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Investigation of Crop Damage Caused by Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) Based on Foraging Behaviour

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Abstract

Expansion of Indian peafowl from their traditional habitats into communal areas has become a serious economic, social and cultural issue. Objectives of the study was to investigate the type and intensity of crop damage done by peafowl based on their foraging behaviour and to understand how different ethnic groups reacted in controlling them. A survey was conducted in 4 Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions in Vavuniya district. Foraging behaviour was studied for 3 months covering morning (006-008 h), mid-day (1130-1330 h) and evening (1600-1800 h) by direct visual scans of male, female and juvenile bird categories. Opinion of a sample of (n=160) farmers and village level officials on peafowl habitat expansion and associated problems were collected using a structured type questionnaire. There were significant differences ($p<0.05$) between the time of peafowl attack, the sex, the stage of peafowl with type of plant damaged. Peak activity (63%) was recorded during morning while it was 36% in the evening and 1% during mid-day. The feed materials ingested consisted mainly of a variety of plants and, beetles, snakes, snails and worms. According the respondents observations, peafowl damage was most serious on paddy (83.5%) followed by other cereals (62.5), spicy crops (33%) and leafy vegetables (19.5%), plantation crops (14%), vegetables (12.5 %), legumes (11%) and tubers (6%). Young peafowl mostly attack (90%) lower level vegetation while adults mostly attack (67%) upper parts. Spreading of parasites (40%), disturbing noise (39.50%), damage to vehicles (29.7%) and damage to houses (6.5%) were among the other nuisances caused by peafowl. Irrespective of the ethnic group, all respected peafowl due to religious reasons. A majority of respondents suggested chasing out (63.50%) and hitting (9.50%) while a few opted trapping (2.25%) and death (1%) as controlling measures. It is concluded that damage caused by peafowl varies with the time of the day and the growth stage of the peafowl. Strategies that cause less harm to peafowl were preferred by the respondents. The study highlights the importance of adopting socially acceptable peafowl habitat expansion strategies.

Keywords: Crop damage, Ethnic groups, Foraging behaviour, Peafowl