

# NEWSLETTER

Vol. 3 | Issue No. 4 | April - June 2024

## THREATS to Birds



WADERS at Kargil Beach , Frazergunj being chased by a dog. A place, that is known for the Spoonbilled Sandpiper; now a days birds do not visit that frequently due to human interference, dog attacks and also hundred of cows that graze near the main beach area.

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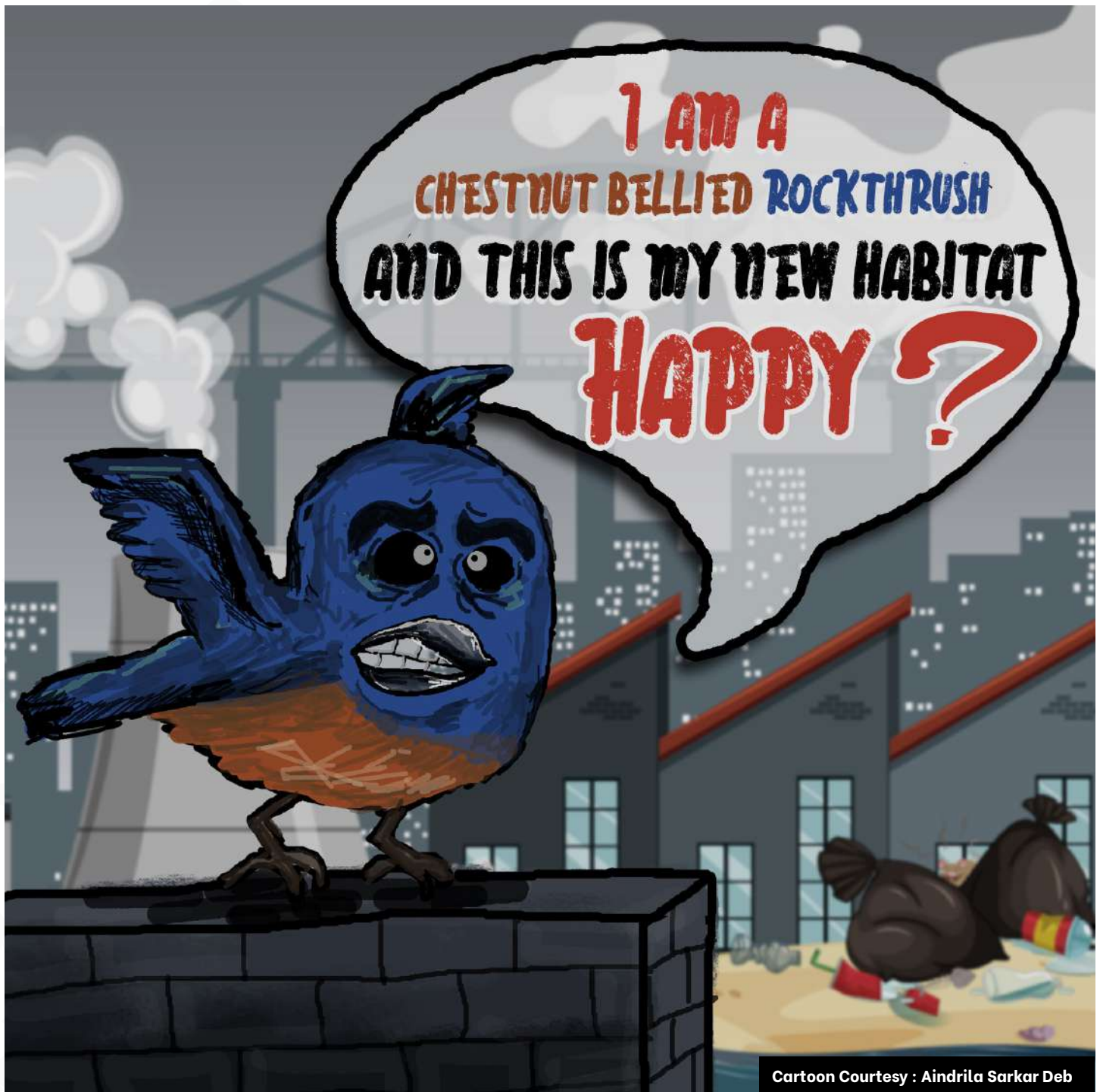
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## BIRD HUMOR



Cartoon Courtesy : Aindrila Sarkar Deb



Pic Courtesy : Amitava Datta \_ Mrs Gould's Sunbird



Pic Courtesy : Sujan Chatterjee \_ Indigo Macaw

“

Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird? ”

Sir David Attenborough



Pic Courtesy : : Dr. Pradeep Kr Sen \_ Purple Sunbird



## TABLE OF

# CONTENTS

**F**antail is a newsletter published by Birdwatchers' Society. This newsletter's primary aim is collecting and disseminating learnings, experiences and anecdotes contributed by citizens through their observations from the field. While the emphasis is on the avian world, equally important are the observations of the habitat and environment of the avifauna including conservation, biodiversity and acknowledge citizen scientists of the region.

**Front Cover:**  
Sandip Das

**Theme Page:**  
Threats to Birds

**Back Cover:**  
Ranadeep Sengupta.

**Design, Layout & Graphics:**  
W3Webhelp  
[www.w3webhelp.com](http://www.w3webhelp.com)

**Publisher:**  
Birdwatchers' Society  
Address: DB 75, Salt Lake,  
Kolkata 700064, INDIA

**Email:**  
[birdwatcherssocietywb@gmail.com](mailto:birdwatcherssocietywb@gmail.com)

**Website:**  
<https://birdwatcherssociety.org>

- 01** EDITORIAL
- 03** Fresh & Rare Sightings (Arrivals)  
**SANKHA MISHRA**
- 05** Threats to Birds in India  
**DR. ASAD RAHMANI**
- 13** El nino, and its Threat to Birds  
**URVASHI BASU**
- 17** Tastes of the WILD  
**RAJDEEP MITRA**
- 22** Threats in the brackish waters: Problems in Chilka Lake  
**SUVODIP MONDAL**
- 25** ভারতে হারিয়ে যাচ্ছে গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড বা হুকনা  
**BISWA RANJAN GOSWAMI**
- 29** Threats to Birds - Photo Story  
**BWS MEMBERS**
- 33** Need of awareness in tackling 'Threats to Birds'  
**SOUVIK ROYCHOUDHURY**
- 38** Indian Birds on Indian Stamps 2016-22  
**INDRANI GHOSH**
- 45** BWS Activities
  - Bird walk update
  - National Bird Day
  - North Bengal
  - GBBC
  - BWS Bakkhali Coastal Camp 2024
  - Camp Feedback by BWS Members
- 44** Crossword  
**HIYA CHATTERJEE.**
- Bird Humor (Cartoon)  
**AINDRILA SARKAR DEB**

# EDITORIAL

Hello Birders,

We are incredibly fortunate to bring you the 4<sup>th</sup> Issue of FANTAIL – Volume 3. This issue marks the completion of a 3-year journey. What an expedition it has been!

During the years, there has been so much that we have learned, and we hope you have enjoyed the results of our toils as a reader and an author. We are excessively thankful to our readers for the encouragement received; we are hugely grateful to the authors who have graciously contributed; we are thankful to the editorial team for their input & inspiration; last but not least, we are thankful to the publishing team who have managed to glue everything together at the oddest hours.

Especially for this issue, having Dr Asad Rahmani lend his name and expertise to our newsletter is just the boost we need to make it even better. It could not have come at a better time than this issue themed on ‘Threats to Birds’.

For the uninitiated, Dr Asad Rahmani is a bounty of knowledge, experience, research, leadership and everything one would look for in a Guru! Dr Rahmani has published 26 books, nearly 170 peer-

reviewed scientific papers, 80 book reviews, nearly 65 editorials, and more than 300 popular articles on nature conservation. He was a Global Council member of BirdLife International, UK (2006–2013) and Chairman of BirdLife Asia Council (2006–2013). He is a Member of Honour by BirdLife International, UK. Dr Rahmani was the Executive Editor of the Journal of BNHS and was Editor of Hornbill, Mistnet and Buceros, popular magazines of BNHS. Dr Rahmani was the Director of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) for 18 years, from 1997 to 2015 till his retirement. Vasundhara-Pune and Nature Mates-Kolkata have awarded him the Lifetime Achievement Award.

It is a privilege to share Dr Rahmani’s wisdom and views on ‘Threats to Birds’, most interestingly, his perspective on emerging threats that agencies overlook. He says, “To this litany of pressures on birds, there are many emerging threats that are often not known or not considered by the government and conservationists. In this article, I will list these new (and

some not new) threats and discuss a few of them in detail that are more relevant to Indian landscapes". It would be a massive satisfaction, if any of our readers took up the cause and championed the mitigation recommendations by Dr Rahmani.

We are proud to have received valuable contributions from our birding community on this extensive topic. Urvashi Basu recalls the dwindling number of migrant birds, which prompted her to trace the impact of El Nino on bird migrations. Our avian ecologist Rajdeep Mitra shares his take on the implications of gastronomic choices in the world around us in his article 'Tastes of the Wild'! Quite an intriguing topic.

Science author and member of the Biodiversity Conservation Academy Biswa Ranjan Goswami chronicles the threats to Hukna or the Great Indian Bustard and the efforts the local communities and agencies have taken to protect them. Sourav Mandal, a wildlife photographer and a keen conservationist, has written about the threats to birds at the Chilika Lake (a RAMSAR site), a vital area for breeding, wintering and staging for waterbirds.

We present a grim reminder of the stark reality of threats in our Photo Story on Threats to Birds. This issue is

undoubtedly a sordid truth. Hopefully it will ignite a few of us to spread education, convict culprits and stop covetous practices.

Birds on stamps has interested birders and philatelists alike, in addition to the awareness and curiosity that it manages to create. Indrani Ghosh in her article 'Indian Birds on Indian stamps 2016-2022' traces the significance of these birds from a conservation perspective.

Talking about education, during the month, many of our associates reached out to children across the state to help create awareness about birds. BWS, in association with Early Birds, has published a picture booklet on common birds of West Bengal. These booklets are given to the children of all ages during these sessions. The booklet will help the students forge a closer connection with the birds and take up their cause to protect our avian friends over time.

Apart from the above, we have our regular crossword, cartoon, and rare bird alert columns.

While we complete Volume 3, as always, we seek your feedback and support going into the next year of publication.

**Here's to Happy Birding!**

**BWS Editorial Desk!**

# FRESH & RARE ARRIVALS

## SANKHA MISHRA

During the period spanning from mid-December 2023 till end March 2024, our community of birders remained active and enthusiastic. Their passion and dedication towards this beloved pastime was quite evident. Here is the list of the stop-over guests that enthralled us.

We would also like to add that, some species mentioned here are quite common in occurrences in broader perspective to WB, but not so common to some districts of WB. We also have tried to add first sightings of the season along with rare sightings in WB.

Sr No	BIRD SPECIES	LOCN - 1	LOCN - 2	SIGHTING DATES
01	Greater Scaup	Gajoldoba		03 & 16 February 2024
02	Great Knot	Jambu Deep, Khalistan & Henry Beach	Lothian Islan	24,25 Feb & ,7,10,17 March
03	Dunlin	Gajoldoba & Farakka IBA	Bakkhali and surrounding Beaches	13,14,28 Jan & 13,18 Feb & 3 March
04	Black-headed Bunting	Pichkuri & Bardhaman	Boshipota and Baruipur, Fulbari	24-25,30-31 December 2023 & 4.21 Jan 2024
05	Eurasian Hobby	Asansol & Mogra(Hoogly)	Senchal WLS, Mahananda WLS, Latpanchar	12,15,18 Oct & 3,4,10,17 Nov 2023
06	Indian Blue Robin	Gosaba	Gorumara	19 Jan & 18 March 2024
07	Indian Courser	Purulia		21 Dec 2023 & 1,20 Jan,20 February 2024
08	Ultramarine Flycatcher	Rabindra Sarovar & Purulia	Neora Valley,Samsing	20 Dec 2023, 3,24 Feb, 1,2,3,9,17 March 2024
09	Sapphire Flycatcher	Mahananda WLS	Neora Valley	26 Dec 2023, Jan-March 2024
10	Rusty-tailed Flycatcher	Mahananda WLS		12,17 January 2024
11	Yellow Breasted Bunting	Kolkata and Outskirts	Fulbari	December 2023-February 2024
12	Long-billed Plover	Buxa		12,21,26,28,31 Jan,14February 2024
13	Rosy Starling	Chittaranjan	Purbsthali	18,26 December 2023
14	Red-headed Bunting	Boshipota		Till Late December 2023
15	Jack Snipe	Purbasthali	Asansol	13,23 December 2023
16	Chestnut-eared Bunting	Baruipur	Jamar, Dakshin Dinajpur	28 December 2023 - Till Early Feb 2024
17	Creasted Bunting	Durgapur, Bankura	Jhargram	6 Jan, 16 & 25 February, 2024



Sr No	BIRD SPECIES	LOCN - 1	LOCN - 2	SIGHTING DATES
18	Himalayan Rubythroat	Mahananda WLS	Mahal Diram Tea Garden	31 Jan & 3,6,18,21,23 February 2024
19	Striolated Bunting	Ajodhya Hill		21 & 22 December 2023
20	Gray-necked Bunting	Ajodhya Hill		22 Dec 23, 1,20,21 Jan,6,9,20,25 February 2024
21	Red-throated Pipit	Diara		18-30 December 2023
22	Bar-tailed Godwit	Bakkhali and surrounding Beaches		18 Feb, 7,17,24 March 2024
23	Black-tailed Godwit	Purbasthali	Lothian Islands	30 Dec 2023, 17 March 2024
24	Nordmann's Greenshank	Lothian Islands		25 Feb, 7,17,24 March 2024
25	Great Knot	Bakkhali and surrounding Beaches		25 Feb, 3 March 2024
26	Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	Buxa		6 January 2024
27	Red Knot	Jambu Deep	Lothian Island	24 & 25 February 2024
28	Caspian Tern	Bakkhali and surrounding Beaches	Sunderban Nation Park	19 Jan, 18,19 Feb, 13,17 March 2024
29	Firethroat	Alipurduar		26,28 Jan, 14,22 February 2024
30	Speckled Wood-Pigeon	Neora Valley NP	Senchal WLS	29 Dec 2023, 9 Feb 2024
31	Lesser Kestrel	Lohagarh,Birbhum		4 February 2024
32	Pied Avocet	Kamarganti, Meidi Nagar, Matiari	Farakka IBA and Gajoldoba	Mid December 2023 to Mid March 2024
33	Common Shelduck	Bakkhali and surrounding Beaches & Lothian	Sunderbans, Bardhaman, Gajoldoba & Teesta Spur	4,19,20 Jan & 19,24,25 Feb & 7,13 March 2024
34	Ruddy Shelduck	Kamarganti		23,24 March 2024
35	Northern Shoveler	Kamarganti		02 March-2024
36	Gadwall	Kamarganti	Baruipur Marshes	23,26,27,28,31 Jan & 1,3,4 Feb & 1,2 March 2024
37	Garganey	Kamarganti & Nalban Bheri	Santragachi Jheel	17,20 Jan & 3 March 2024
38	Ferruginous Duck	Kamarganti & Nalban Bheri		20 Jan & 2 March 2024
39	Eurasian Wigeon	Kamarganti & Nalban Bheri		20 Jan & 2 March 2024

### Disclaimer:

Please note this list has been prepared to the best of our knowledge. Some sightings may have been missed due to paucity of time.



### About Author

**Sankha Mishra:**

A data analyst by profession, a biker and a passionate conservationist. He loves discovering India's diverse landscapes on his motorbike. Currently he is actively pursuing birdwatching and herpetology, advocating for threatened species through grassroots education and rescue efforts.

# THREATS TO BIRDS IN INDIA

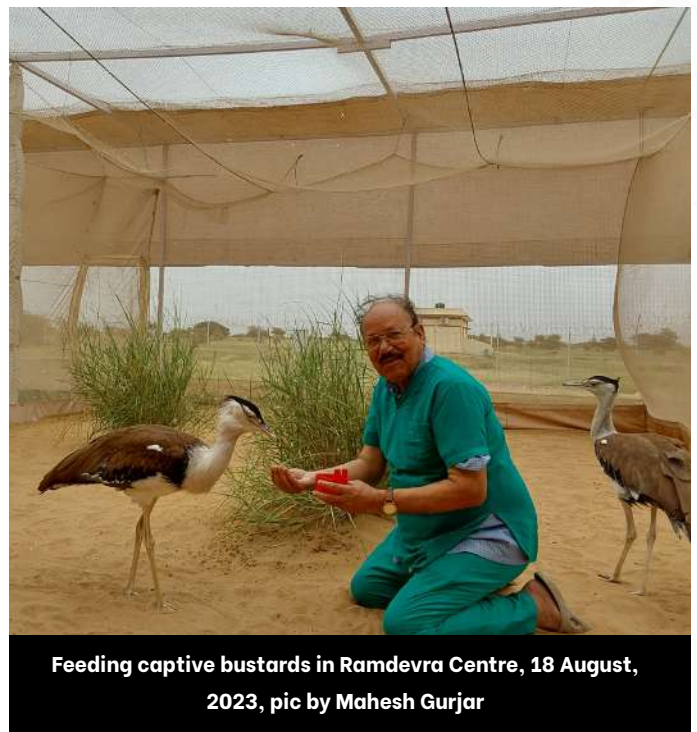
**DR. ASAD RAHMANI**

In 1958, James C. Greenway, in his book *Extinct and Vanishing Birds of the World*, listed 95 internationally endangered species. Within eight years, in 1966, the first edition of the 'Red Data Book' came out, identifying more than twice the number of globally threatened birds. As more research was done and more habitats came under threat, this list kept increasing. In the 1985 edition of the Red Data Book, a little more than 1000 bird species have been listed that are under threat of extinction—almost 12 percent of all known bird species. The situation has not improved even now. In 2023, BirdLife International assessed the status of 11,029 bird species (excluding 159 species that have been exterminated in the last 400 years). Five species are extinct in the wild, 233 species are critically endangered, 413 are endangered, 754 are vulnerable, 991 species are near threatened, 8587 are least concerned, and 46 are data deficient (i.e., we do not know their status; they are not certainly common).

