

Black Francolin expanding its range into Thar Desert

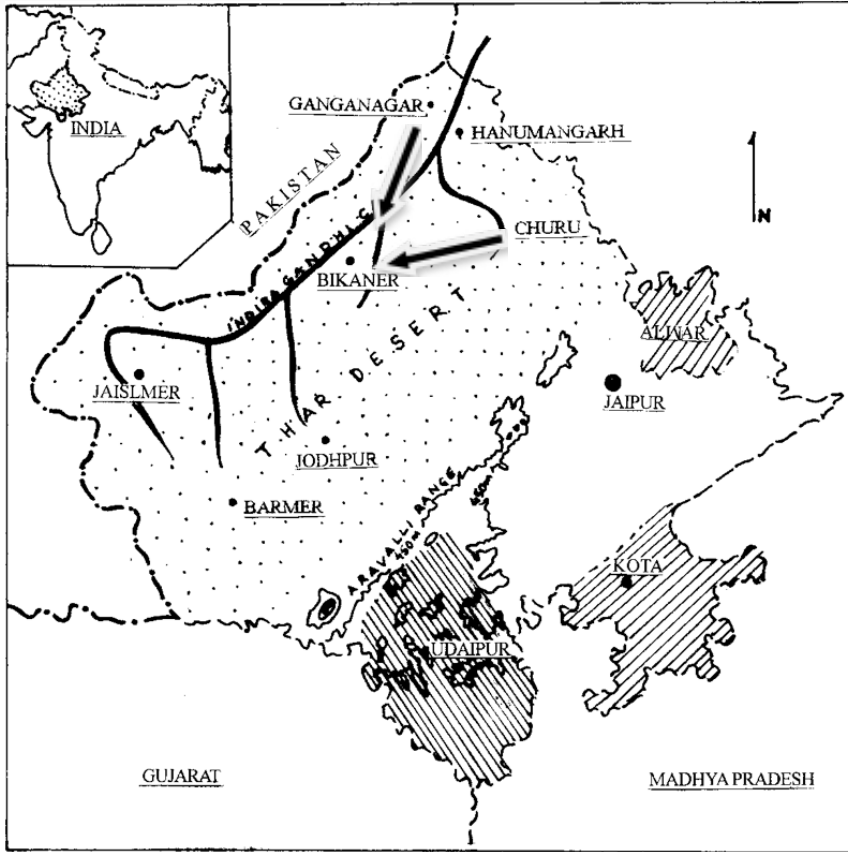


Black Francolin male in the Vallabhgardan area of Bikaner region. © Jitendra Solanki.

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* (Linnaeus, 1766), a resident species in its range, is well distributed from southern Afghanistan through Indus Valley of Pakistan, Kachchh in Gujarat, along the Himalaya to Assam, to Bangladesh, to Odisha and central India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Though the species is assessed as Least Concern as per IUCN Red List, its population is declining in many parts of its distribution range (Birdlife International 2018). Grimmet et al. (1998) and Kazmierczak & Perlo (2000) report that the species is almost absent from the Indian part of Thar Desert except small

patches in Sri Ganganagar District. The species occurs here, maybe, due to alteration of habitat as irrigation has been in practice since 1960 in this area (Singh et al. 2009). Roberts (1991) reported that the species had declined rapidly during early 90s in Pakistan in most of its distribution range and is entirely absent from the main desert tracks of Thar or Cholistan.

Though Black Francolin has been frequently reported from Tal Chhappar Blackbuck Sanctuary, which is largely a flat tract of grassland present in Churu District, it is



Map of Thar showing possible ingress of Black Francolin towards core areas.

report of the species from the core area of Thar Desert. We had earlier sighted this species in Jhunjhnu and Churu districts of Rajasthan and Suratgarh Tehsil of Sri Ganganagar District. The avian diversity of Thar Desert is changing considerably due to Indira Gandhi Canal and several species appear to be invading the core region of Thar Desert because of these ecological changes (Patil et al. 2015; Bhardwaj & Sangha 2016). It is conjectured that Black Francolin is also expanding in the Thar region from areas adjoining to Punjab and Haryana. It may not have invaded from eastern Rajasthan as there appear to be a large gap between the canal and eastern Rajasthan. An early study of Behbash et al. (2010) in southwestern Iran indicates that both plant height and

absent from the rest of Thar. Rahmani (1996) and Rana et al. (1996) did not report it from the Thar, but Dhillon (1984) and Sangha (1984) reported its occurrence in the area of Ganganagar District

falling in Thar Desert. We have recently sighted this species in Vallabh Garden Area of Bikaner District (27.592°N & 73.210°E) which is about 250km from Sri Ganganagar. This is a first

Table 1. Some recent records of the Black Francolin in the Thar Desert.

| | Location | Date of observation | Observer/ s | No. of individuals |
|----|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. | Tal Chhapar | 12.iv.2016 | Jitendar Solanki, Veer Vaibhav Mishra | 03 |
| 2. | Suratgarh | 15.ii.2015 | Partap Singh | 01 |
| 3. | Bikaner | 17.viii.2016 | Partap Singh, Jitendar Solanki | 03 |
| 4. | Jhunjhunu | 20.ii.2015 | Partap Singh, Jitendar Solanki | 02 |
| 5. | Tal Chhapar | 07.i.2017 | Jitendar Solanki, Gautam | 01 |
| 6. | Bikaner | 29.vi.2017 | Partap Singh, Jitendar Solanki | 02 |



Sighting area of Black Francolin.

plant cover are important factors for occurrence of Black Francolin. It is surmised that with expansion of agriculture and increase in the grassland, the species would establish its population in the areas of Thar desert from where it was hitherto not reported.

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