

China's most endangered galliform

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The few remaining forests where the Sichuan hill-partridge lives are all being logged. This species, with its very restricted range, is one of China's most endangered birds and yet it has no protection at all. The authors say a reserve should be set aside for the partridge before it is too late; such action could save not only this species but others of restricted ranges, which also live in the same broad-leaved forests.

The Sichuan hill-partridge *Arborophila rufipectus** has one of the most restricted ranges of any galliform in the world. It is endemic to southern Sichuan Province of south-west China and has been found in only four counties there: Mabian, Ebian, Ganluo, and Ping Shan (Li, 1980), which together cover an area of approximately 60×150 km. The partridge was first described in 1932 from a single male (Boulton, 1932) and no more specimens were collected until the 1960s when Professor Li Guiyuan obtained a series of 23 and described the female (Li *et al.*, 1974).

The Sichuan hill-partridge lives between 1000 and 2000 m in broad-leaved forest. Since there is no significant forest in Sichuan below 1000 m, the forests between 1000 and 2000 are quite vulnerable and fast disappearing as they are the most readily exploitable forests remaining.

Forestry Department officials in Mabian County, the centre of the partridge's range, told King that only three areas of native forest remained in the county in that elevation range: Dafengding Panda Reserve; Huang Nian Shan, an 800-ha forest between 1200 and 1500 m; and Da Zhu Bao, a 3000-ha forest between 1200 and 1500 m.

King ran an expedition to the Dafengding Panda Reserve from 25 April to 6 May 1986 and found no trace of the partridge, although the party was

in its altitudinal range over half the time. It might exist elsewhere in the reserve, but it might well not be there at all, as it is an area of higher rainfall and with rather different vegetation than the area in which it was subsequently found.

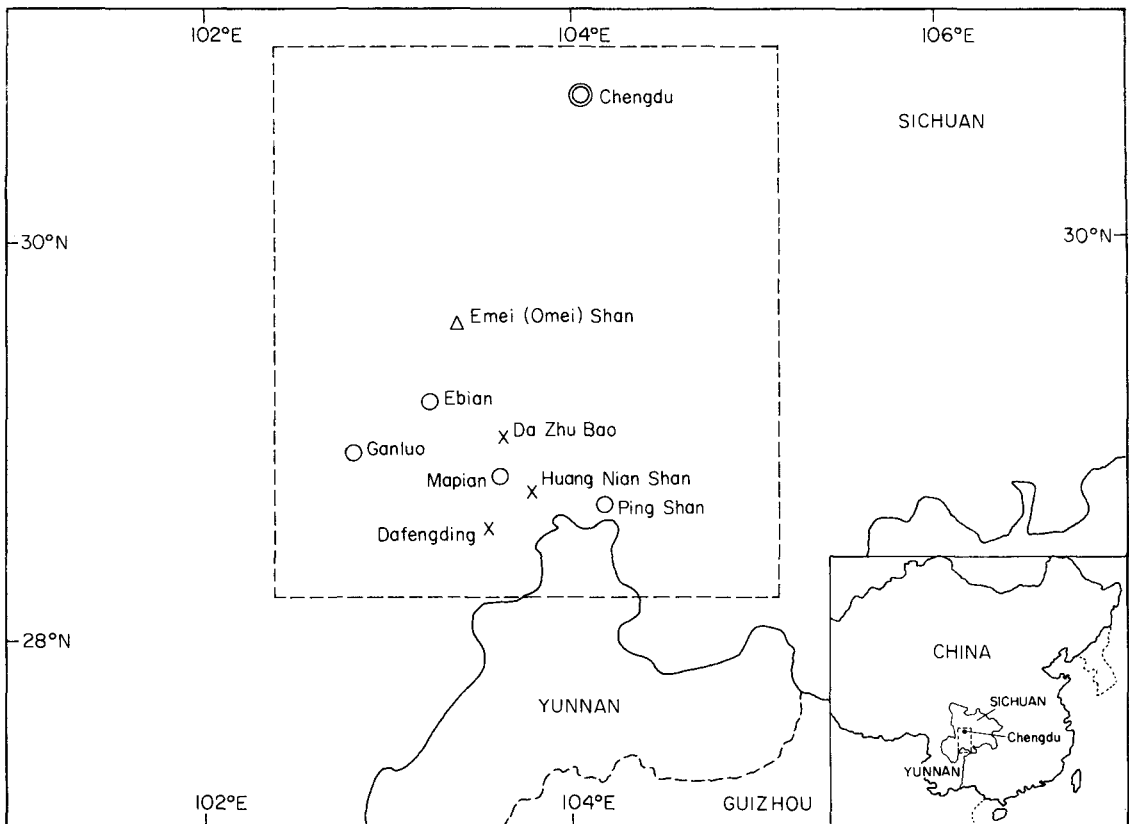
King visited Huang Nian Shan from 26 April to 1 May 1987 and found the Sichuan hill-partridge to be fairly common, noting 2–11 individuals each day by voice. Presumably only males were calling and each calling bird represented a pair. Two males were seen and tape recordings of the three types of call were obtained.

It is likely that the partridge also exists in the Da Zhu Boa forest.

Logging of the Huang Nian Shan forest is expected to be complete within 15 years and the logging of the Da Zhu Boa forest within 40 years. These forests are being replaced by tree farms of fast-growing conifers. It is not known if the partridge will be able to adapt to these plantations. Thus, all known habitat for *A. rufipectus* in Mabian County will be gone within 40 years.

It is logical to assume that similar timetables for logging exist in surrounding counties. Since the partridge appears not to exist on any current reserve, its habitat is all vulnerable to logging and its existence is probably limited by the speed with which its remaining forest haunts can be cut. The best prognosis is that it has 40 years to go. Since all the other Chinese galliforms

*Scientific names follow Meyer de Schauensee (1984).



Map showing distribution of Sichuan hill-partridge.

believed to be endangered or threatened exist on at least one reserve, they at least have some protection and thus can be said to be less endangered than *A. rufipectus*, which has no protection whatsoever.

The immediate needs are: official recognition of its endangered status; a commitment to establish a reserve for the bird; and field studies to determine the best site for the reserve. Huang Nian Shan has a good population of the species, but is 800 ha sufficient to contain a large enough population to ensure the species's survival?

The broad-leaved forests in the 1000–2000-m range in this area of Sichuan contain several other birds of restricted distributions. The gold-fronted fulvetta *Alcippe variegaticeps* is found only in the forests of southern Sichuan and in the Yao Shan of Guangxi Province (its total known range). The rare silver oriole *Oriolus melianus* breeds in these broad-leaved forests in southern Sichuan and in a few other localities

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in southern China. Having three species of bird with such restricted ranges in the same forests suggests a high level of endemism, which might exist in other taxa also. A good patch of this type of forest should be saved for its own sake as well as for its endemic forms of wildlife.

References

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