Incidentally, BirdLife International, through its partners in 122 countries, does the bird assessment every year and provides the data to IUCN. Therefore, the IUCN Red List of Birds is basically prepared by BirdLife International.

In India, the number of red-listed species is increasing. For example, in 2012, 155 species were in the threatened and near-threatened categories, but by 2023, the number had gone up to 186. The latest figures (December 2023) show that 1,377 bird species have been recorded from the Indian territorial limit, and about 8% are under various threat categories.

A recent study published in the prestigious journal, **Science** reveals that since 1970, bird populations in the United States and Canada have declined by 29 percent, or almost 3 billion birds are missing. The results also showed pervasive losses among common birds across all habitats, including backyard birds. Grassland birds saw a 53-percent reduction in population—more than 720 million birds—since 1970. Shorebirds, most of which frequent sensitive coastal habitats, were already in dangerously low numbers and have lost more than one-third of their population. The volume of spring migrations, measured by radar in the night skies, has dropped by 14 percent in just the past decade. A study in Europe showed that 550 million birds disappeared in the last 40 years, mainly due to pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. The study was based on monitoring 170 bird species in Europe, using data collected at more than 20,000 monitoring sites across 28



Feeding captive bustards in Ramdevra Centre, 18 August, 2023, pic by Mahesh Gurjar

countries over 37 years. The study also found that there were four major driving forces: i) agricultural intensification; ii) climate change and its influence on temperature; iii) changes in forest cover; and iv) urbanization. In India, a recently released book, **State of India's Birds**, shows that 146 species show a declining trend. Of these, nearly 80% are declining fast, and nearly 50% are going at a rapid rate. Just over 6% of the species studied show stable populations, and 14% show increasing population trends.

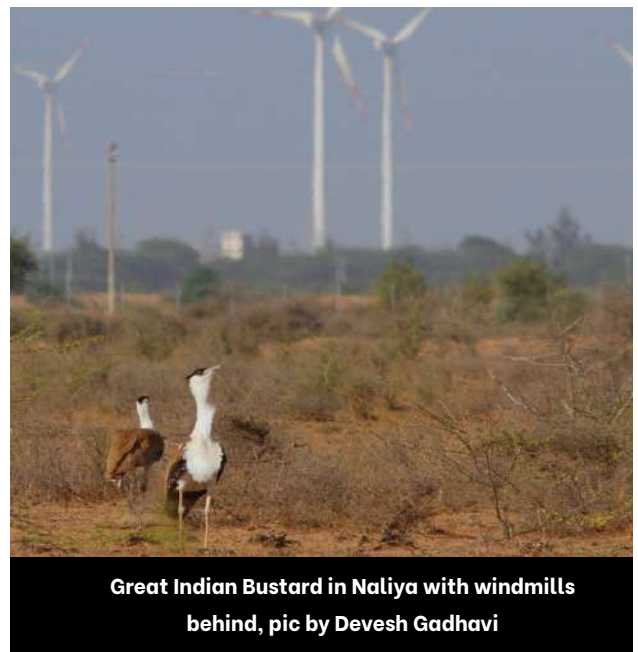
Habitat destruction, hunting, trapping, overfishing, invasive species, pollution, agrochemical and pharmaceutical usage, and illegal bird trade are considered the main causes of the decline of birds in India (and globally). To this litany of pressures on birds, there are many emerging threats that are often not known or not considered by the government and conservationists. In this article, I will list these new (and some not new) threats and discuss a few of them in detail that are more relevant to Indian landscapes.

First, let us see what the new emerging threats are: Wind farms, powerline collisions, free-ranging stray dogs, climate change, ecological traps, oil spills, extreme pollution, plastic pollution, invasive species, tall glass buildings, sand mining, bird photographers, and unrestricted tourism. Let us examine a few of these threats in more detail.

### POWER LINES AND WIND MILLS:

Millions of birds are killed monthly after hitting the powerlines and windmills. According to the studies by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), more than one hundred thousand birds die annually, including 18–20 Great Indian Bustards, after hitting the powerlines in a small study area of Jaisalmer. Just imagine how many birds would die after hitting the wires all over India. It comes in the news when big birds like cranes or bustards die after hitting the wires, but a WII study proved that even smaller birds such as larks, pipits, warblers, rollers, hoopoes, etc. also get killed. As the birds are eaten by predators or decompose quickly, very few carcasses are found unless someone is doing research on this topic. Birds are dying unsung and unreported.

A dozen studies on the impact of powerlines and wind farms have been done in India, some of dubious nature that are funded by corporations and hence sing their tune and show that windmills and powerlines are not a great threat. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) brought out a special issue on the existing guidelines for the establishment of wind farms, but the government is not serious enough to take any action. Even the Hon'ble Supreme Court has directed power companies to make high-impact powerlines underground. This order has not been implemented until now. The power companies know that they have the tacit support of the government. I call this so-called 'green energy' a 'killer energy' as our houses are lit up by the energy generated



Great Indian Bustard in Naliya with windmills behind, pic by Devesh Gadhavi



from the carcasses of birds and bats.

In Rajasthan, where so-called 'green energy' is being promoted by all political parties, BNHS and the Corbett Foundation have identified many areas where the powerlines have to go underground, but nothing has been done till now. Every day I get reports of eagles, vultures, and large birds being killed by powerlines. Social media is full of such pictures but apparently such hard evidences are not convincing enough to the government to take actions.

### FREE-RANGING DOGS:

There could be one billion dogs in the world, about 80% of them free-ranging. They are euphemistically called 'community dogs' by the fanatic dog lovers. These free-ranging dogs are reported to pose a potential risk to nearly 200 vertebrate species listed on the Red List of the IUCN. Based on the online key informant survey and reports from national print media in India, a scientific study found that dogs attacked 80 wild species, including 31 IUCN Red List threatened species, of which four are critically endangered. Another study shows that dogs' presence itself deters bird numbers and diversity as many species leave the area. In my own study on the Sarus cranes in seven districts of Uttar Pradesh, I found that harassment of Sarus by free-ranging domestic dogs is a big threat to Sarus. Many times, I have seen Sarus leave the area when dogs appear. Sometimes Sarus chases the dogs but remains distressed for a long time. It has been found that fear-mediated behavioral changes in the presence of predators can decrease breeding success in some species. For example, a study near Sydney found that pet dogs, even when restrained by leashes in city parks and national parks, reduces the abundance and species richness of birds. The study shows that dog walking in woodland leads to a 35% reduction in bird diversity and a 41% reduction in bird abundance.

My studies show that free-ranging dogs are the major threats to the small breeding population of

the Black-necked crane in Ladakh. If dog menace is not controlled by large-scale sterilization and euthanasia wherever required, we will lose the Black-necked Crane in another 15-20 years, as more than 60% of eggs and chicks are eaten by the free-ranging dogs in Ladakh. Dr. Pankaj Chandan, who worked on the Black-necked crane for 18 years found that chick survival is extremely low due to dog predation. When the old birds die, there will be no one to replace them. Incidentally, the Black-necked crane is the state bird of the Union Territory of Ladakh! Earlier, it was the state bird of Jammu and Kashmir. Imagine, allowing the state bird to be exterminated by the free-ranging dogs! Can any country or territory allow this in the world? We need to control the number of free-ranging dogs by every possible means, even total elimination from protected areas and important wildlife landscapes such as the Thar Desert and Ladakh.



Checking a dead Sarus, pic by Fazlur Rahman

## INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES:

IAS, have become a serious issue in many habitats, such as grasslands, wetlands, and forests. For example, the spread of *Prosopis juliflora* in the Banni and Naliya grasslands of Kutch (Kachchh), water hyacinth in wetlands all over India, *Mimosa*, *Rosa*, and other invasive weeds in Kaziranga, Orang, Manas, and other areas, and *Lantana* in forests. I found that *Lantana camara* and *Bombax ceiba* spread, is a huge problem in the grassland of D'Ering Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh, where I found the highest density of Critically Endangered Bengal Florican. The Bengal Florican is an obligate grassland species, and once its grassland habitat is destroyed, it has nowhere to go. India's oldest bird sanctuary, Vedanthangal, is menaced by *Cuscuta dodder*, a parasitic vine, native to North America, that is choking the canopy of *Barringtonia* bushes on which the native birds such as Painted Stork, Spot-billed Pelican, egrets, cormorants breed.

## DISEASES:

Most of the birds tolerate the natural diseases of their environment as they have evolved with some natural pathogens; however, the introduction of new pathogens is a big problem. For example, the accidental introduction of mosquitoes and consequently avian malaria and avian pox has devastated Hawaiian birds, as these island's endemic birds did not have any immunity to avian malaria. Ninety-five of the 142 bird species found nowhere else have become extinct on Hawaii. Thirty-three of Hawaii's remaining 44 endemic birds are listed under the American Endangered Species Act; 11 of those have not been seen for decades and are likely extinct. No wonder Hawaii is called the 'Extinction Capital of the World'!

Closer home, Spot-billed Pelicans that had recovered to reasonable numbers thanks to community protection have suffered catastrophic decline in some colonies, for example, Kokkarebellur in Karnataka, due to nematode and trematode parasites that infested the alimentary canal, resulting in birds starving to death. This is the result of a preliminary investigation, but shockingly, detailed studies have not been done to this ongoing tragedy.



BNHS team investigating death of an eagle after hitting the wire, pic by Dr. Asad Rahmani



## CLIMATE CHANGE:

Birds' presence, absence, distribution, range expansion or contraction, change in the community structure, and breeding success or failure are all good indicators of the process of climate change. Studies the world over show that the threat of climate change is impacting a very large number of birds all over the world. Not much research has been done on this aspect in India, but BirdLife study in which I was leading the Indian part, show that the distribution of many species will change in the next 40–70 years and many species may not occur within the existing IBA–PA boundaries. Our paper was published in the prestigious journal *Global Change Biology* (2013), DOI: 10.1111/gcb.12123. This multi-country and multi-institute investigation was done in India, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand on the impact of climate change on Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and the birds occurring in IBAs.

In Europe, studies show that for more than 80% of European long-distance migrants, there will be a significant increase in both the distance and time taken to travel. For example, the Thrush Nightingale will have to travel nearly 800 km further on average by 2070, adding at least five days to the duration of its migration; similarly, the European Bee-eater is projected to travel 1,000 km more and add 4–5 days by 2070. As birds have a very delicate energy balance, will these birds be able to travel an additional distance at the current level of fat load in their bodies? Or will they exhaust themselves and die, or will they settle in a not-so suitable habitat? In a paper in *Current Biology* (2018), it was shown that global warming is shifting environmental signals, so some geese (e.g., Barnacle Goose) are migrating fast without stopping for rest and fuel, so when they arrive, they are too exhausted to mate and breed.

These subtle changes in breeding failures or deaths of birds while migrating are not dramatic, so they do not get reported in the press. But this is happening all over for a large number of species.



Powerline survey by Dr. Asad Rahmani and others,  
photo by Sujit



BNC at Nest at Tsokar in Ladakh Photo Pankaj Chandan



BNC by Dhritiman Mukherjee



## TALL GLASS BUILDINGS:

While tall glass buildings are not such a problem in India at present, we are moving towards this problem as we build glass-covered buildings. Scientists in the US estimate that at least 100 million and maybe as many as a billion birds die each year in the US when they collide with buildings, especially glass-covered or illuminated skyscrapers. It is not only the death threats of these glass buildings to birds, but it is also incongruous to construct such glass-covered buildings that become a heat trap in a tropical country like India, where the temperature can go up to 48°C in the summer. These buildings need 24-hour central air conditioning to work or live in, thus adding to climate change crises. If not for birds, at least from the climate change mitigatory methods, we should minimize the use of air conditioner which such glass-covered buildings force us to use.

## SAND MINING

Most of the conservationists have not given much attention to the sand mining issue, thinking that it is a law-and-order problem. However, sand and boulder mining in most Indian rivers is a huge threat to riverine birds, reptiles, and turtles. Trampling of eggs and chicks is a major threat to globally vulnerable Indian skimmers, Black-bellied terns, and River lapwings. Gharial and turtle eggs and nests are trampled or impacted, and young ones are crushed under trackers and trucks that operate, mostly illegally, in Chambal, Ken, Yamuna, and other rivers.

During the meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2012 in Hyderabad, where delegates from 100 countries were present, BNHS brought up the issue of sand mining. Since then, many conservationists have taken up this issue seriously all over the world. However, we need to give much more attention to this issue and see that at least in sanctuaries, sand and boulder mining is stopped.



Dr. Asad Rahmani (L) and team inspecting a dead eagle in the Thar Desert, Feb. 2021



Picture Courtesy : Sand mining at Rajghat near the Indian Skimmer nesting island \_Chambal 2019 \_Parveen Shaikh

## PLASTIC POLLUTION

With great fanfare, the government regularly ‘bans’ single-use plastic, but after a few days of drama, the plastic bags are back on the market. Pollution by plastic is a huge problem all over India, which is so apparent to anyone that it does not need any elaboration. Plastic debris poses a considerable threat to wildlife all over the world by choking and starving wildlife, distributing non-native and potentially harmful organisms, absorbing toxic chemicals, and degrading microplastics that may be ingested by animals. Plastic pollution in the ocean is a global concern; concentrations reach 580,000 pieces per square kilometer and are increasing.

While surveying vultures in the Jodhpur district, I went to a carcass dump where vultures were reported and was horrified to see more plastic than the carcasses. I was intrigued to know where this plastic had come from, so I asked the caretaker. He revealed that all the plastic is from the stomachs of the dead cattle! He told me that sometimes 40 kg of plastic comes out of the stomach of a cow. No one has studied how much microplastic birds are ingesting through food.

Bhutan is famous for its natural beauty, lovely people, and strict environmental laws. Single-use plastic is banned in this small, landlocked country. Even there, it was found that 5% of the 1000 feces samples of the Black-necked cranes had plastic. In one fecal sample, 6.5 g of plastic pieces were found. Just imagine what the percentage of our Sarus cranes, that live and forage in plastic-littered village wetlands, would be having in its stomach.

### WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

I have briefly described some of the lesser-known conservation problems for birds, but what are the solutions? Before I give some practical solutions, my major three resolutions are: respect for Nature and making our rules accordingly; acceptance by human beings that we have to share this world with millions of species; and lastly, better governance in all aspects of our lives.

#### The following solutions are not based on rocket science but on pure logic.

- ✓ Expansion of the protected area network to include all types of habitats and ecosystems. This is particularly important for grasslands, wetlands, coastal regions, and the territorial waters of India towards the sea. Rivers are underrepresented in the PA network, so long stretches of rivers should be protected where only sustainable fishing by locals should be allowed, and in some stretches, totally restricted.
- ✓ Based on scientific recommendations, underground powerlines in the main migratory paths of birds. Effective and widespread use of bird diverters to minimize bird collisions with high-tension wires. More experimental studies are needed on developing effective bird diverters for Indian conditions. At present, most of the bird diverters have been copied from European countries, where environmental conditions are very different. Such bird diverters do not work properly and cheap plastic imitations break during high summer heat. packaging industry.

- ✓ Strict control of free-ranging dogs with large-scale sterilization, adoptions, and, wherever necessary, humane euthanasia. A long term policy to eliminate free-ranging dogs in the next ten years. No free-ranging dogs should be allowed in PAs under any condition or pretext. They need to be eliminated immediately from all PAs.
- ✓ Control of invasive species, starting with PAs. More research is needed on the biological control of water hyacinth, Lantana and other invasives.
- ✓ As trapping and trade of birds is still common in some states like Bihar, weaning away the traditional bird trappers by providing them alternative livelihood options, particularly to the younger generation. Strict implementation of CITES, TRAFFIC, CMS and Wildlife Protection Act to stop illicit trade and poaching of species.
- ✓ Conservation breeding and reintroduction of selected critically endangered species, but at the same time, in-situ conservation of their habitats.
- ✓ Detailed long-term studies on bird migration and movement in India, in collaboration with states and international agencies, and the development of distribution maps of Indian bird species.
- ✓ Complete ban on single-use plastic and gradual eradication of plastic from the food packaging industry.



## About Author Dr. Asad Rahmani

Dr Asad Rahmani is an ornithologist and conservationist who was also the former Director of Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). He is currently the scientific adviser to The Corbett Foundation, and governing council member of Bombay Natural History Society. He has been member of several committees of Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and was Global Council member of BirdLife International, UK for eight years. Having authored about two dozen books and over 150 peer-reviewed research papers in scientific journals, Dr. Rahmani has also guided scores of scholars of biological sciences. He is deeply interested in grassland and wetland birds and often highlights the plight of bird species and bird habitats.

Picture credits : Dr. Asad Rahmani





## THE EL NIÑO, AND ITS EFFECTS ON BIRDS

URVASHI BASU

In the intricate nature of our planet's biodiversity, birds play a fundamental role. However, the delicate balance of ecosystems is compromised as bird populations face unprecedented challenges. As we witness the decline of numerous avian species due to habitat loss, climate change, and other human facilitated factors, the urgency to surrounding conservation has never been more critical.

### WHAT IS EL NIÑO?

El Niño a climatic phenomenon which unfolds as a periodic disruption in the Pacific Ocean's temperature patterns. El Niño, Spanish for "The Little Boy," refers to the periodic warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific, disrupting the atmospheric circulation and triggering a domino effect on weather systems. This natural occurrence impacts globally with catastrophic consequences; with altered precipitation to shifting ocean currents, El Niño holds the power to reshape ecosystems and impact societies worldwide.

## THE EL NIÑO EFFECT AND BIRD MIGRATION

*Understanding the sensitivity of bird population fluctuations associated with events like El Niño becomes paramount. Even slight shifts in temperature can disrupt the delicate balance of avian ecosystems, impacting feeding opportunities, breeding cycles, and migration patterns.*

Long-distance migratory birds, which are starting to decline in North America and Europe, cannot foresee the climate change-induced outcome of being isolated from food sources along their migratory path.

