

Himachal Pradesh's Cheer pheasant conservation programme

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Species

Why in news?

Himachal Pradesh has significantly raised the survival rate of reintroduced Cheer Pheasants from 11.11% in 2019-20 to 100% in 2024-25 through a scientifically managed captive-breeding and reintroduction programme.

- **Cheer Pheasant** - It is a vulnerable Himalayan bird species.
- **Scientific name** - *Catreus wallichii*
- The cheer pheasant is locally known as 'Chir Tittar'.
- **Family & Genus** - It belongs to the family Phasianidae and stands out as the only member of its genus, *Catreus*.
- **Habitat** - Depends on grasslands, often mixed with shrubs and short trees, in parts of the northwestern and central Himalayas.
- **Appearance** - They have buff-brown plumage heavily barred with black and grey, which serves as excellent camouflage against rocky terrain.
- They feature a prominent, messy crest on the head and a long, untidy tail.
- Both males and females display striking, crimson-red patches of bare skin around their eyes.
- The male is slightly larger with a longer tail and a more pronounced crest.



- **Diet** - As ground-dwelling foragers, they use their strong, curved bills to dig up roots,

tubers, bulbs, seeds, berries, and small insects.

- **Conservation Status**

- IUCN Red List – Vulnerable.
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 – Schedule I.

- **Threats** – Grassland degradation, forest fires, overgrazing, fodder collection and other human disturbances.

- **Reintroduction Programme** – The programme is led by the Khadiyun Cheer Pheasant Breeding Centre in Chail, Solan district.

- So far, 77 captive-bred birds have been released into the wild.

- **Latest Release (Wildlife Week 2026)** – The latest phase saw another 12 birds, two males, two females and eight chicks released near Koti in Shimla district.

- **Key Conservation Strategies**

- **Parent-Rearing Technique** – Instead of relying entirely on artificial incubation, chicks are naturally incubated and raised by their parents.
- Birds raised by their parents are considered better equipped to survive after release.
- In the wild, adult birds help their chicks learn survival skills, including finding food and responding to threats.
- **Soft Release Method** – Soft release gives captive-bred birds a gradual transition to their natural surroundings rather than releasing them directly without an acclimatisation period.
- **Radio Telemetry Monitoring** – Very High Frequency (VHF) transmitters are fitted to the male leading each released family.
- The device helps officials track the bird's movements and monitor how the family adapts to the new habitat.
- **Camera trap surveillance** – Camera traps provide additional evidence about activity in the release areas, including survival, behaviour, movement and adaptation.

Reference

[TOI | Himachal Pradesh raises the survival rate of reintroduced cheer pheasants](#)