafowl Mortality in the available data (2000-2002)**



percentage of mortality due to unnatural causes (64%) is much higher than the natural mortality (25%). In 11% cases the cause was not reported [Fig 2].

Till date, Indian peafowl is not believed to approach the thresholds for population decline criterion used by the IUCN Red List (i.e., declining more than 30% in ten years or three generations). Therefore, the species has been evaluated as Least Concern (Birdlife International, 2004). Though global population trends have not been quantified, there is evidence of population decline (Del Hoyo et al., 1994). This study is of short duration, yet it reflects that the present volume of such trade is quite large which might not be restricted solely to the shed feathers collected from outside the protected areas. In this context, a census of Indian peafowl population throughout its distribution range is essential to assess the present population status of our national bird.

On the other hand, the volume of trade needs to be quantified to analyze whether it is adversely affecting the peafowl population. These in turn, will help to take proper conservation action. If any illegality is found, strict enforcement action should be taken and, if required, necessary policy change need to be done. This has to be realized that if selectively males are removed for feather trade, then it might lead even to the complex problem of skewed sex ratio of the peafowl population. A proper monitoring action through local level community participation should be devised and implemented to prevent poaching and poisoning of peafowl. An

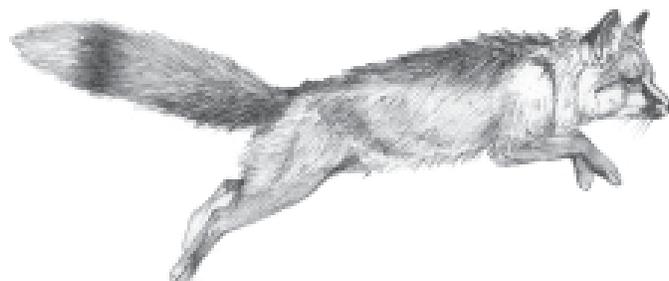
entrepreneurship for the people manufacturing different products from legally procured peacock feathers needs to be developed, so that they get good value for the handicrafts and restrict themselves in collecting only the shed feathers. They would also get an incentive to protect our national bird. The Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) formed under the purview of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 at the distribution areas of our Indian Peafowl can be a feasible and practical solutions to protect our national bird from getting killed outside the protected areas.

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**Blandford's Fox  
(*Vulpes cana*)**