Due to the unpredictable changes in the weather-based cues (indicating seasons and therefore the instinct to migrate), birds are now struggling to find prey, as peak time for preying on their usual breeding grounds may have been earlier in the year than they arrived for. This puts long-distance migratory birds at a greater disadvantage due to climate change threat than resident birds. In some places such as the Netherlands, this issue led to a 90 per cent decline in some populations of pied flycatchers in the last 20 years.

## HOW EL NIÑO IS AFFECTING MIGRATORY BIRDS

Here are some ways in which El Niño is causing concern:



### Altered Weather Patterns:

El Niño disrupts typical global weather patterns, leading to irregularities in temperature, precipitation, and wind. This can affect the timing and routes of migratory bird journeys.



### Shifts in Food Availability

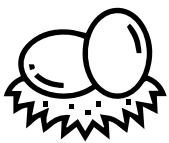
Changes in sea surface temperatures influence the distribution and abundance of marine life, affecting the availability of food resources for seabirds and waterfowl. Migratory birds dependent on specific prey species may experience challenges if their usual foraging areas are affected.



### Habitat Disruptions

El Niño is associated with extreme weather events, including droughts, floods, and wildfires. These events can impact the availability and condition of crucial habitats for migratory birds, such as wetlands and breeding grounds. Some of these birds include the Galapagos Penguins, the only penguin species found near the equator. The warming of sea surface temperatures during El Niño events disrupts the penguins' marine environment in many ways. These effects highlight the vulnerability of this unique penguin species to climate-related events and emphasize the importance of conservation measures to mitigate the impact of El Niño on their populations.





### Changes in Breeding Success

Altered precipitation patterns and food availability can impact the breeding success of migratory birds. Reduced food resources may result in lower reproductive rates that affect the overall population.



### Displacement and Redistribution

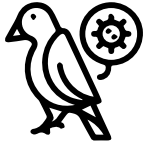
Some migratory birds may alter their traditional migration routes and destinations in response to changing weather patterns and food availability. This can lead to increased competition for resources in new areas and potential conflicts with resident bird populations.



### Impact on Stopover Sites

Migratory birds often rely on specific stopover sites during their long journeys for rest. El Niño-induced disruptions in these areas can affect the birds' ability to complete their migration successfully.





## Spread of Diseases

Changes in temperature and precipitation may create better conditions for the proliferation of pathogens and parasites. In conclusion, the delicate dance between bird conservation and the formidable force of El Niño underscores the intricacies of our interconnected natural world. As we strive to protect and preserve avian species facing myriad threats, the unpredictable climate fluctuations brought about by El Niño add an additional layer of complexity to our conservation efforts.

The challenges posed by El Niño, ranging from altered weather patterns to habitat disruptions, necessitate a dynamic and adaptive approach to bird conservation. While the warming of sea surface temperatures may reshape the landscapes that birds navigate, it also serves as a stark reminder of the urgency to cement our commitment to safeguarding their habitats. Conservation initiatives must address immediate threats and consider the long-term impacts of climate phenomena like El Niño. Integrating climate-smart strategies into conservation plans, such as protecting diverse habitats, promoting sustainable land use, and fostering community engagement, can enhance the resilience of bird populations in the face of climatic uncertainties.

Over the years, I have visited various wetlands during winters, like Gazoldoba, Purbashali, Mangalajodi, Nalsarovar, etc and experienced a significant fall in bird numbers. Over the past 5 - 6 years, I have witnessed the decline in the arrival of Trans-Himalayan migrants such as Northern pintail, Gadwall, Ferruginous duck, Common teal and Garganey in most of the wetlands. This year, the migrations from Eurasian & Himalayan regions have been delayed by two weeks due to Cyclone Michaung and a late onset of winter, resulting in a very significant fall in numbers, too. Migratory birds play several essential and indispensable roles in the ecosystems they reside in and travel through. So we must protect birds in various ways, including legislation, preserving & restoring bird habitat and establishing captive populations for reintroductions.



### About Author

**Urvashi Basu**

Interior Designer, Wildlife photographer & columnist in various media.

Picture credits : Urvashi Basu

# TASTES OF THE WILD: BIRD HUNTING AS A GASTRONOMIC ADVENTURE

RAJDEEP MITRA

In the chilly morning hours of the last day of 2017, Yabeez ji was battling the metal frame of his partially alive car and the biting cold of the morning. We were heading for Zero Point, nestled amidst snow-capped peaks in the verdant Tibetan plateau. The last night had seen us reach pretty late in the evening at the newly built wooden Yumthang bungalow after an exhausting trek through the pine and rhododendron forest in pursuit of the Blood Pheasant.

With gloaming sunbeams slowly filling the horizon creating a colourful panorama of shades of gold and amber, the caretaker of the guest house approached us with a strange proposition. He flashed a twinkle in his eye and then said that we should have a “jungly chicken roast” on New Year’s Eve. Bewildered, I asked him where he was planning to get a chicken in the middle of the wilderness. His response was as audacious– he was going to catch Kalij Pheasants for our dinner. It was the first time that I had come across this concept of hunting right in front of my face. We respectfully turned down the offer, preferring to watch the bird in its natural environment rather than on our plates.

As we started our journey northward, a flock of white Snow Pigeons flashed right above our car. Yet, amidst the breathtaking view, a thought kept lingering in my mind. For generations in these remote mountains, people must have been relying heavily on hunting for survival, especially in the cold winters. Even now, when the roads get impassable under thick blankets

of snow, they would venture into the forest in search of anything they can find– be it a bird, a goral, a tahr or any living being.

Since the dawn of humanity, hunting has been an integral part of our lives so much so that it has been woven into the fabric of Homo sapiens sapiens. The earliest people relied on hunting for primarily their food to the present day with rural communities and indigenous groups depending on hunting for their sustenance. In such far-flung areas, ancient traditions and practices persist as hunting continues to be both a source of food and a way of life. Yet in the Western world, it is a sport and a pursuit of gastronomic delight.

In case you were to ask someone what part of Europe birds are shot the most just to stimulate the tastebuds, apart from confused looks and wrinkled brows all that you may get in return is silence. The most dangerous place for a bird to be in Europe is in the four-time football world-cup winning nation Italy. In the very streets of Italy amidst the beauty of its towns and villages where the alluring aroma of the traditional dishes tantalizes the senses, a shadow looms over this idyllic scene. Every year, an astonishing 5.6 million songbirds are killed in Italy to satisfy the cravings for delicacies like “polenta uccelli” – a dish where songbirds are grilled on a spit and served with a portion of corn porridge (polenta), as well as a local sausage. In the northern reaches of the country, hundreds and thousands of European Robins meet their untimely demise despite bans on hunting imposed by European Union regulations. Behind a family restaurant or

a trattoria in the mountains of Lombardy, songbirds are still getting eaten. In the restaurant business some advertise the offer brazenly: “Spiedo” is the name for “spit” in Italian referring to the infamous grilled songbird dish.

France is also not far behind, with around half a million birds, especially over 100,000 thrushes dying each year due to illegal trapping. But, it is the Ortolan Bunting that steals the spotlight. Ortolan Buntings are small songbirds that breed across Europe and travel thousands of kilometres to reach their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. And it is during this autumn migration that they are trapped massively in France. After trapping, these buntings are kept in total darkness (once they used to be purposefully blinded) to disrupt their natural rhythms. Then they are fed constantly until they are bulging with fat. Then comes the ritual, they are drowned and simultaneously marinated in Armagnac brandy, taken out and baked whole. And so, the stage is set for the grotesque finale. Diners, head and shoulders covered with a large white napkin, supposedly “to hide from the sight of God”, pick up one whole, hot bird by the head and place it feet-first into their mouths, sparing only the beak. Supporters of this tradition describe the experience—an orchestra of cracking bones, dripping fat, and explosive tastes of organs that exceed one’s senses, crafting an unrivalled delicacy unlike anything else. However, to some, it is a vision of savagery and overindulgence, a vivid symbol of how far people will go in seeking gustatory pleasures. One French president even took it to the next level. François Mitterrand in his deathbed in 1996 had two ortolan buntings as his last meal and refused to eat anything thereafter until he died eight days later. Until recently 300,000 Ortolan Buntings were caught and sold in the black market for 150 euros each. Even

though hunting has decreased within the last few years, the bunting population has taken a massive hit. Since 1980, a staggering 80% of the Ortolan Bunting population has vanished from Europe, the fastest rate of decline among all European passerines.







©The Spectator

In the vast expanses of the Mediterranean Sea, a few hundred kilometres off the south coast of Turkey, lies the island of Cyprus, a country of both beauty and tragedy. Cyprus's location makes it a crucial stopover site for millions of migratory birds that pass through this island twice, once on their way to Africa in autumn migration and the second time in spring migration while birds come back to Europe for breeding. Amongst the millions of songbirds, waterfowls, raptors and shorebirds that pass through this landscape, many of them do not get to leave. Cyprus is notoriously famous for its illegal bird trapping through mist nets and lime sticks (lime meaning glue). In the 1990s it was estimated that an astonishing 10 million songbirds were trapped in Cyprus every year. Today, the numbers remain grim. Though strengthened by the efforts of the government and conservationists, BirdLife International estimates approximately 1.4 million birds still fall prey to mist nets and lime sticks each year. Among them, half a million finches and 300,000 thrushes meet their demise

As the night falls upon the island, trappers emerge from the shadows, armed with towering mist nets that they place between the trees and play the songs of the birds on a recorder. Birds whether roosting in the trees or flying above get attracted to the song and meet their demise by getting tangled in the nets. For the skulkers or ground dwellers, trappers use "lime sticks". A stick covered in homemade superglue from which there is no escape. What happens to the birds next? They are cooked whole in hot oil, sprinkled with salt and served to the diners, a dish that is famously known as "ambelopoulia". European Robins and Eurasian Blackcaps are the most sought-after for this dish and this practice has been going on for ages. Embedded deep in tradition and blood, it has become a stern reality for many in Cyprus. For some, it is a way of life, their livelihoods dependent on it, a testament to the dark underbelly of human existence.

As we drove past Yomesamdong, a flash of royal blue caught my attention. “Grandala!! Grandala!!” I shouted in excitement. All of us got out of the vehicle and found ourselves in front of a kaleidoscope of Grandalas. Around 2000 birds dotted the landscape. They were all foraging on the slope of the mountain on either side of the road, feasting on the tiny red berries of a shrub. Minutes later, they descended upon the road, lapping up the precious water trickling from the nearby army camp. It was quite the sight, reminding me of the amazement I experienced the first time I saw a flock of Yellow-breasted Buntings in my hometown’s Teesta Grasslands.

This Critically Endangered species has been eaten to near extinction. Only the Passenger Pigeons have seen a faster fall in population among all bird species, both in terms of rate and scale. Yellow-breasted Buntings used to have a massive breeding range, stretching from Finland in Europe to eastern Russia and the majority of the population traversed through coastal China on their way to the wintering ground in South-East Asia. And while passing through China they are massively hunted.

Hunting has always been a tradition in China but in recent decades as wild meat became a status symbol for the Chinese, the pace of killing skyrocketed. The price of a single bunting is estimated to be equivalent to 2500 to 3300 INR. Despite China’s legal ban on hunting, in 2001 as many as a million were killed and consumed in the Gungdong Province.

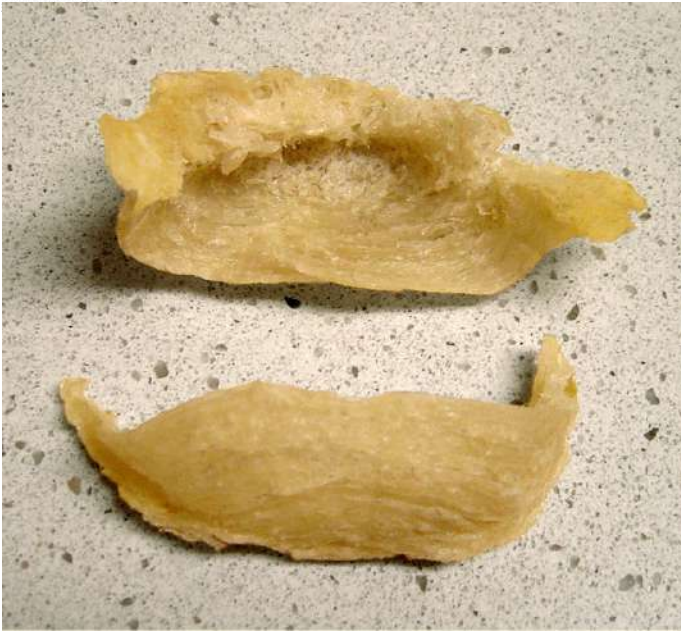
Normally, the birds are plucked and given a thorough cleaning after being caught. To improve their flavour, they could be marinated in a concoction of herbs, spices, and other flavourings, depending on the recipe. Soy

sauce, ginger, garlic, and other fragrant herbs are frequently utilized in these marinades. After marinating, the birds are cooked through and golden brown by roasting, grilling, or frying. To achieve more nuanced flavours, several recipes additionally call for braising or stewing the birds with vegetables and sauces. After being prepared, the food is frequently served hot and may come with rice, noodles, or additional sides. With no mention on restaurant menus, the trade operates undercover. Customers place orders in advance. Birds are then delivered from off-site storehouses.

On the other hand, in the heart of South-East Asia, another species is extremely sought after not because of the meat but for its nest. The Edible-nest Swiftlets are tiny birds that build nests in caves. They use their saliva to create these elaborate constructions that are affixed to the walls of caves with incredible accuracy and dexterity.



© China Foto Press



These nests, harvested from the interiors of caverns, are cleaned and prepared with great care before being turned into opulent treats. The nests are usually soaked in water to soften them and then thoroughly cleaned to get rid of any contaminants. Once cleaned, the nests are often simmered in a broth or stewed with other ingredients, infusing them with flavor while preserving their delicate texture. The resultant dish, called bird's nest soup, is highly regarded for its opulent flavour and alleged therapeutic benefits. Bird's Nest soup, which is expensive and rare and served in fancy restaurants, has come to represent sophistication and class in many regions of the world.

The United States is not far behind either, the Americans ate Passenger Pigeons to kaput. In a remarkable book called "The Market Assistant" published in 1867 by a butcher from New York named Thomas F. De. Voe wrote in detail about the taste of different birds, "Meadowlarks are almost as good as quail".

The excitement of the New Year's Eve party was in the air as we arrived back from our thrilling trip to Zero Point. The atmosphere crackled with excitement as we got ready to say goodbye to the old year and welcome the new. But in the background of all the excitement and planning, I couldn't shake the worry that we could have to feast on Kalij pheasant. My gaze searched the table expectantly as I entered the joyous gathering, and to my surprise and delight, I was told that a juicy

BBQ chicken was shining under the cozy glow of the lights. I was filled with gratitude as the aroma of grilling meat filled the air, tempting my senses.

Even in the middle of the evening's laughing and celebration, I couldn't help but think about the decisions we make and how they affect the world around us. The omission of Kalij Pheasant from the menu was a reminder that there are other options available to those who might otherwise indulge in the exploitation of wildlife and birds for food. We need to take a moment to reflect on our decisions in a world where excessive consumerism and greed are rampant. Rather than pursuing novelty and luxury in the delicacies of wild animals, let us focus on more environmentally friendly and compassionate choices without causing harm to our fellow inhabitants of this fragile planet.



## About Author

### Rajdeep Mitra

A researcher affiliated with the Wildlife Institute of India, focusing on the intricate movements of pelagic birds within the captivating ecosystem of Lakshadweep. With a passion for understanding wildlife behaviour and movement ecology, Rajdeep's work delves into the fine-scale dynamics of avian species in these marine habitats. "Through rigorous field studies and innovative tracking techniques, I aim to unravel the mysteries of bird migration patterns and contribute to the protection of seabird populations" says Rajdeep.





## THREATS IN THE BRACKISH WATERS - PROBLEMS IN CHILIKA LAKE

SUVADIP MONDAL

**T**his special habitat in Chilika attracts a large number of migratory birds every year. During winter, nearly 150 different bird species can be spotted in Nalban Wildlife Sanctuary, which is part of the brackish water lakes.

With its abundance of pristine marine species, Chilika attracts both waders and fishermen, serving as a vital resource for the livelihood of the locals in the area. However, the extensive fishing in the lagoon has given rise to several issues, and one of the most significant problems is the alteration of the hunting capabilities of many birds.

Extensive fishing and the use of planted nets to boost fish numbers have disrupted the natural balance in Chilika. If you take a look at Chilika Lake, you'll see these nets in the water. They are set up to catch fish as they get pulled in by the water flow.



Now, the problem arises when many fish don't end up in those nets but remain tangled in them. These lifeless fish become easy meals for Peregrine Falcons, Brahminy Kites, and other raptors.

## There are a couple more significant problems.

### 1. Reduced Hunting Capabilities

The use of permanent nets, meant to increase fish yields, has unintentionally turned Chilika into a risky place for some fish. These nets, often left unchecked, become deadly traps, attracting birds like Peregrine Falcons and Brahminy Kites into unexpected trouble. This change makes it difficult for migratory birds to find food properly, risking their survival, especially during the crucial winter months when they need it the most.

The lake, once a safe place for migratory birds, now puts them at risk with trapped prey, affecting their ability to find food properly. This change in behaviour, especially during the important winter months, is a serious, long-term threat to the survival of these visiting birds.



### 2. Might Induce Poisoning

The birds in Chilika Lake face the problem of not knowing where their fishy meals come from. Birds hunt fish to survive, but they don't know if there might be harmful stuff in them. Since no one is sure about the age or health of the fish, migratory birds face risks from unknown bacteria and viruses.

Adding to the concern is the pesticides used in the lake for large-scale fish and prawn farming. Once these chemicals get into the water, they not only threaten aquatic life but also harm the health of the birds relying on this delicate environment, turning it into a poisonous place.

