

## PAINTED SPURFOWL: A RESIDENT BIRD THAT 'CHOOSES' ITS HILLS WITH A FINE-TOOTHED COMB

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

A male and female Painted Spurfowl at Natham-Vallapakkam range in Vellore. Photo: Rama Neelamegam | Photo Credit: [Rama Neelamegam](#)

Three bitter phasianidae realities birders from Peninsular India have to swallow.

Taking its name seriously, the delectably-coloured Himalayan Monal keeps to that region, fancying real estate that comes with an elevation of 10,000 ft, give or take a couple of thousands. So, a monal sighting is much effort, much time and a few travel tickets away.

The Golden Pheasant, also strikingly-painted, is not within easy range, and can even be safely called out-of-bounds. Though endemic to western China's mountainous ranges, it has populated scattered parts in the rest of the world as feral populations, but none of these is in India.

The unkindest cut of all: the Painted Spurfowl — as with the other two, the male is right out of a canvas — belongs to peninsular India. But not every peninsular birding soul is deemed worthy to have a Painted Spurfowl sighting in their backyard. The bird's habitat is a combination of scrub environment and hilly terrain, but it chooses such properties with a fine-feathered comb.

So, you will find this species in the Natham-Vallapakkam range in Vellore, around 150 km from Chennai. But not in the Kumizhi hills near Guduvancherry; not in the hillocks in Pallavaram; not in the Vandalur area; nor at the hillocks around Mailai village on the road from Tiruporur to Chengelpet, though the non-decrepit village with its hillocks is known for another famous phasianidae, the Indian peacock. Of course, the Indian peacock is a highly adaptable member of the family, with a range covering the length and breadth of India, except for the really high reaches of the Himalayan range.

"The Painted Spurfowl needs a hilly terrain marked by huge, exposed rocks, which I do not think really characterises the hillocks in and around Guduvanchery. Large boulders with scrub vegetation in-between — that is where we normally see this species. The Painted Spurfowl sighting closest to Chennai has been at Gingee in Vellore district. I do not think they are in coastal areas. They are found in areas a little more interior; a little more drier. The Deccan plateau must be a good habitat; Hampi would be a good area to sight the Painted Spurfowl. Of course, the species is in the Eastern Ghats; and also found in some of the outlying hills of the Western Ghats, but not in the range's densely forested areas," says V. Santharam, ornithologist and director, Institute of Bird Studies, Rishi Valley, a residential school run by the Krishnamurti Foundation of India in Madanapalle, Chittoor.

If the last paragraph of Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* ever required an illustration from the natural world, the Painted Spurfowl would be a fit candidate.

Adult birds are usually seen moving around in pairs, ascending and descending hilly slopes, and foraging together in scrub vegetation. Santharam has observed the bird display this behaviour at Rishi Valley.

He elaborates: "Our campus is protected and well-wooded, and surrounded by rocky hillocks. I have seen the Painted Spurfowl go up these hillocks in pairs, flying from one rock to another

only to avoid getting into the bushes, and making a characteristic call. They probably feed on the rocky hill, in the scrub forest, on seeds fallen from the plants in the crevices of these rocks. In the evening, the reverse happens. They start descending from 4.30 p.m. - 5 p.m. onwards, and the slow descent would come to an end around 5.30 p.m. - 6 p.m., depending on the sunset. As they move downwards, they would again fly from one rock to another, making that call. And so they come to our campus, where they probably roost on trees. On the campus, I have seen the Red Spurfowl climb up trees to roost there. For a long time, we thought only the Painted Spurfowl was on the campus, but it came to light that the Red Spurfowl was there too; and it seems to be commoner than the Painted Spurfowl.”

Its inherently shy and wary nature had kept the Red Spurfowl from being documented as a species on the campus

In *Indian Birds*, dated 22 April 2013, Santharam narrates how in February 2011, Chennai birder and Madras Naturalists' Society member Gnanaskandan Keshavabharathi photographed the Red Spurfowl at Rishi Valley. That evidence led Santharam to revisit spaces where he had earlier heard what he recognised as calls of the retiring Red Spurfowl, but not clapping eyes on it around these spaces had held him back from acknowledging the species' presence. Fresh and determined efforts that followed the record led to many Red Spurfowl sightings on the campus.

The Red Spurfowl is also a bird of the hill terrain with scrub vegetation.

Santharam says, “There are old records of Red Spurfowls being sold in the Madras Market; those were probably birds captured from hills, possibly Nagari Hills, and brought to Madras.”

Coming back to the Painted Spurfowl, eBird reviewer Vikas Madhav Nagarajan has made an observation of a female Painted Spurfowl sighting at Kolapakkam in the Vandalur belt in December, 2018. He could not snap a photo of the bird.

“Though I am certain it was a Painted Spurfowl, I am not sure about the bird's origin: where it could have come from. It could have been an escapee, after being brought here and kept in some form of confinement,” says Vikas.

On the likelihood of the Painted Spurfowl being a resident in these parts: “With the kind of rocks found there, the Deccan topography would be ideal habitat for the Painted Spurfowl. It is not just about hills, even the nature of the vegetative cover matters. The vegetative cover in the hillocks in Chennai and its outlying areas is different from that found in Vellore and Tiruvanamalai hills. Painted Spurfowl, White-naped Woodpecker and Yellow-throated Bulbul and Red Spurfowl are species you see in Vellore and Thiruvanamalai.”

Not many weeks ago, Chennai-based birder Rama Neelemegam documented Yellow-throated Bulbul and Painted Spurfowl sightings from the same habitat in Vellore.

Vikas says: “You never know, there may be an odd pocket or two around Chennai that may have the Painted Spurfowl. But are these areas accessible enough for us to explore them?”

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Start your 14 days free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

\*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper, crossword and print.

Dear reader,

We have been keeping you up-to-date with information on the developments in India and the world that have a bearing on our health and wellbeing, our lives and livelihoods, during these difficult times. To enable wide dissemination of news that is in public interest, we have increased the number of articles that can be read free, and extended free trial periods. However, we have a request for those who can afford to subscribe: please do. As we fight disinformation and misinformation, and keep apace with the happenings, we need to commit greater resources to news gathering operations. We promise to deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Dear subscriber,

Thank you!

Your support for our journalism is invaluable. It's a support for truth and fairness in journalism. It has helped us keep apace with events and happenings.

The Hindu has always stood for journalism that is in the public interest. At this difficult time, it becomes even more important that we have access to information that has a bearing on our health and well-being, our lives, and livelihoods. As a subscriber, you are not only a beneficiary of our work but also its enabler.

We also reiterate here the promise that our team of reporters, copy editors, fact-checkers, designers, and photographers will deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Suresh Nambath

Please enter a valid email address.

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Start your 14 days free trial [Sign Up](#)

You can support quality journalism by turning off ad blocker or purchase a subscription for unlimited access to The Hindu.

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com