

**Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times
by Sanjay Sondhi**

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The Vociferous Black Partridge

The bird's rasping call was driving me crazy. "*chik chirik chirik chirik*" went the bird's call. Over and over again. The grating call of the bird seemed to say to me tauntingly "*ja kha le khichdi!*" (go and eat your dal!), all because I could not locate the bird.

Out for a stroll in the scrubland near our house, the bird that was driving me up the wall, and into the bushes, was the Black Partridge, also known as the Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*). I recognise the bird's call and despite having made many visits to the area, I had never really got a good sighting-just fleeting glimpses of the bird scurrying into the undergrowth.



The Black Partridge (*Kala titar* in Hindi) is very vocal during the breeding season, calling throughout the day. During the non-breeding season, the bird calls mainly in the early morning or the late evening. The partridges normally call from a perch. However, on approaching the bird, it quickly hops down, and scurries into the undergrowth. If you get even closer, the bird takes to the wing. With a rapid flutter of its wings, it flies for a short distance, and then glides. Never flying far, the bird

suddenly dips and descends to the ground, quickly merging with the undergrowth, completely camouflaged. When searching for the bird, it suddenly flies from your feet with a startling flurry of wingbeats! In the days gone by, the partridge was always considered a good game bird, as it was challenging to shoot, and probably tasted good as well.

On a visit to Jardhargaon last week, a village in Tehri Garhwal, I heard the Black Partridge calling everywhere. Imagine my pleasure, when I spotted the bird sitting on a stump, calling, no more than 15 feet from where I stood. The male—a handsome black and brown bird, with a red ring around its neck and a white cheek patch, stood arrogantly on the stump and calling vociferously. I managed to photograph the loudmouth (sorry for being rude, but it is a loudmouth!), with its mouth wide open. The female bird is a dull brown colour, lacking the regal look of the male.

The Black Partridge is found throughout northern India in appropriate habitat—grassland, shrub and cultivated fields near rivers and streams. However, like so many other creatures in India, its numbers are on the decline, as its habitat comes under increasing pressure from rapid development—roads, factories and more. Will we allow this pretty bird to make it to the next millennium?

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Making a difference: I have occasionally come across people selling wild partridges and quails. Most of these birds are protected under the Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which means they cannot be hunted or captured. If you ever see people selling wild birds, do take the onus to report it to the Forest Department.

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