### 3. Increasing Poaching activities

Despite some successful conservation efforts, poaching is growing around Chilika Lake, indicating an ongoing problem. While places like Manglajodi set a good example for conservation, they can't tackle the larger issue alone. The birds, with their changed hunting habits due to heavy fishing, unintentionally become easy targets for poachers. As birds get used to simpler hunting techniques, baiting—a common tactic—becomes even more effective. With poaching happening every year, the delicate balance of Chilika's rare habitat is at risk. Immediate and thorough action is needed to stop poaching and protect this special place.



Chilika Lake is a stunning example of the biodiversity and beauty of nature. However, its delicate balance is at risk due to the unchecked growth of fishing activities. These extensive fishing methods disrupt the careful harmony between fresh and salty waters that makes Chilika a unique haven for migratory birds. While the permanent nets aim to catch more fish, they unintentionally become traps, harming fish and changing bird behaviour. There's also concern about the health risks linked to eating possibly contaminated seafood and the growing instances of poaching. Immediate and decisive steps in conservation are vital to sustaining the well-being of Chilika Lake, preserving its significance for both local communities and the varied wildlife it houses. We must act promptly and in collaboration to safeguard the delicate balance of Chilika's ecosystem, securing its enduring value for the people and animals that rely on it.



#### About Author

#### SUVADIP MONDAL

A passionate Wildlife Photographer | 3-Time National Award Winner | Capturing Nature's Majesty since 2015 | In Wildlife Photography, "wildlife" comes first.

Picture credits : Suvadip Mondal



# ভারতে হারিয়ে যাচ্ছে গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড বা হুকনা

## বিশ্ব রঞ্জন গোস্বামী

সারঙ্গ বা ওটিডিডি পরিবারের এই দেশে সবচেয়ে উল্লেখযোগ্য পাখি গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড যাকে হিন্দিতে বলা হয় “তুকদার বা হুকনা”, বাংলা নামও তাই। ভারতের সবচেয়ে বড় পাখিদের মধ্যে একটি, রাজস্থানের রাজ্য পাখিও এটি, কিন্তু আজ তাদের অস্তিত্ব বিপন্ন।

### দৈহিক বৈশিষ্ট্য:-

গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ডগুলি যা কিনা ভারতের মধ্যে সবচেয়ে বড় পাখি হিসাবে পরিচিত, বেশ বিরাট আকারের লম্বা পা ও গলা বিশিষ্ট পাখি যা কিনা উচ্চতায় প্রায় ১.২ মিটার বা ৪ ফুট পর্যন্ত হতে পারে; এর ওজন ১৫ কিলোগ্রাম। পুরুষ ও স্ত্রী পাখি প্রায় একই আকারের হয়, এরা দেখতে অনেকটা উটপাখি বা অস্ট্রিচের মতো। পুরুষ ও স্ত্রী পাখিদের পালকের রঙ দেখে আলাদা করা যায়। পুরুষদের চাঁদির উপরের পালক কালো হয় ও তাতে একটি কালো মুকুট থাকে, গলা ও বুকের নীচের অংশের রঙ সাদা, পিঠের দিকে অনেক কালো ছিট আছে, তবে গলার নীচে বুককে ঘিরে একটি কালো পাড় বা ব্যান্ড আছে। ওড়ার সময় ডানার প্রান্তে সাদা ছোপটি খুব চোখে পড়ে। অন্যদিকে স্ত্রী পাখির পিঠের উপরের রঙ অনেকটা ফিকে এবং গলার নীচে কালো ব্যান্ড হয় অবিচ্ছিন্ন বা অনেক ক্ষেত্রে থাকে না।

### গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড।\*\*

#### স্বভাব ও বসতি:

সাধারণতঃ এরা দুটি-তিনটি করে ঘুরে বেড়ায়, অবশ্য একসঙ্গে দলবদ্ধভাবে ২০ বা ৩০টির দলেও দেখা পাওয়ার কথাও শোনা গেছে, আবার কখনো তাদের নিঃসঙ্গ অবস্থায় দেখা যায় বটে। হুকনা ভারতীয় উপমহাদেশে সাধারণতঃ শুকনো তৃণভূমি এলাকায় বাস করে, রাজস্থানে এদের বেশী দেখা যায়। শুষ্ক, প্রায় মরুভূমির মত উষ্ণ তৃণভূমির মাঝে কাঁটা গাছের ঝোপ এবং আশেপাশে অল্প সল্প কৃষিক্ষেত্রে আছে সেইসব জায়গা এই পাখি বেশী পছন্দ করে। লোকচক্ষুর আড়ালে থাকতে ভালবাসে। ওড়ার সময় এদের প্রথমটা একটু অসুবিধা হয়, কিন্তু একবার উড়তে শুরু করলে একটানা বেশ কিছু দূর উড়ে যায়। তবে অবশ্য বেশী উঁচুতে এরা কখনো উড়ে না। ভয় পেলে এরা ‘হুক হুক’ শব্দ করে বেশ জোরে ডাকে। বিভিন্ন পোকা মাকড়, গিরগিটি, ছোট সাপ, শস্যের চারা গাছ ও দানা এদের প্রধান খাদ্য।

#### প্রজনন বৈশিষ্ট্য :

হুকনার প্রজনন সম্পর্কে বেশ কিছু আচরণ জানা যায়, তবে বাসা বাঁধা ও প্রজননের সূক্ষ্ম বিবরণ ও কার্যকলাপগুলি বিভিন্ন ভাবে পরিবর্তিত হয়। দেখা গেছে স্ত্রী পাখিরা দুই বা তিন বছর বয়সে প্রজননক্ষম হয় অথচ পুরুষ পাখি পাঁচ বা ছয় বছর বয়সে যৌনতা প্রাপ্ত হয়। পুরুষ পাখির একাধিক সঙ্গিনী থাকে, টার্কিদের মত নানা রকম কায়দা কানুন

দেখিয়ে সঙ্গিনীদের মুগ্ধ করার চেষ্টা করে। পুরুষদের একটি গলায় পাউচ বা থলি থাকে যা স্ত্রী পাখিদের আকর্ষণ করার জন্য জোরে শব্দ করে, তা ৫০০ মিটার দূর থেকেও শোনা যায়।

সাধারণতঃ তারা সারা বছর প্রজনন করতে সক্ষম, তবে বেশিরভাগ ক্ষেত্রে প্রজনন ঋতু মার্চ থেকে সেপ্টেম্বর মাস পর্যন্ত হয়। এরা বছরের পর বছর একই বাসাগুলি ব্যবহার করে না, বরং প্রতি বছর নূতন করে বাসা তৈরি করে। তবে কখনও কখনও অন্যান্য হুকনার দ্বারা আগের বছরগুলিতে তৈরি করা বাসাগুলি ব্যবহার করতেও দেখা গেছে। কাঁটা ঝোপের নীচে অগভীর গর্তে বাসা তৈরি করে স্ত্রী পাখি একটি ডিম পাড়ে, কচিং কখনও দুটি ডিম পাড়তেও দেখা গেছে। ডিমের রঙ ফিকে জলপাই বা বাদামি, তাতে গাঢ় বাদামির ছোপ। ডিম ফুটতে প্রায় এক মাস সময় লাগে। সদ্য ফোটা ছানারা দেখা গেছে এক সপ্তাহ পর নিজেরাই কিছু খেতে পারে এবং ৩০-৩৫ দিন পর তারা নিজেরাই সম্পূর্ণরূপে পরিণত হয়। ডিমে তা দেওয়া বা বাচ্চাদের যত্ন করার ক্ষেত্রে পুরুষদের কোন ভূমিকা নেই। প্রজননের পর পুরুষ তার সঙ্গীকে ত্যাগ করে নূতন সঙ্গীর খোঁজে বেড়িয়ে পড়ে। বাচ্চারা পরবর্তী প্রজনন মরসুম পর্যন্ত মায়ের সাথে থাকে।

\*\*সূত্র: উইকিমিডিয়া কমন্স



Picture Courtesy : Souvik Roychoudhury

## কেন অবলুপ্তির পথে হুকনা বা গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড?

হুকনা বা বাস্টার্ডের অস্তিত্ব আজ বিপন্ন! ১৯৬০ সালে এদের সংখ্যা ছিল ১২৬০টি, অথচ ৩০ বছরে তার সংখ্যা প্রায় ৭৫ শতাংশ কমে গেছে। কিন্তু কেন? বাসস্থানের ক্ষতি এবং অবক্ষয় এই পাখিদের পতনের প্রাথমিক কারণ বলে মনে হয়। পরিবেশবিদেরা অনুমান করেছেন যে এই প্রজাতির প্রায় ৯০ শতাংশ প্রাকৃতিক ভৌগোলিক পরিসর, যা একসময় উত্তর-পশ্চিম এবং পশ্চিম-মধ্য ভারতের বেশির ভাগ অংশ জুড়ে ছিল, তা এখন হারিয়ে গেছে। রাস্তা নির্মাণ এবং যান্ত্রিক চাষের প্রচলন, পরিকাঠামোগত উন্নয়ন যেমন, রাস্তা-ঘাট, বৈদ্যুতিক খুঁটি, খনির কার্যকলাপ, শিল্পায়ন ইত্যাদি এদের বাসস্থানের প্রচুর ক্ষতি করেছে। অনেক ফসলিজমি যেগুলোয় একসময় জোয়ার ও বাজরার চাষ হতো, সেগুলোতে এখন আখ, তুলা, আঙ্গুরের ক্ষেত হয়ে গেছে। এই প্রজাতির জন্য বড় বিপদ হল চোরা শিকারীদের উপদ্রব।

প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক বাস্টার্ডের অনেক শত্রু আছে, এরা ঈগল ও ইজিপটিয়ান শকুনের মত কিছু শিকারী পাখির দ্বারা প্রায়শই আক্রান্ত হয়। তাছাড়া কিছু বন্য প্রাণী যেমন নেকড়ে, শিয়াল, বন্য কুকুর, বন্য বিড়াল দ্বারা আক্রান্ত হতেও দেখা যায়। আবার কখনও শেয়াল, নেউল, গোসাপ, অন্য পাখিও এদের বাচ্চা ও ডিম চুরি করে। তবে ডিমের জন্য সবচেয়ে বড় বিপদ হল গবাদি পশুর চারণ, যা প্রায়ই ডিমগুলিকে পদদলিত করে।

বড় বৈদ্যুতিক খুঁটি বাস্টার্ডরা অনেক সময় সনাক্ত করতে পারে না; শিকারী সনাক্তকরণের জন্য দুপাশের দৃষ্টি সজাগ থাকে, কিন্তু সামনের দৃষ্টি সংকীর্ণ, তাই উড়ন্ত পাখি সজোরে খুঁটির সাথে ধাক্কা খায় ও মৃত্যু হয়। বেশির ভাগ ক্ষেত্রে বিদ্যুত স্পৃষ্ট না হয়ে ধাক্কা খেয়ে মারা যায়। ২০২০ সালে ভারতের বন্য প্রাণী সংরক্ষণ সংস্থার একটি সমীক্ষায় জানা যায় ২০১৭ থেকে ২০২০ সাল পর্যন্ত এই কারণে ৬টি পাখি মারা যায়। বিশ্বের বিভিন্ন অংশে গবেষণা থেকে জানা যায় বৈদ্যুতিক খুঁটির ধাক্কায় দক্ষিণ আফ্রিকায় ডেনহার্মের বাস্টার্ড ও স্পেনের গ্রেট বাস্টার্ডের সংখ্যাও হ্রাস পেয়েছে।

একটি জনস্বার্থ মামলায় গত ২০২২ সালে নভেম্বরে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট রাজস্থান ও গুজরাট সরকারকে বাস্টার্ড সংরক্ষণের জন্য আদেশজারী করেন ও 'প্রোজেক্ট টাইগারের' মত কিছু করা যায় কিনা তা দেখার জন্য নির্দেশ দেন। এই প্রথমবার নয়, ২০২১ সালের এপ্রিলে একটি আদেশে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট নির্দেশ দিয়েছিলেন যে এক বছরের মধ্যে ওভারহেড লাইনগুলিকে ভূগর্ভস্থ বৈদ্যুতিক লাইনে রূপান্তরিত করার জন্য, কিন্তু বাস্তবে তা কার্যকরী হয়নি। তাই এই ক্রিয়াকলাপগুলি এবং প্রাকৃতিক শিকারীদের চাপের মিলিত প্রভাব হুকনাদের অস্তিত্বকে একটি অনিশ্চিত অবস্থার দিকে ঠেলে দিয়েছে।

## ভারতে গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড সংরক্ষণের প্রচেষ্টা

১৯৯৪ সালে গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ডগুলিকে ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ইউনিয়ন ফর কনজারভেশন অফ নোচারস্ (IUCN) এর অধীনে বিপদগ্রস্ত প্রজাতি হিসাবে লাল তালিকায় বিপন্ন প্রজাতি বলে তালিকাভুক্ত করা হয়েছিল। ২০০৮ সালের একটি সমীক্ষা অনুযায়ী এদের সংখ্যা ছিল আনুমানিক ২৫০ এর মতো। ২০১১ সালের মধ্যে এদের সংখ্যা হ্রাস এতটাই তীব্র ছিল যে IUCN এদেরকে অত্যন্ত বিপন্ন প্রজাতি হিসাবে শ্রেণীবদ্ধ করেছিল। যাহোক তারপর থেকে পরিচালিত ছোট আঞ্চলিক

সমীক্ষাগুলি উল্লেখ করেছে যে স্থানীয়ভাবে এদের সংখ্যা ক্রমাগত হ্রাস পেয়েছে, এদের সবচেয়ে বেশি ঘনত্ব সম্ভবত রাজস্থানে যেখানে ১২০টির মত সংখ্যায় দেখা যায়।

ওর্ল্ড ওয়াইড ফান্ড ফর নোচার – ভারত (WWF-India), এই সংস্থাটি আবাসিক 'বাস্টার্ড রিকভারি প্রোগ্রামের' জন্য রাজ্য অ্যাকশন প্ল্যানের নির্দেশিকা তৈরিতে সহায়তা প্রদান করেছে। এই কর্মসূচী ক্রমহ্রাসমান সংখ্যা সম্পর্কে সাধারণ মানুষের মধ্যে সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধিতে এবং জাতীয়

পর্যায় বাস্টার্ড সংরক্ষণ কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়নের গুরুত্ব তুলে ধরতে এক গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করেছে। অদূর ভবিষ্যতে তারা গুজরাটেও হুকনা সংরক্ষণের কাজ সম্প্রসারণের পরিকল্পনা নিয়েছে।

২০১২ সালে ভারত সরকার ‘প্রজেক্ট বাস্টার্ড’ কর্মসূচী চালু করে তাতে গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড বা হুকনা সহ লেসার ফ্লোরিক্যান বা লীথ ও বেঙ্গল ফ্লোরিক্যান বা পাতি ডহর এবং তাদের আবাসস্থল আরও হ্রাসের হাত থেকে রক্ষা করতে একটি জাতীয় কর্মসূচী গ্রহণ করেছে। এই কর্মসূচীটি “প্রজেক্ট টাইগারের” আদলে তৈরি করা হয়েছিল। ভারতীয় বন্যপ্রাণী (সুরক্ষা) আইন, ১৯৭২ এর তফসিলে তালিকাভুক্ত করা হয়েছে। এটি ভারত সরকারের পরিবেশ ও বন মন্ত্রকের বন্যপ্রাণী বাসস্থানের সমন্বিত উন্নয়নের অধীনে প্রজাতি পুনরুদ্ধার কর্মসূচী হিসাবেও চিহ্নিত করা হয়েছে।

গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ডকে বিলুপ্তির হাত থেকে বাঁচানোর লক্ষ্যে বম্বে ন্যাচারাল হিস্ট্রি সোসাইটির (বি এন এইচ এস) মুম্বাই সদর দপ্তর থর মরুভূমি অ-সংরক্ষিত অঞ্চলে তৃণভূমি ও এই পাখিদের রক্ষা করার জন্য একটি মডেল নিয়ে কাজ করেছে। তাদের সমীক্ষা অনুযায়ী বর্তমানে এই পাখিদের মধ্যে মাত্র প্রায় ১০০টি রয়েছে, তার বেশিরভাগই রাজস্থানের থর মরুভূমিতে বেঁচে আছে। তাছাড়া গুজরাটে ৬-৭টি, মহারাষ্ট্রে ২-৩টি, কর্ণাটকে ১০টি এবং অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশে রয়েছে বলে অনুমান করা হয়েছে। এই পাখিদের সংরক্ষণের জন্য বি এন এইচ এস থর মরুভূমির জয়সালমীরে গবেষণা পরিচালনা করতে এবং এই বিষয়ে স্থানীয় লোকদের মধ্যে সচেতনতা বাড়ানোর একটি কর্মসূচী শুরু করেছেন। বি এন এইচ এস ২০২২-২৩ সালের তাদের বার্ষিক প্রতিবেদনে শুরু করা পদক্ষেপগুলি বর্ণনা করেছেন। এই সংস্থার পরিচালক কিশোর রাঠে বলেছেন ‘আমাদের এই প্রজাতিটিকে বিলুপ্তির হাত থেকে রক্ষা করতে সর্বাত্মক প্রচেষ্টা নিতে হবে।’ তারা একটি ৩৫ হেক্টর এলাকাকে বেড়া দিয়ে অবশিষ্ট আবাসস্থলকে সুরক্ষিত করার লক্ষ্য রেখেছে। পাশাপাশি বি এন এইচ এস রাজস্থানে সংরক্ষিত অঞ্চলের বাইরে তাদের কাজকে সফল করার জন্য স্থানীয় জনসাধারণের সহায়তার জন্য আবেদন রেখেছেন। পোখরান তহসিলে ইতিমধ্যে একটি নিবিড় সমীক্ষা চালানো হয়েছিল। এই সংস্থা বর্ষার শেষ থেকে পরবর্তী গ্রীষ্মের শুরু পর্যন্ত হুকনাদের ব্যবহৃত কিছু এলাকা চিহ্নিত করেছেন যেখানে মানুষের বসতি বেশি, যার উদ্দেশ্য হল বর্তমান বিপদগুলি মোকাবিলা করা বিশেষত ভূমি ব্যবহারের পরিবর্তন ও হুকনার বেঁচে থাকার সম্পর্ক সংক্রান্ত বিষয়গুলো তাদের বোঝানো। তাছাড়া সীমান্তবর্তী এলাকাতে প্রকল্পটি ভারতীয় সেনাবাহিনী ও বর্ডার সিকিউরিটি ফোর্স (বি এস এফ) এজিয়ারভুক্ত অঞ্চলে হুকনা বিষয়ে সমীক্ষা, গবেষণা ও সংরক্ষণ বিষয়ে তাদের সহযোগিতা করেছেন।

