

Duetting in the Grey Partridge (*Francolinus pondicerianus*)
A note from M.K. Himmatsinhji

L. Shyamal < muscicapa @ yahoo . com > 15 October 2002

Several Indian bird species are known to duet, most noted being the Scimitar babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*). Some observers have suggested that the Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*) call is also the result of a tightly synchronized duet of a male and female (Antiphonal Duetting). I first came to hear about duetting in the Grey Partridge from a newspaper article by Zafar Futehally. Further enquiry led me to M.K.Himmatsinhji, who wrote the following that would be of interest to other too and hence this file. At that time I was not aware of his note to the Journal of the BNHS on the same subject.

Himmatsinhji, M.K. (1959) The different calls of the Grey Partridge, (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) (Gmelin). *J. Bomb. Nat. Hist. Soc.* 56(3): 632-633.

Jubilee Ground
Bhuj, Kutch.
December 14, 1990

Dear Mr. Shyamal,

Thank you for your letter of the 10th which I received yesterday. I describe the calls of the Grey Partridge as hereunder:

There are two calls of the male and two of the female. The first call of the male (normal call) sounds like *kili k̄ā k̄ā k̄ā k̄ā*. The second call (semi challenge) is *kilā kilā kilā kilā*. The female has the main call (ordinary) *kee kee kee*, a sharp mono-syllabic call which can be distinctly heard when she calls by herself. But the other call is like the males, is *kilā kilā*, but uttered in a less sharp and lower tone, which by practice could be distinguished in the field. If you have the opportunity to hear a caged pair of partridges, it would be easier still. The combined, or synchronised, calls are uttered after the pair-formation between two birds. More often than not, there are more than two birds in a covey (family) of partridge. All, or many, of such birds call together. However in that case the synchronization between individual birds is not perfect, and one can at once tell, again with some practice, that there are more than two birds involved.

Now, to come back to the main point of your query, in a combined call the *kee* of the female in the male's first ordinary call precedes his *kili āk* to sound like *kili āk kili āk kili āk*, and if the male stops his call before the female, it ends with her *kee* this like *kili āk kili āk kili āk kee*. In the male's second, semi-challenge call, the female's *kee* comes after the males beginning *ki* of the call to sound like *kateelā kateelā kateelā*.

When separated from each other, or from the chicks, both of the parents utter loud *kuān kuān* until they come together. Then there are other softer calls constantly uttered by the birds which are not audible in the wild to the human ear. The pair calls together all the year round and they need not be necessarily close together. Taking a count from the calls is not an infallible method. They have to be physically seen and counted.

You are most welcome to write again for any clarifications.

Sd. Himmatsinhji