

### PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

#### **Djibouti Francolin** *Francolinus ochropectus*



Djibouti Francolin (© Hilary Welch).

### **Background**

Djibouti Francolin is a shy and elusive gamebird endemic to juniper woodland in Djibouti, north-east Africa. It is known from just two sites: Forêt du Day in the Goda Massif and the nearby Mabla Mountains. Available habitat at Forêt du Day halved between 1977 and 1983 and by 2006, 95% of the remaining plateau juniper was either dead or dying. The species has consequently undergone an extremely rapid population decline, with the population recently estimated at just 612-723 adults. At Mabla, survey work in 2009 led to a population estimate of 108 individuals.

The reasons for the poor condition of the juniper woodlands is unclear, but overgrazing by cattle, camels and goats is certainly a major factor, possibly exacerbated by acid rain, climate change and fungal disease. Other threats include firewood collection, hunting and human disturbance. Although the species continues to persist in dead and degraded juniper woodland, its long-term tolerance of this habitat remains unknown.

### **Actions being implemented (in association with the World Pheasant Association)**

- 1. Through a series of meetings** involving local NGOs, government officials and local community representatives, work is underway to advance the implementation of full **protected area status** for the Forêt du Day and Mabla. It is hoped that the formal process to gain protected area status will begin soon. Information on the species and the status of its habitat has been included in the government's 2009 agenda, and the five-year government project 'Mobilisation of rain water and sustainable use of land' began in November 2008.
- 2. A campaign to raise community awareness** is underway. Brochures on the Djibouti Francolin and its habitat have been produced and distributed widely including within schools, tourist centres and government departments. Meetings have been held with education authorities to discuss the integration of environmental teaching within primary schools, and a pilot **environmental education programme** has been trialled at five local schools. The new edition of the Djibouti bird booklet for primary schools has been completed and printed in April 2009 in Germany and it is expected to be distributed to schools in Djibouti in the 2009-2010 school year.

- 3. Plans for a community-based juniper forest restoration** project are underway: three exclusion zones have already been established and have shown encouraging results of natural regeneration. Unfortunately, many new juniper seedlings died in 2009 because of drought. In May 2008, the Day village local community agreed to donate an area of 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> near the village for the establishment of a **tree nursery**, and a local entrepreneur has been contracted and has almost completed the construction of the nursery.
- 4. A Site Support Group** (SSG) for Forêt du Day comprising 7 people (5 locals and 2 from Djibouti Nature) was established in November 2009 and initial attempts to introduce the concept have taken place at Mabla.
- 5. The establishment of a Djibouti Francolin Working Group** has been discussed but at present the focus remains on awareness raising.



Top left: Government Project Manager visits Day Forest accompanied by Houssein Ralayeh; bottom left: discussion with local community in; top right: Houssein Ralayeh visiting Ministry of Agriculture tree nursery; bottom right: Houssein Ralayeh with a local field assistant (All photos © Geoff and Hilary Welch).

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