সম্প্রতি ভারতের বন্য প্রাণী সংরক্ষণ সংস্থা ও রাজস্থান সরকারের বন দপ্তর যৌথ প্রচেষ্টায় জয়সালমীরের কাছে শাম জাতীয় মরুভূমি উদ্যান স্থাপন করা হয়েছে। এখানে মানুষের গতিবিধি, শিকারী প্রাণী সম্পূর্ণ রূপে নিয়ন্ত্রণ করে ১৮ বর্গ কিলোমিটার জুড়ে এই এলাকাটি আলাদা করা হয়েছে। পরবর্তী সময়ে এলাকাটি ৩০ বর্গ কিলোমিটার পর্যন্ত সম্প্রসারিত করার পরিকল্পনা আছে। এখানে বিজ্ঞানীরা নিরলস ভাবে হুকনাদের সংরক্ষণের জন্য সর্বাত্মক প্রচেষ্টা চালিয়ে যাচ্ছেন। ইতিমধ্যে বন্য অবস্থা থেকে ডিম সংগ্রহ করে পরীক্ষাগারে কৃত্রিমভাবে ডিম ফোটানর সাফল্য পেয়েছেন, সদ্য ফোটা বাচ্চাদের পুষ্টির খাদ্য ও লালন পালন করে বন্য পরিবেশে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হয়। গত ২০২২ সালে জাতীয় মরুভূমি উদ্যান থেকে ২০টি ডিম সংগ্রহ করা হয়েছিল ও পরে কৃত্রিমভাবে ডিম ফোটানো এবং তাদের পালন করা হয়েছিল। এখানে একটি মজার বিষয় দেখা গেছে বন্য পরিবেশে অন্তত চারটি স্ত্রী পাখিকে দুটি করে ডিম পাড়তে দেখা গেছে অথচ তারা কিনা সাধারণত ১টি করে ডিম পাড়ে। গবেষকেরা এর কারণ হিসাবে বলছেন গত বছর এই এলাকাতে গড় বৃষ্টিপাত স্বাভাবিকের চেয়ে বেশি ছিল, তাছাড়া কোন শত্রুর উপদ্রব ছিল না, পরিবেশে ছিল পর্যাপ্ত খাদ্য, তাপমাত্রা ও আপেক্ষিক আর্দ্রতা ছিল উপযোগী। তাই পাখিরা বেশি সংখ্যায় ডিম পাড়তে দেখা গেছে।

### গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড সংরক্ষণ আন্দোলনের এক অতন্দ্র গ্রহরী - রাধেশ্যাম বিম্বেই\*\*

এই পাখিকে বিলুপ্তির হাত থেকে বাঁচানোর জন্য সরকারী উদ্যোগের পাশাপাশি এলাকার লোকদেরও বিরাট ভূমিকা আছে। এখানে উল্লেখ করার মত বিষয় হল স্থানীয় বিম্বেই সম্প্রদায়ের লোকেরা এই সংরক্ষণ প্রচেষ্টায় এগিয়ে এসেছেন। ভারতের চিপকো আন্দোলনের পুরোধা ছিলেন অমৃতা বিম্বেই যিনি ১৮ শতকে যোধপুরের তৎকালীন রাজার আদেশে গাছ কাটার বিরুদ্ধে রুখে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিলেন ও গাছ রক্ষা করার জন্য ৩৬৩ জনসহ শহীদ হয়েছিলেন। ১৯৯৮ সালে অভিনেতা সলমন খানের সাথে জড়িত কৃষ্ণহরিণ শিকার মামলার দিকে দৃষ্টি

আকর্ষণ করতেও বিম্বেইদের ভূমিকা ছিল। সেই সম্প্রদায়ের ২৬ বছর বয়সী রাধেশ্যাম বিম্বেই, তিনি বলেন ‘আমার সম্প্রদায়ই আমার অনুপ্রেরনার উৎস এবং যারা প্রকৃতি ও বন্যপ্রাণী সংরক্ষণকে তাদের অবিচ্ছেদ্য অঙ্গ বলে মনে করেন।’ তিনি বনবিভাগের সাথে সবসময় যোগাযোগ রাখেন ও সেখান থেকে বন্যপ্রাণী সংরক্ষণ বিষয়ে প্রশিক্ষণ নেন। যাইহোক, তার আসল চ্যালেঞ্জ শুরু হয়েছিল প্রশিক্ষণ নিয়ে ফিরে আসার পর যখন ক্রমাগত টহল, শিকার বিরোধী অভিযান থেকে প্রাণীদের উদ্ধার ও অন্যান্য সংরক্ষণ কার্যক্রম ইত্যাদির জন্য





Picture Courtesy : Souvik Roychoudhury

কঠোর পরিশ্রম করেছেন। তিনি ফটোগ্রাফিও শিখেছেন, গত পাঁচ বছর ধরে অনেক বন্যপ্রাণী নথিভুক্ত করেছেন এবং শিকারের ঘটনা সম্পর্কে অনেক প্রমাণও সংগ্রহ করেছেন। তাছাড়া স্কুলের ছাত্র ছাত্রীদের মধ্যে প্রকৃতি ও প্রাণীদের সংরক্ষণ বিষয়ে প্রায়ই সচেতনতা শিবির পরিচালনা করেন। এমনকি তার সম্প্রদায়ের সকলের সাথে বিশেষ করে রাখাল ও বনে বসবাসকারী পরিবারের সাথে জড়িত থাকার চেষ্টা করেন। গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড সহ কৃষ্ণ হরিন, চিঙ্কা, শকুন, কাঁটায়ুক্ত গিরগিটি ইত্যাদি প্রাণী যারা আজ বিলুপ্তির পথে, তাদের সংরক্ষণ প্রচেষ্টার জন্য রাধেশ্যাম বিশেষই এর নিরলস প্রচেষ্টার অন্ত নেই। গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ডের সংরক্ষণের উদ্দেশ্যে ওভারহেড বৈদ্যুতিক লাইনগুলিকে ভূগর্ভস্থ বৈদ্যুতিক লাইনে রূপান্তরিত করার জন্য বিশেষই সম্প্রদায়ের লোকেরাই একটি জনস্বার্থ মামলা করেন তাই সংরক্ষণের এই সব নানা উদ্যোগ বিপন্ন এই পাখিদের বাঁচিয়ে রাখার আশা জাগিয়ে রাখছে। আশা করা যায় আগামী ২০-২৫ বছর পর হয়তো হুকনার সংখ্যা অনেকটাই বৃদ্ধি করা সম্ভব হবে। কিন্তু তার জন্য চাই এদের উপযুক্ত পরিবেশ নিশ্চিত করা। ভারতের বন্য প্রাণী সংরক্ষণ সংস্থার বিজ্ঞানী সহ বিশেষজ্ঞরা রাজস্থানের গ্রেট ইন্ডিয়ান বাস্টার্ড অধ্যুষিত এলাকাগুলির মধ্য দিয়ে যাওয়া সমস্ত ওভারহেড পাওয়ার লাইনগুলি সরানোর কথা বলেছেন, পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয়ও একটি টাস্কফোর্স গঠন করেছেন। তবে তা বাস্তবায়নের খুব ধীরগতি নিয়ে প্রশ্ন উঠেছে।

যদিও এই প্রজাতির বেশির ভাগ জয়সালমির মরুভূমি জাতীয় উদ্যান এর মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ, তাই বন্যপ্রাণী প্রেমীরা মনে করেন যে সংরক্ষিত এলাকার বাইরেও আরও বেশি এলাকা এই প্রজাতির জন্য তৈরি করা উচিত। প্রজেক্ট টাইগার এর মত একটি সংরক্ষণ প্রচেষ্টা একটি শুষ্ক অঞ্চলের একটি বড় পাখির জন্য কাজ নাও করতে পারে যেটি সবসময় সুরক্ষিত এলাকা থেকে উড়তে পারে।

**\*\*রাধেশ্যাম বিশেষই। সূত্র - ইন্টারনেট**



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# THREATS TO BIRDS - PHOTO STORY

**BWS MEMBERS**

A feral dog at a nesting ground of Oriental Pratincole at Kharibari. They used to destroy the eggs.



Picture Courtesy : Sandip Das

A Brown Hawk Owl and Greater Painted Snipe died due to poachers net at Malda.



By : Sandip Das

Overspeed kills. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters are passage migrants to western parts of India. The roads through Desert National Park poses a threat always, and that is speeding vehicles. These unfortunate Bee-eater could not complete its yearly journey and got perished by one such.



By : Kushankur Bhattacharya

Read more about 'Threats to Birds', here  
[https://birdwatcherssociety.org/featured\\_item/soib-2023-report/](https://birdwatcherssociety.org/featured_item/soib-2023-report/)



Yellow Bittern entangled in net and died consequently



By : Soumya Aon

This is a picture of a yellow footed green pigeon in Rabindra Sarovar lake which was trapped by a kite manja. Then a kind hearted uncle dived into the water and saved him. Thank you uncle.



By : Maulik Ghosh



By : Ranadeep Sengupta

### THE GREBE TRAGEDY

A Great-crested grebe was floating idle at a corner of reed-beds of Gajaldoba. As Rabi-da, our boatman quietly rowed the boat towards the lonely bird, it never tried to move or fly away. We were surprised.

It was 8th December, 2012. Dr. Arup Kumar Banerjee and myself was in a boat with Rabi Malo, one of the veterans now. It was around 12.20pm when we noticed the grebe. As we moved closer, a thread was seen coming out from its mouth and we concluded there must be a fish-hook lodged at its throat. Rabi-da gently rowed the boat towards the poor bird and caught hold of it. He cut the thread and tried to pull out the fish-hook. But it was too deep into its throat.

We came ashore with the bird however did not know whom to contact. So we put the grebe in our knapsack with the the zip half open and rushed to Siliguri veterinary hospital only to find it closed by that time. Guided by a staff there, we located the residential quarter of the on duty doctor. He tried his best to remove the fish-hook but it was lodged too deep. After few attempts the poor bird went limp and probably died of shock in our hands. It was a dreadful experience for both of us. In that gloomy afternoon we took the bird to bury in the Balason riverbed.



## LITTLE RINGED PLOVERS IN CHUPI, PURBASTHALI PAKHIRALAYA.

Plastic Bottles are everywhere. And probably Birdwatchers who are supposed to be sensible are the ones who throw this bottles from the boat.



By : Malay Ghosh

## FROM POACHERS TO PLATE

From February to April, hundreds of migratory larks are trapped daily by commercial bird poachers in Central West Bengal using mist nets installed in fallow crop lands. The birds are then sold as delicacy meat. HEAL is working to impose a crackdown on this trade by monitoring lark hunting fields, intercepting poaching attempts, and facilitating enforcement action against bird poachers.



By : Santanu Das, team HEAL (Human & Environment Alliance League)

## White Wagtail devoured by Stray Dog Pup Pangolakha WLS



By : Dibyendu Ash



By : Swarnab Ghosh



#### MAN SPAYING PESTICIDE

A group of cattle egrets being pushed away from their habitat by indiscriminate use of weedicides which kills undergrowth as well as insects, the egrets' food.

#### OUR WASTE, THEIR POISON:

**Black-tailed Crakes:** Plastic pollution is one of the major threats to wildlife everywhere. These Black tailed Crakes live in Mirik lake, a busy tourist destination in North Bengal. Day by day their habitat is getting polluted by domestic waste disposal, especially plastic.



By : Kushankur Bhattacharya



# NEED OF AWARENESS IN TACKLING “THREATS TO BIRDS”

**SOUVIK ROYCHOUDHURY**

## OBJECTIVE:

A survey-based analysis to find out awareness levels of birding community & general public for the top threats to birds and identify the threats that need increased awareness.

## APPROACH:

A list of top threats to birds is created based on input from experts in the birding field. Then the birder community and general public were asked to rate these threats with High, Medium, Low or No Impact. Any threat that is rated significantly lower impact means it needs increased awareness so that people can understand how it impacts birds and why it should be prevented.

## TARGET POPULATION FOR SURVEY:

The survey was sent to a broad class of people covering varied demographics (i.e. different age, gender, profession, locality, city/town etc.) which should reflect the overall society behavior to a large extent (limitation - no rural person was involved). There was total 207 responders in which 105 of them categorized themselves as Wildlife Enthusiast and rest 102 as general public.

## SURVEY PROCESS:

**Step 1:** Reached out to 6 birding experts who are aware of or actively involved in conservation and wildlife protection. Each of them was asked to share what they considered as top 10 “Threats to Birds” and also to grade each of these threats based on impact (Options - High, Medium, Low). I sincerely appreciate the following panel of experts for their valuable inputs: Mr. Arijit Banerjee, Mr. Arka Sarkar, Mr. Ashwin Vishwanathan, Mrs. Pampa Mistri, Mr. Sandip Das and Mr. Santanu Manna.

**Step 2:** These individual lists varied slightly from person to person, but following 15 threats were present in most of the lists. These 15 threats were considered as the “Top Threats to Birds” and was baselined for broader survey. It must be noted that not all threats would be applicable to all birds like glass coated kite strings will only affect birds near human habitats.

1. Habitat loss or degradation like logging, grassland burning
2. Reduction of food source (producer to consumer to predator)
3. Hunting, poaching or catching bird for captivity
4. Invasive species like feral dogs, cats, birds or trees
5. Climate change like global warming
6. Environment pollution (waterbodies, soil or air)
7. Light pollution and sound pollution
8. Pesticides and other chemical toxins
9. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID)
10. Glass-coated kite strings
11. Power infrastructure like windmills, high tension lines
12. Forest encroachment like livestock grazing, plantation
13. Road through forest or corridor leading to roadkill
14. Rapid urbanization and infrastructural development
15. Tourism and leisure activities like picnic or party



**Step 3:** This list of top 15 threats was shared in a Google form with members of BWS and my personal contacts and they were asked to grade each of these 15 threats (Options – High Impact, Medium Impact, Low Impact, No Impact) based on their assessment of the impact. All these questions were mandatory. The survey also asked the name for internal tracking and (optional) their reasons or thought process (in plain text) for making these impact ratings. They were also asked to select whether they were involved in wildlife observation or photography (i.e. bird watcher or bird photographer) so that we can analyze the results separately for birder community and general public. The survey was run from 2-March-2024 to 12-March-2024.

**Step 4:** Survey data was downloaded as csv file and analyzed in Microsoft Excel. To preserve the confidentiality of the responders, their names and responses are not shared in this article but it is shared with the Fantail editorial board for reference and audit trail. Following is the summary:

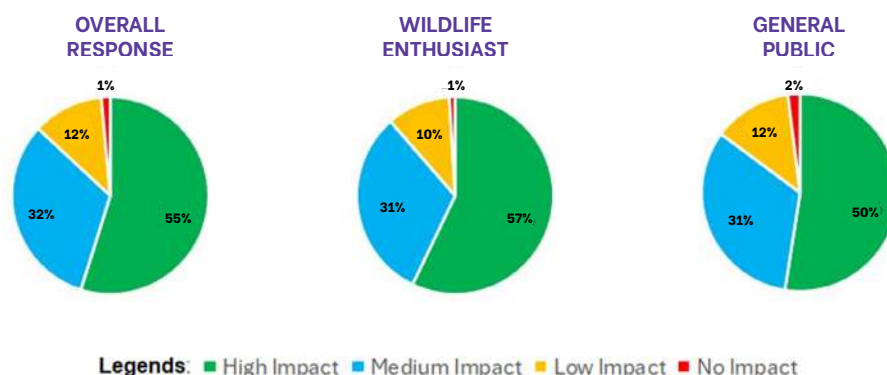
Survey Question	Overall Response				Wildlife Enthusiast				General Public			
	High Impact	Medium Impact	Low Impact	No Impact	High Impact	Medium Impact	Low Impact	No Impact	High Impact	Medium Impact	Low Impact	No Impact
1. Habitat loss or degradation like logging, grassland burning	184	19	4	0	97	6	2	0	87	13	2	0
2. Reduction of food source (producer to consumer to predator)	141	53	12	1	72	25	7	1	69	28	5	0
3. Hunting, poaching or catching bird for captivity	132	54	17	4	68	25	11	1	64	29	6	3
4. Invasive species like feral dogs, cats, birds or trees	49	102	49	7	32	56	16	1	17	46	33	6
5. Climate change like global warming	157	38	10	2	83	17	5	0	74	21	5	2
6. Environment pollution (waterbodies, soil or air)	172	29	6	0	89	13	3	0	83	16	3	0
7. Light pollution and sound pollution	90	88	27	2	44	46	15	0	46	42	12	2
8. Pesticides and other chemical toxins	147	49	11	0	80	21	4	0	67	28	7	0
9. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID)	57	102	38	10	32	54	16	3	25	48	22	7
10. Glass-coated kite strings	75	78	51	3	43	41	20	1	32	37	31	2
11. Power infrastructure like windmills, high tension lines	81	87	37	2	46	43	15	1	35	44	22	1
12. Forest encroachment like livestock grazing, plantation	110	75	20	2	60	34	11	0	50	41	9	2
13. Road through forest or corridor leading to roadkill	82	93	29	3	39	51	13	2	43	42	16	1
14. Rapid urbanization and infrastructural development	168	34	4	1	89	13	2	1	79	21	2	0
15. Tourism and leisure activities like picnic or party	54	96	49	8	30	50	22	3	24	46	27	5
	Total: 207				Total: 105				Total: 102			
Average	113	66	24	3	60	33	11	1	53	33	13	2

## ANALYSIS - OVERALL:

Taking an average of all questions and all responders, 55% were correctly assessed as High Impact and another 32% were of Medium Impact which is an assuring fact that overall 87% responses reflect the top threats to have an impact on birds. 12% were Low Impact and 1% were No Impact which are concerns. Subsequent analysts below reveals which are those threats. Wildlife enthusiasts were found to be more aware of the threats compared to general public consistently for all questions.

### QUESTION

#### Overall Summary



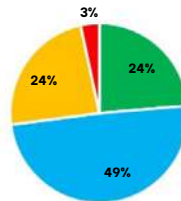
### ANALYSIS – 3 THREATS TO BIRDS THAT NEED SIGNIFICANT AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS:

Threats which are rated as High by less than 30% responders, implies a significant gap in awareness and should be the priority for focused awareness campaigns. In most of these cases a good number of responders marked this as No Impact to bird which makes it a bigger concern.

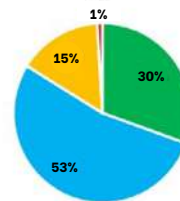
#### QUESTION

Invasive species like feral dogs, cats, birds or trees

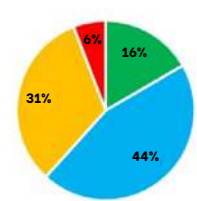
#### OVERALL RESPONSE



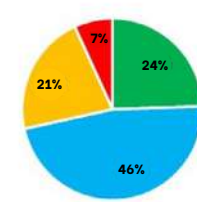
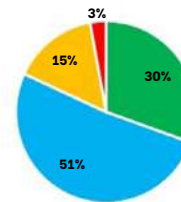
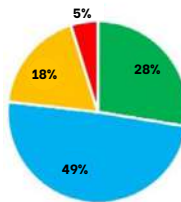
#### WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST



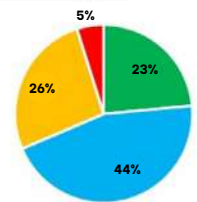
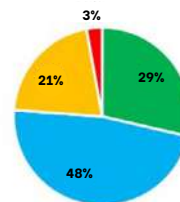
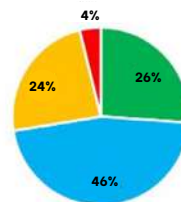
#### GENERAL PUBLIC



Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID)



Tourism and leisure activities like picnic or party



Legends: ■ High Impact ■ Medium Impact ■ Low Impact ■ No Impact

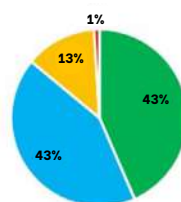
### ANALYSIS – 5 THREATS TO BIRDS THAT NEEDS MODERATE AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS:

Threats where more than 30% but less than 60% responders rated as high are put in this category which needs moderate awareness campaigns and should be the next priority. In most of these cases, Medium Impact is significantly high compensating for the lower High Impact rating %.

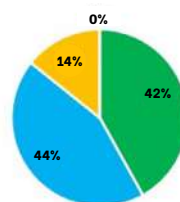
#### QUESTION

Light pollution and sound pollution

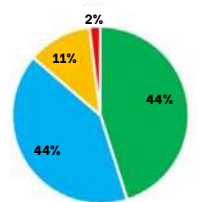
#### OVERALL RESPONSE



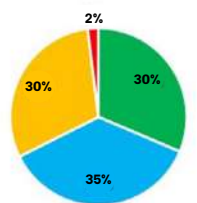
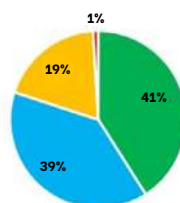
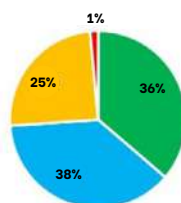
#### WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST



#### GENERAL PUBLIC



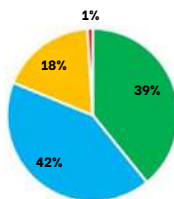
Glass-coated kite strings



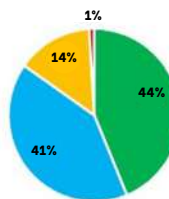
## QUESTION

Power infrastructure like windmills, high tension lines

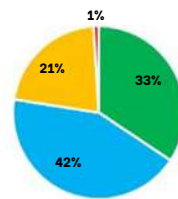
### OVERALL RESPONSE



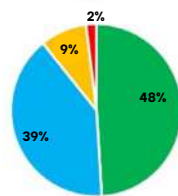
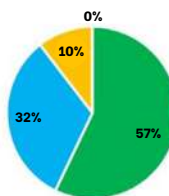
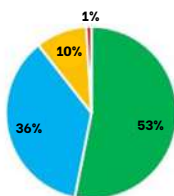
### WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST



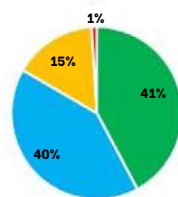
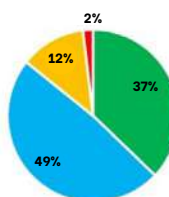
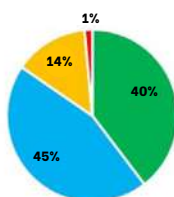
### GENERAL PUBLIC



Forest encroachment like livestock grazing, plantation



Road through forest or corridor leading to roadkill



Legends: ■ High Impact ■ Medium Impact ■ Low Impact ■ No Impact

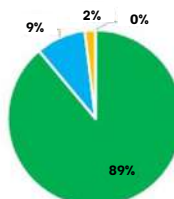
## ANALYSIS – 7 THREATS TO BIRDS THAT RESPONDERS ARE WELL AWARE OF:

For the remaining cases more than 60% responders have rated the threat as High. Medium Impact rating is also high keeping Low and No impact ratings to minimum. These threats responders were well aware of and won't need too high a focus for awareness campaigns.

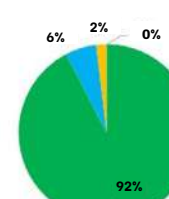
## QUESTION

Habitat loss or degradation like logging, grassland burning

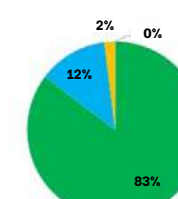
### OVERALL RESPONSE



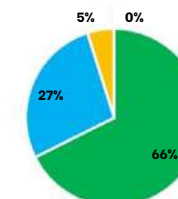
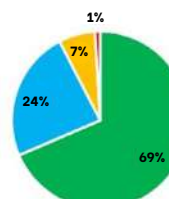
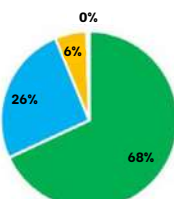
### WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST



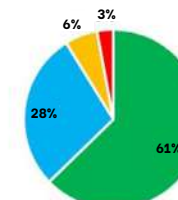
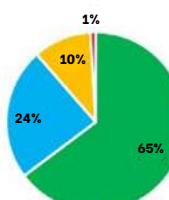
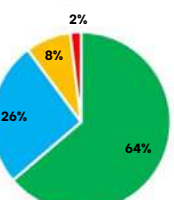
### GENERAL PUBLIC



Reduction of food source (producer to consumer to predator)



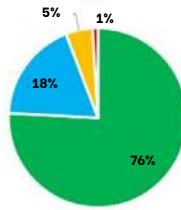
Hunting, poaching or catching bird for captivity



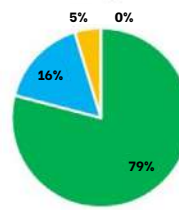


Climate change like  
global warming

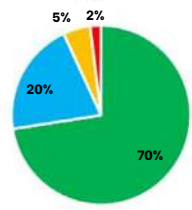
OVERALL  
RESPONSE



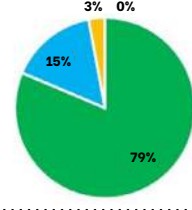
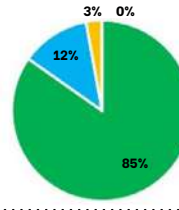
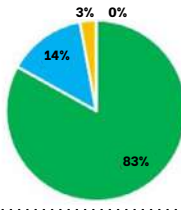
WILDLIFE  
ENTHUSIAST



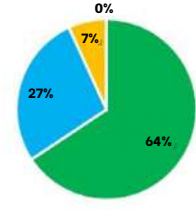
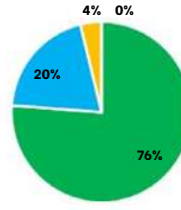
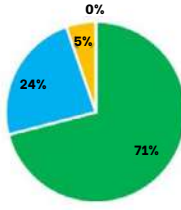
GENERAL  
PUBLIC



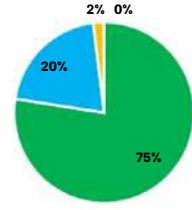
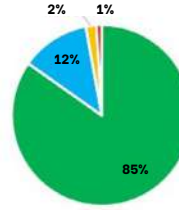
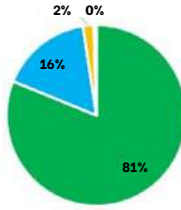
Environment pollution  
(waterbodies, soil or air)



Pesticides and other chemical  
toxins



Rapid urbanization and  
infrastructural development



## SUMMARY & CONCLUSION:

As elaborated above, **3 threats to birds have significant gaps in public awareness based on this survey of 207 responders. These should be the top focus of conservation initiatives and we need to run campaigns explaining how these threats impact birds in the wild so that general public and the birders understand why these threats must be neutralized.** Another 5 threats to birds have some awareness but that is not sufficient. We need to campaign about the impact of these threats which can help bridge the gap. The remaining 7 threats to birds have good awareness among responders and gives comfort. This must be due to the effect of conservation initiatives and information in social media. The length of this article is already large and doesn't provide scope to detail out how each of these threats impact bird but hope in this and subsequent editions of Fantail newsletter, other authors will articulate it with details, examples and pictures.



## About Author

### Souvik Roychoudhury

Souvik is a senior IT professional observing wildlife for over 2 decades. Started bird photography since 2017. Lives in Kolkata.

# BIRDS ON INDIAN STAMPS (2016-2022)

INDRANI GHOSH

## INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous technological gadget that has made connectivity easily accessible coupled with the indolence of writing and sending a letter has had debilitating impact on the postal service. We are approaching a stage where postage stamps will be phased out and become obsolete, in near future. Yet, as bird watchers, we would like to understand the level of importance the avian population was accorded by the postal department through depiction on stamps. Stamps are not only a form of pre-payment for postal services rendered but are also a visual mode of communication with the mass. As any philatelist, birdwatchers too take delight in keeping the stamps as collectibles. Records of birds on postage stamps of pre-independence era are not available. The record of stamps post-independence until 2011 is captured in the writings

of Col. Ashwin Baindur<sup>1</sup>. Another detailed study on Himalayan birds on stamps<sup>2</sup> that covers the endemic birds of Himalayas across India, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Pakistan was published in 2022. This article focuses on birds depicted in Indian stamps between 2016 and 2022.

A complete list of birds is presented in Table 1. In this period, a total of 19 stamps depicting birds were released covering eight different themes. Stamps are cultural ambassadors and depiction of the state/national birds on stamps aim to forge cultural ties. A series on exotic birds from different regions of the world were published in 2016. These exotic birds are primarily native of Central and South America (Cape parrot, Blue and yellow macaw, Hyacinth macaw, Sun parakeet) and one is a native of Australia (Lesser sulfur-crested cockatoo).



*In 2017, Indian Postal Department issued two stamps jointly with Papua New Guinea featuring the National birds of the two nations – Indian peafowl and Raggiana bird-of-paradise.*



1.Baindur, A., 2011. Birds on Indian postage stamps. Indian BIRDS 7 (1): 25–28A  
2.Rao, Lokeshwara.M.(Retd. IFS) 2022

The present write-up focuses on the threats the endemic and resident birds face thus excluding birds residents of other nations (Sl. No.6-10 and 16 in Table 1).

Sr No	Date of release	Themes	Name of Bird	Scientific Name	Denomination of Currency (INR)
01	12/08/2016	Independence Day, Tourism	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	25
02	17/10/2016	Birds of India Near Threatened	Nicobar pigeon	<i>Caloenas nicobarica</i>	05
03	17/10/2016	Birds of India Near Threatened	Nilgiri flycatcher	<i>Eumyias albicaudatus</i>	10
04	17/10/2016	Birds of India Near Threatened	Andaman woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus hodgei</i>	15
05	17/10/2016	Birds of India Near Threatened	Black and orange flycatcher	<i>Ficedula nigrorufa</i>	25
06	25/11/2016	Exotic birds	Cape parrot	<i>Poicephalus robustus</i>	05
07	25/11/2016	Exotic birds	Blue and yellow macaw	<i>Ara ararauna</i>	05
08	25/11/2016	Exotic birds	Hyacinth macaw	<i>Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus</i>	10
09	25/11/2016	Exotic birds	Sun parakeet	<i>Aratinga solstitialis</i>	10
10	25/11/2016	Exotic birds	Lesser sulfur – crested cockatoo	<i>Cacatua galerita</i>	15
11	25/11/2016	Nature India	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	05
12	25/11/2016	Nature India	Indian peafowl with tiger	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	05
13	18/09/2017	Vulnerable Birds	Nilgiri wood pigeon	<i>Columba elphinstonii</i>	05
14	18/09/2017	Vulnerable Birds	Broad-tailed grass bird	<i>Schoenicola platyrus</i>	05
15	18/09/2017	Vulnerable Birds	Nilgiri pipit	<i>Anthus nilghiriensis</i>	05
16	30/12/2017	Joint issue with Papua and New Guinea	Raggiana bird-of-paradise	<i>Paradisaea raggiana</i>	05
17	30/12/2017	Joint issue with Papua and New Guinea	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	25
17	16/03/2020	Natural Sites Great Himalayan National Park	Western tragopan	<i>Tragopan melanocephalus</i>	05
18	20/02/2022	Arunachal Pradesh	Great hornbill	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>	05

**Table 1**



Between 2016–2022, ten different species, endemic to India were featured. Peacock being the National Bird was featured four times on three different occasions (Independence Day, Tourism, Nature India, Joint issue with Papua and New Guinea) in this period.

An analysis of the geographical distribution of birds that were depicted in the stamps reveals that 50% (barring Great Hornbills) of the birds were from the Western Ghats, 20% from Andaman and Nicobar islands. Western Tragopans or Western Horned Tragopans<sup>3</sup> from the western Himalayan regions was the only bird species that found prominence in Indian postage stamps representing Great Himalayan National Park. Being the state bird, Great hornbills<sup>4</sup> were represented as celebration of 50 years of freedom of Arunachal Pradesh.



## DISCUSSION

**INDIAN PEAFOWL** is native of India. This ornamental national bird of India reported from a wide variety of habitats, including a range of primary and secondary tropical and subtropical, evergreen and deciduous forest-types, mixed coniferous forest, swamp forest, open woodland, forest edge, bamboo, grasslands, savannas, scrub and farmland edge, from sea-level to at least 2,100 m<sup>5</sup>. The major threats to this species is habitat loss and fragmentation, hunting for feathers. Though, the State of India's Bird 2023, shows that the population trend of Indian peafowl is steadily increasing, but IUCN has categorized this species as endangered. This species is included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.



Two endemic birds of Andaman and Nicobar islands, Nicobar pigeon and Andaman woodpecker, found place in postal stamps. Being closer to Indo-Malayan region, these islands are faunistic centers and is recognized as important endemic bird areas by Birdlife International (2001)<sup>6,7</sup>.

**NICOBAR PIGEONS** are the only living species of Genus Caloenas. They are slightly larger than common pigeons. They have dark slaty, grey body with lustrous metallic blue-green and copper bronze upperparts. These pigeons prefer inhabiting small, densely forested offshore islands. The population of the species is assumed to be rapidly declining due to habitat destruction in the tsunami that struck in 2005. Also, Nicobar pigeons are hunted for food, gizzard stones (used as jewellery). They are sometimes trapped for pets locally (an illegal trade). Predators such as rats and cats at their nesting grounds are additional factors of threat to the population. The IUCN status is Vulnerable and included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.



3. To be noted, Western Tragopan was earlier depicted in Indian postal stamps in 1976.

4. To be noted, Great Hornbill appeared in different forms in Indian postal stamps in 1983, 2013, 2015.

5. Refer FANTAIL (Vol3, Issue#3) for further details on Indian Peafowl.

6. Stattersfield, A.J., Crosby, M.J., Long, A.J. and Wege, D.C. (1998). Endemic bird areas of the world: priorities for biodiversity conservation. BirdLife Conservation Series No. 7. Cambridge UK: BirdLife International

7. BirdLife International (2001). Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red data book. BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K., 3,038 p



The other species that featured in 2016, was **ANDAMAN WOODPECKER** endemic to few islands of Andaman. Largely inhabiting the moist evergreen and semi-evergreen forests and as well as in open areas with sparse patches of taller trees. The male has crimson forehead, crown and crest and rest of the body is black to sooty-black with slaty legs, whereas the female has red only on hind crown and crest. These species are restricted in their range. Logging and conversion of forest lands to agricultural or for other purposes are a serious threat to the population. Hence, the IUCN status is Vulnerable and included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.

The Western Ghats of the country harbour several hundreds of species. Hence, the postal department has given due credit to this Biodiversity Hot Spot by featuring five birds endemic to this region and one widespread.

The Nilgiri flycatchers and Black and orange flycatchers are found in the high altitude forests and Shola grasslands, gardens, plantations and towns of the Western Ghats and the Nilgiris. **THE NILGIRI FLYCATCHERS** are small territorial flycatchers with greenish indigo-blue body and white patches on the base of a tail. Males have unique dark lores, black heads and wings, while their female counterparts are dull grey-brown in colour.



The **BLACK AND ORANGE FLYCATCHERS** are small, compact brightly coloured (males have orange rufous upper parts whereas females have dull, dark olive-blackish head and face with pale buffish lores, eye rings and streaks on cheeks) flycatchers. Both species of bird forage on low grounds and nests in low bushes or ferns.

The population of both the species is endemic to a small range and has shown tolerance for disturbed habitat. However, reduction in forest cover majorly due to anthropogenic activities are known to impact adversely, and the population trend appears to be decreasing. As per IUCN, both are species of Least Concern. They are included under Schedule -II of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.

**NILGIRI WOOD PIGEONS** are medium sized birds with bluish grey heads blending into darker neck and breast. The males have green iridescence on hindneck behind collar that merges into purple or brownish purple iridescence on mantle. The female is slightly duller with reduced purple upper parts and blue-grey with brownish mix head. These birds are found in the wet forests of the Western Ghats of south west India (from northern Maharashtra to southern Kerala and western Tamil Nadu). They characteristically forage quietly up in the canopy and occasionally descends on the ground to feed. Though the species has a comparatively large range, yet the population of these birds are declining and are under threat due to widespread habitat destruction and potential hunting for food and sports. As per IUCN classification, they are classified under Vulnerable species and also they are included under Schedule -I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.





**BROAD-TAILED GRASSBIRDS** are distributed throughout higher altitudes (900 m–2000m) of Western Ghats (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) small sized with rufous brown upper parts, long brown tail, buff underparts, white throats and supercilium and thick beaks. Males and females are largely similar and differ in their gape colours (black in males and brown in females). They inhabit dense, tall grass and reeds that are present with sparse scrub and bushes on open hillsides, particularly in marshy and damp depressions around hilltops. As per IUCN classification, they are classified under Vulnerable species and also they are included under Schedule –I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.

**NILGIRI PIPITS** are medium-sized birds endemic and restricted to mid-high altitude (>1000 m to 2300 m) of southern end of the Western Ghats. They inhabit open short montane-grasslands interspersed with marshy grounds and small streams. The birds are richly coloured with dark lores, buff supercilium and throat. They lack malar stripes.

The major threats to both the above species are encroachment of habitats due to mismanagement of native shola grasslands – grazing of grasslands, fires, invasion of species, introduction of exotic species and increasing tourist spots. These have detrimental impacts on the population of these species. As per IUCN classification, they are classified under Vulnerable species and also they are included under Schedule –I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.



**WESTERN TRAGOPANS** are brightly plumaged pheasants that inhabit the Himalayas from Hazara in northern Pakistan in the west to Uttaranchal in India to the east. The males are dark with prominent white dots all over the body with bright orange patch on the breast. Their faces are reddish bordered by a black crown and ears, along with blue throat. The female is brownish-grey with paler underparts with fine white streaks. It inhabits upper temperate forests (2400 m–3600 m) in summers and dense coniferous and broad-leaved forests (2000 m –2800 m).

These birds are arboreal however they feed on ground. These birds are considered the rarest of all living pheasants. The species is highly endangered, sensitive to anthropogenic disturbance. Hence, habitat degradation and fragmentation due to subsistence farming, searching of food in understorey shrubs by livestock, lopping of branches for animal fodder and fuelwood-collection, and hunting for food are adversely impacting this species. As per IUCN, the species has been categorized as Vulnerable because of its small and sparsely distributed population which is declining. They are included under Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.



In the Indian subcontinent, **GREAT HORNBILLS** are found in the primary evergreen forests along the Himalayas and Western Ghats (> 2000 m). They are distinctive from other hornbills in their sizes, large yellow bills and casque. They forage in their canopies and sometimes descends to the ground for fallen fruits. They are monogamous and territorial. The major threats are habitat loss and fragmentation due to anthropogenic activities such as illegal logging, land conversion for housing and agricultural developments, slash and burn agriculture system. Hunting is another threat to these species since they have predictive feeding behaviour pattern. The species is hunted for food, casque and tail feathers. The fat is used for various purposes including medical treatments, gun polish. They are captured for pet trades. As per IUCN classification, they are classified under Vulnerable species and also they are included under Schedule –I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for conservation.



## CONCLUSION

In India, there are approximately 1350 bird species of which a total of 204 bird species have shown a decline in the past three decades. In a span of eight years, a total of 16 different bird species (endemic and exotic) were depicted on stamps. As per the latest Bird census report, many of the birds depicted such as Western tragopan, Broad-tailed grassbird, Nilgiri wood pigeon, and Nilgiri pipit are considered as Highest Priority Species in Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, respectively. Further, Andaman woodpecker (Andaman & Nicobar Islands), Nilgiri wood pigeon (Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu), Western tragopan (Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir), Broad-tailed grassbird

(Karnataka), Nilgiri pipit (Kerala, Tamil Nadu) are considered to be species of Highest Conservation Priority for the different states<sup>8</sup>.

One of the major objectives of depiction of birds on the stamps is to increase awareness amongst common mass and propel action towards their conservation. Though the usage of the stamps have considerably reduced amongst general population, however the message should not be lost. The commendable work done by the Indian Postal Department could be carried in future by transformation of the postage stamps in a digital form. This would enable the continuation of the noble work of awareness creation and conservation of birds in the nation.

**Acknowledgement:** Dr. Kanad Baidya (photos of stamps) and information available in public portal

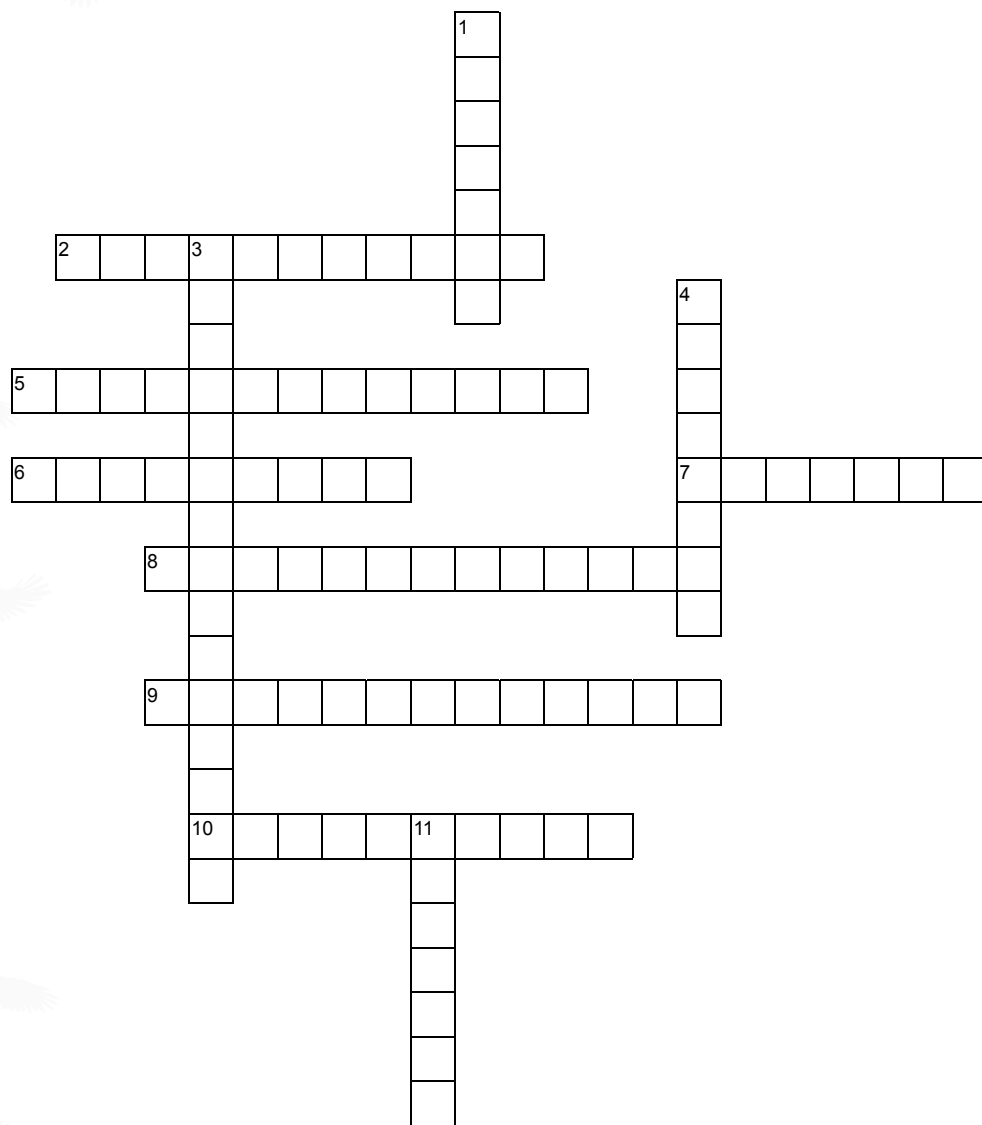
8.State of India's Birds, 2023. [www.stateofindiabirds.in](http://www.stateofindiabirds.in)



### About Author INDRANI GHOSH

Dr. Indrani Ghosh, an avid nature lover is an environmental consultant. She has rekindled her interest in birding.

## Threats to Birds



### Across

- 2 If we destroy their homes, where will they go?
- 5 Not the kind of warmth you would welcome in your home, the planet
- 6 Despite the name, this kills not just insects, but birds too
- 7 Only humans can kill for sport and as a hobby
- 8 Hack, chop! Hack, chop!
- 9 A kind of metal toxicosis that is commonly seen in raptors
- 10 I know why the 'caged' bird sings

### Down

- 1 Unfortunately, birds cannot wear masks to prevent this from spreading.
- 3 Overcompetitive organisms that thrive by destroying its neighbours
- 4 Causes include subsistence uses, recreational activities, organized crime, traditional practice and so on
- 11 This cheap petroleum by-product has cost the environment a lot

# BWS ACTIVITIES

## National Bird Day 2024 celebration:

**1. 5th January: Bibhutibhushan Wildlife Sanctuary, Parmadan,** in association with BAN (BONDING WITH ANIMALS AND NATURE) and 24 Parganas (North) Forest Division, Govt of West Bengal. More than 100 local Govt school students along with their teachers participated to take part in Bird walk, Discussion and Rally.



বনবিভাগ, উত্তর ২৪ পরগনা জেলার তরফে বিভূতিভূষণ অভয়ারণ্যে আয়োজিত এই অনুষ্ঠানে ১১৫ জন ছাত্র-ছাত্রী উপস্থিত ছিল একদম পার্শ্ববর্তী কাপাসহাটি মিলন বীথি হাই স্কুল থেকে। নৌকা চেপে ইছামতী নদী পার হয়ে অভয়ারণ্যে ঢুকে ওরা আজ প্রথম বারের জন্য দেখলো হরিণের পাল, বাঁদরের বাঁদরামি। শুনলো পাখিদের কলরব। তারপর অংশগ্রহণ করলো পাখিদের নিয়ে আলোচনা: তাদের চেনা-জানা, বাস্তুতন্ত্রে তাদের গুরুত্ব, দেশি পাখিদের মারা-ধরা-পোষা-শিকার করা থেকে বিরত থাকা থেকে শুরু করে আরও নানা বিষয় নিয়ে। একটি বর্ণাঢ্য মিছিলের মাধ্যমে শুরু হয়ে সব শেষে কুইজ কম্পিটিশনের পর উপস্থিত সব ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের হাতে তুলে দেওয়া হল শংসাপত্র, সাধারণ পাখি চেনার পকেট বুক গাইড, সংরক্ষণের বার্তা দেওয়া বিভিন্ন লিফলেটস।



## 2. 5th and 6th January: MOM with Saba Islam/Happy Mommy Place

20 kids (age group 8-14) participated in the School of birds organized by BWS.

a) Classroom session held on Life of birds on 5th Jan, Friday - 3-4PM at their office in Ballygunge.

b) Field trip at Rabindra Sarovar on 6th Jan afternoon.

“We had a great time today with a lovely bunch of home schooled children and their parents at Rabindra Sarovar. This was the field trip part of a 2-day event on Birds of Kolkata & Life of birds done in association with Birdwatchers’ Society” . said Titash who coordinated the event.

## 3. 5th Jan: Bird Talk: BWS and BNC (Bishnupur Nature Club) at Uparsole junior High school, Taldanga, Bankura. 50 students participated.

National Bird Day উপলক্ষে Uparsole junior High school, Taldanga, স্কুলের তরফ থেকে Birdwatcher’s Society (BWS) আর Bishnupur Nature Club (BNC) কে সাথে নিয়ে ও তাদের সহায়তায় একটি বিশেষ অনুষ্ঠান এর আয়োজন করা হয়। উক্ত অনুষ্ঠানে আমরা নিম্নলিখিত বিষয়গুলোর উপরে আলোকপাত করার চেষ্টা করিঃ





- i) পাখি পাঠ (চেনা অচেনা ১৭৪টি পাখির উল্লেখ আছে এমন একটা পকেট গাইডও দেওয়া হয় বাচ্চাদের।)
- ii) পাখির স্বভাব, বাসস্থান, ও তাদের সংরক্ষণ নিয়ে আলোচনা।
- iii) Bird Walk (যেখানে বাচ্চাদের হাতে কলমে পাখি দেখার পদ্ধতি শেখানো হয়, পাখিদের মধ্যে স্থায়ী বাসিন্দা কারা আর পরিযায়ী পাখি কোনগুলো তা চেনানো হয়। বিভিন্ন আলাদা আলাদা পরিবেশ যে আলাদা আলাদা পাখির বাসস্থান তা হাতে কলমে দেখিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। আমাদের পাখি দেখার গোটা পথে ছিলো কিছু বুশি habitat, ওপেন ফিল্ড, দুটো ওয়াটার বডি, বাঁশ ঝাড় ও সামাজিক বনসৃজন এর ফলে তৈরি হওয়া কিছু আকাশমনি গাছের জঙ্গল।



#### 4. 5th Jan: “Walk for Raptors”:

Siliguri based Organisation ‘Airavat’ organised their 4th phase of “Walk for Raptors” campaign at Mechi riverbed area under Panighatta range of Kurseong Division of Indo-Nepal border area.

On the occasion of ‘National Bird Day’, ‘Airavat’ has celebrated the 4th “Walk for Raptors” campaign around upper Rajourikhola to upper Manjha with some incredible lifers. Thanks to Birdwatchers’ Society (BWS) and ‘eBird’ for supporting us.

Also we are continuing our Minimum use of Plastic and Banner campaign during our survey period.



#### 5. 5th Jan: Bhalo Pahar/ ভালো পাহাড়, Purulia.

Dr Ranadeep Sengupta distributed 100 pocket guide books to the school authority on behalf of BWS.

Bhalo pahar is a society established in 1996 at the arid zone of Purulia, West Bengal. Since 1996, it had involved the locals to plant trees and save nature. Now, they have created a man-made forest over 30 acre area which contains roughly 2 million herbs, plants and trees. It is more like an “ashrama” now where trees are worshipped as God.

In 2004, they also started a school for the children of local villagers. It has turned into a middle school now with around 200 children. In 2015, Bhalopahar School received the “Telegraph Award” within the category called “The School who cares”.

We visited the organisation and met Sri Kamal Chakraborty, a renowned poet who along with his friends, started this journey. We got a very warm welcome and were shown around. On behalf of BWS, we donated 125 booklets on common birds of West Bengal to distribute among the students. We hope it would help to educate the local tribal children and might help in conservation in near future.

## 6. 5th Jan: Bird Talk: BWS and Optopic Siliguri organised a Bird talk in Modela Caretaker School,

Fulbari, Siliguri.

On the occasion of National Bird Day, we conducted an interactive session with the future generation of this society to spread the awareness about Birds, their habitat and need of Conservation of the same.

Photography and birdwatching has no meaning if it's restricted to oneself only. Conservation begins when we connect the society with nature. And that's the initiative 'BWS' took to celebrate the 'National Bird Day' across the state. In North Bengal zone, we introduced the teens of 9th & 10th standard to the avian kingdom.



## 7. a) 5th Jan: Bird count at Dwarika Prasad Jheel, Jalpaiguri and b) 7th Jan: Teesta-Karala Bird Walk at Jalpaiguri.

A new beginning for Jalpaiguri was marked today. The members of the Birdwatchers' Society joined hands with 'Teesta Parer Bidyamandir' run by a group of self-sponsored volunteers to organise a bird walk for the school children living in and around the Teesta Grasslands. With proper grooming and development, these children might become the custodians and first line of defense for saving the Teesta Grassland which is already under threat.



ডুয়ার্সের একটি জনপদ জলপাইগুড়ি, আমি সেই জনপদের বাসিন্দা। কমবেশি শহরতলির মাঝে পাখি দেখা সবারই হয়, কিন্তু কখনও তাদের গতিবিধি সম্পর্কে গভীর ভাবে ভেবে দেখিনি। আমার মা ক্যামেরার জগৎ-এর সাথে যুক্ত থাকায় অল্প বিস্তার ছবি দেখা হতো পরিযায়ী পাখিদের। গত ৭ই জানুয়ারি '২৪ 'Birdwatchers' Society 'র উদ্যোগে একটি 'Birdwalk' আয়োজন করা হয়। ৫ই জানুয়ারি 'জাতীয় পক্ষী দিবস' ছিল কিন্তু ছুটির দিন না থাকায় দিনটি উদযাপন করা যায়নি। আমাদের সেই 'Birdwalk' এ সামিল হয়েছিলেন জলপাইগুড়ি শহরের একাধিক চিত্র সাংবাদিক, চিত্র গ্রাহক, নানান বয়সী খুদেদা এবং 'তিস্তাপারের বিদ্যামন্দির'-এর ছোটো ছোটো ছাত্রছাত্রীরা। ছোটোদের উৎসাহ শীতের সকালে দেখার মতো ছিল। আমাদের সকাল ৬:৩০টায় জুবলি পার্কের গেটের সামনে একত্র হওয়ার জন্য আগের দিন বলে দেওয়া হয়েছিল। বাঙালির শীতকাল, সেই শুরু হতে হতে ৭টা বেজেই গেল। প্রথমেই শুরু হল ঘুঘু পাখির সূক্ষ্ম পার্থক্য চেনার মধ্যে দিয়ে, তারপর একে একে বাবুই, ছোটো পানকৌড়ি, বড়ো পানকৌড়ি ইত্যাদি পাখির পোশাকি নাম এবং প্রচুর তথ্য, জানালেন 'Birdwatchers' Society'র মৌসুমি ম্যাম। শহরের মাঝে করলা নদীতে মূলত ছোটো আর বড়ো পানকৌড়ি দেখতে পেয়েছিলাম, সূর্যের তাপে পাখা দুটো মেলে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল, এছাড়াও শামুকখোল পাখি, সূক্ষ্ম ভাবে কখনও খেয়াল করিনি শামুকখোলের ঠোঁটের মাঝে ফাঁকা থাকে সেই তথ্যটি জানতে পেরেছি, তার সাথে বকের নানান প্রজাতির কথা জেনেছি যেগুলো শহরতলিতে দেখা যায়। ছবি তোলা শেষে আমাদের প্রত্যেকের হাতে একটি করে পাখি সংক্রান্ত সূচি দিয়েছিলেন মৌসুমি ম্যাম, তাতে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের নানান পাখি সংক্রান্ত তথ্য রয়েছে। সর্বোপরি খুব সুন্দর একটি অভিজ্ঞতা হয়েছে, আশা রাখি, ভবিষ্যৎ-এ আরও এমন পাখি দেখার সুযোগ করে দেবে 'Birdwatchers' Society'। **Purbasa Sarkar (Dooars)**

## 8. 6th Jan: Bird walk and talk: At Hirapur Manik Chand Thakur Institution, Asansol

On the occasion of National Bird Day, Birdwatchers' Society, in collaboration with Wild Tusk Asansol, had organised a Bird walk and talk program in Hirapur Manik Chand Thakur Institution, Asansol. 45 students, 3 teachers, 2 BWS members and 4 WTA members are present in the event.

21 different species of Birds have been observed by the while getting to know Birding, Nature and Conservation.

We celebrated the National Bird Day's 2024 theme, "Right

To Flight," is by teaching children the importance of keeping all birds free flying in their natural habitats.



## 9. 2nd February - Birdwatchers' Society joined hands with Optopic Siliguri, AIRAVAT, Siliguri Photographers' Association to conduct a SIT & DRAW competition among the local children of area

adjacent to the Fulbari Wetlands. Three posters depicting the local birds of the area were also put up permanently to acquaint the local with the names and looks of the common birds of the area. Fulbari wetland plays the role of a purifier for the city Siliguri and in spite of its gradual dying condition this place is supporting its best to maintain the ecology of the city & its surroundings.

Immediate steps are extremely necessary to save this gem of North Bengal which should be one of our first and foremost priorities now.

বিশ্ব জলাভূমি দিবস উপলক্ষে শিলিগুড়ি শহর লাগোয়া ফুলবাড়ি জলাভূমি সংলগ্ন 'বড়ো পথুরাম' গ্রামের কমপক্ষে ৬০ জন কচি-কাঁচাদের নিয়ে আয়োজিত হলো এক 'বসে আঁকো প্রতিযোগিতা ও পাখিপাঠ' শিবির।

'বার্ডওয়াচারস্ সোসাইটি', 'শিলিগুড়ি অপটোপিক', 'শিলিগুড়ি ফটোগ্রাফার্স অ্যাসোসিয়েশন' ও 'ঐরাবতে' র যৌথ উদ্যোগে আয়োজিত এই একদিনব্যাপী অনুষ্ঠানে বড়ো পথুরাম গ্রামের স্থানীয় শিশুদের অঙ্কন প্রতিযোগিতার পাশাপাশি স্থানীয় পাখি চেনানো, জলাভূমির গুরুত্ব ও সংরক্ষণের প্রয়োজনীয়তা সম্পর্কেও সচেতন করা হয়।

অনুষ্ঠানের শেষে উপস্থিত সকল বাচ্চাদের অভিভাবকদের হাতে একটি করে পাখি চেনার পকেট গাইড বুক তুলে দেওয়া হয়।

'বসে আঁকো' প্রতিযোগিতায় অংশগ্রহণকারী শিশুদের নিয়ে ৪ঠা ফেব্রুয়ারি গ্রাম সংলগ্ন জলাভূমিতে পরিযায়ী ও জলাভূমির পাখি চেনানোর ব্যবস্থা করা হয়।

## Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2024

### 1. AWC at Bishnupur

আজ যুব দিবসের সকালে আমরা সবাই মিলিত হয়েছিলাম একটা বিশেষ কারণে। আজ ১২ই জানুয়ারী শুরু হলো "Annual Count Of Water Bird - 2024" আর চলবে 20 ই জানুয়ারী পর্যন্ত। বিষ্ণুপুর ফরেস্ট ডিপার্টমেন্ট এর সাথে ছিলাম আমরা "Bishnupur Nature Club" (BNC) এর সব সদস্য বৃন্দ আর "Birdwatcher's Society" এর সদস্য হিসাবে আমি। বিষ্ণুপুর ফরেস্ট ডিপার্টমেন্ট এর তরফ থেকে উপস্থিত ছিলেন আমাদের সবার শ্রদ্ধেয় DFO Sri Anjan Guha স্যার। ওনার তত্ত্বাবধানে দারুন ভাবে সম্পন্ন হয়েছে পুরো বার্ড কাউন্ট প্রোগ্রাম। এছাড়াও উপস্থিত ছিলেন ADFO স্যার, ও রেঞ্জার স্যার শিবদাস বাবু ও অলোকমান বাবু।

আজকে আমাদের বিষ্ণুপুরের যমুনা ও কালিন্দী বাঁধে এই বার্ড কাউন্ট এর সূচনা হয়।





## 2. Gajoldoba AWC

Birdwatchers' Society along with 'Optopic', Siliguri Photographers' Association and 'Airavat' jointly participated in Asian Waterbird Census 2024 at Gajoldoba on 14th Jan.

Sightings:- Falcated Duck, Goldeneye, Ruddy Shelduck, Red crested Pochard, Gadwall, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Great-crested Grebe, Common Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Long-legged Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Caspian Gull, Northern Lapwing, Pacific Golden Plover, and other waterfowls.

## 3. Fulbari Wetland AWC

Members of Birdwatchers' Society, Optopic Siliguri, Airavat, SPA participated in AWC 2024 at Fulbari Wetland, one of North Bengal's most important wetlands on 4th February. Fulbari Wetland has always been a gem of a place as far as bird's winter migration habitat is concerned. Protecting this Gradually shrinking habitat is one of our prime responsibilities.

We surveyed the whole area dividing it into individual grids and counted a large number of feathered beauties. We took the little minds of Bara Pathuram village (who participated in the 'Sit & Draw' program earlier) with us show them birds as well as to teach them about wetland & migratory birds.

### Prime Sights:-

350+ Small Pratincoles, 480+ Gray-headed Lapwings, 340+ Lesser Whistling Ducks, 30+ Yellow-breasted Buntings, 230+ Ruddy Shelducks, 300+ Gadwalls, 90+ Red crested Pochards, 12 Cotton Pygmy Geese and many other waterbirds.

Others:- Lesser Adjutant Stork, Himalayan Griffon, Paddyfield, Clamorous reed & Dusky Warbler, Stork billed kingfisher, Red-naped Ibis, Raptors including Eastern Marsh Harrier, Greater spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle, Steppe Eagle etc.

## Other events:

### Birdwatching Workshop on 21/01/2024 at IISER Kolkata

The birdwatching workshop was a resounding success, drawing enthusiasts, researchers, and nature lovers alike. The rich avian diversity in and around the IISER Kolkata campus.

The workshop had two parts, firstly there was a birdwatching outdoor event exploring and then an indoor talk session.

The event fostered a vibrant atmosphere for participant interaction, with attendees exchanging experiences, insights, and queries. The speakers actively engaged with the audience, addressing questions and providing valuable advice on enhancing the birdwatching experience. There were different question answer sessions, some quiz, and some welcome gifts from Nature Club IISER Kolkata for all the participants.

The workshop served as a significant platform for knowledge exchange and community building among bird enthusiasts. The diverse perspectives shared by the speakers, coupled with hands-on activities, left a lasting impact on participants, inspiring a deeper appreciation for avian biodiversity.

### Bird walk on 27/01/2024 at Santragachhi Jheel with 27 children and 4 teachers of MC Kejriwal Vidyapeeth, Liluah (Howrah).

The enthusiastic bunch of 6th graders shot many questions at us regarding bird behaviour, habitat and migration. They were equally excited to observe and learn about each species, be they residents or migrants, near or far, multicoloured or otherwise.

Thank you @earlybirdindia for the pocket guides on 174 familiar species of West Bengal which are being distributed to all children during all of our events.

### Sit & Draw competition on Birds on 28/01/2024 -

Remembering the great poet Jibanananda Das's 125th birth centenary and his passion towards our nature and birds, we had organised a "Sit and Draw" competition among the local school students in collaboration with BAN Foundation and Shanpukur Shakti Sangha, Habra, North 24 Parganas.





বিভাগ: ক (বয়স: অনূর্ধ্ব ৮ বছর), বিষয়: রঙবেরঙের পাখি

বিভাগ: খ (বয়স: ৯-১২ বছর), বিষয়: “পাখি আমার মনের পাখি, পাখি আমার বনের পাখি।”

বিভাগ: গ (বয়স: ১৩-২০), বিষয়: ‘জীবনানন্দ দাশ এবং তাঁর পাখিরা’

রং-তুলি নিয়ে শুধু পাখিদের নিয়েই গল্প হলো, ছবি হলো। ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের পাখি এবং পরিবেশ নিয়ে সচেতন করে তুলতে ছিল নানাধরণের পুস্তিকা, শংসাপত্র এবং পুরস্কারের পসরা।

জীবনানন্দের প্রিয় পাখি শঙ্খচিলের আদলে তৈরী ‘মেমেন্টো’ গুলো সুন্দর ভাবে প্রায় একার দায়িত্বে বানিয়েছে আমাদের সদস্য শ্রী মৃণাল কান্তি কর।

## GBBC (Great Backyard Bird Count) 2024

Since 2013, India has been actively involved in the GBBC. Just like in previous years, the 12th edition of GBBC 2024 was a resounding success. The complete results of GBBC will be available by April 2024.

As per the preliminary summary, some highlights about GBBC India chapter:

This was the first GBBC where all the states and union territories of India were covered and this year, West Bengal, along with some of the other states and union territories, birdwatchers were able to cover all of the districts of WB. And this is also the first time a new species (Spur-winged Lapwing) for India was reported! This is also the second consecutive year with 1000+ species and 40000+ checklists across the country.

BWS participated in GBBC 2024 public walks under the leadership of one of our senior and vastly experienced birder-members Sri Santanu Manna. Venues were:

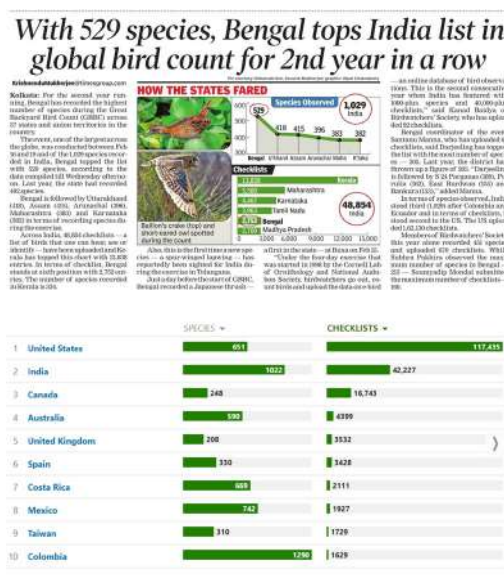
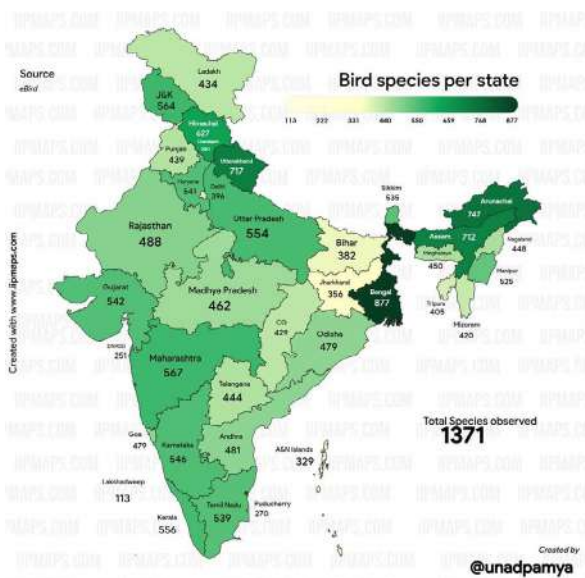
16 Feb at Central park

16 Feb at Shyam park, Deshbandhu Park with students

17 Feb Rabindra Sarovar

18 Feb Baruipur

For final report of GBBC globally, you can visit here: <https://www.birdcount.org/2024-final-results/>





# BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY BAKKHALI COASTAL CAMP

23-25 FEBRUARY 2024

By Sandip Das & Amitava Dutta



Picture Courtesy : Saptarshi Mukherjee : A morning with Common Shelducks, Lothian Island

## A TRIP REPORT

*And above, in the light  
Of the star-lit night,  
Swift birds of passage wing their flight  
Through the dewy atmosphere.*

*I hear the beat  
Of their pinions fleet,  
As from the land of snow and sleet  
They seek a southern lea.*

*I hear the cry  
Of their voices high  
Falling dreamily through the sky,  
But their forms I cannot see.*

### “Birds of Passage” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

was the title poem in a short collection of poetry that Longfellow published in 1858. Any birder with an ear & eye for migration listens for flight calls or has a poetic touch, shall love this part of the poem, which is a pretty good description of what hearing birds migrating overhead is like.

In a move breaking away from tradition, Dr Kanad Baidya (MD) ignited excitement by announcing BWS Coastal Birding Camp 2024 in early November’23. This was imperative as the Birdwatchers’ Society has been growing steadily, thereby the need for not one but two birding camps during the financial year. The first camp, documented in the Trip Report featured in Fantail Vol 3; Issue 3 (Jan – Mar 2024), unfolded amidst the untamed beauty of Maredumilli, nestled deep in the forests of Eastern Ghats, Eluru district, Andhra Pradesh, from Dec 11-15, 2023.

While the echoes of the first camp still lingered, the clamour for more resonated among members unable to partake in the Maredumilli adventure (lesser mortals like us included!). Swiftly, with an unwavering commitment, the Society arranged a second rendezvous near Kolkata. Bakkhali emerged as the perfect locale, offering a haven for migratory birds wintering along the coastal region. 23-25 Feb 2024 were the dates for the wild ride of reckoning for the BWS Bakkhali Coastal Birding Camp.

Located 120 km from Kolkata, Bakkhali is just a stone's throw from the metropolis. Its vast stretches of sandy beach, wetlands and meadows form part of the Gangetic Delta and the Sundarbans settlements. Along the Central Asian Flyway, Bakkhali provides crucial stopover points for migratory birds during their long journeys between breeding and wintering grounds. It's a vital resting and refuelling site for these birds. Considering its strategic importance, the Birdwatchers' Society has been conducting regular birding visits at Bakkhali.

Bakkhali boasts a diverse range of habitats, including mudflats, marshes, mangroves, and coastal wetlands, among the islands of the Gangetic Delta. These habitats offer abundant food resources, such as small fish, crustaceans, and invertebrates, essential for the survival of migratory birds during their stopovers. Additionally, dense vegetation and mangrove forests offer nesting sites and protection for breeding pairs. The region is home to a wide variety of resident, migratory, and quite a few endangered species. Its rich biodiversity attracts migratory birds in large numbers, making it a key hotspot for birdwatching and conservation efforts.

It was a race against time to secure a spot. The call for action had barely begun before the limited seats were filled! The next announcement from the organisers came about engaging professional services of Zigzag India Tours, represented by Soumya Kundu (a fellow birder & member of BWS). As D-Day came by, 21 members boarded the bus from Kolkata in addition to Soumya Kundu - Líder del tour. Initially, this camp was envisaged as a straightforward traditional exploration of the usual sites around Bakkhali, Frasergunj & Henry Island.

Now, let me paint you a picture of the eclectic bunch that gathered for this feathered adventure. Picture this: like the versatility of a 22 calibre, this bunch of 22 eager bird enthusiasts (counting our fearless Tour Leader) packed a distinctively passionate punch. Amidst us, we had a triumphant trio of seasoned senior citizens aged 60 and up - still kicking it with the best! Matching up were the thriving three in their fabulous fifties, while the rest were a spectrum of youthful energy and midlife wisdom in their mid-20s to early 40s. Ah, but the fun doesn't stop there! The testosterone-fuelled group of 20 hosted a fierce pair of female bird whisperers - maintaining sanity. Talking about expertise, a handful five were the Gandalfs of the birding world, wielding years of knowledge like seasoned wizards, while the rest of us were eager learners armed with cameras, ready to capture every avian moment in pixelated glory.



## Day 0 (23 Feb 2024) - Set off from Karunamoyee

Our revered Major (Maj BS Parihar) was kind enough to see off the team as it rolled out on a chartered bus from Karunamoyee, Salt Lake, at 1600 hrs, picking up the participants along the route. The contingent checked into Hotel Inadoy at 2130 hrs on 23 Feb 2024 after completing a 4-hour journey with a pitstop mid-way.

As soon as we checked in, dinner was served. The next morning's schedule was reiterated. Troop out by 0545 hrs to head to the jetty and set sail at 0700 hrs. While most members hit the sack to be up early, a few late-night nocturnals gathered in the lobby for a spirited discussion until well past midnight.



Pic Courtesy : Sankha Misra : Time for a quick chai break and team photograph



## Day 01 (24 Feb 2024) - Morning Session

Out at the break of light, the team emerged from their cosy nests, ready to embark on their avian odyssey. With a chorus of yawns, puffs of smoke and caffeine-fuelled banter, we shuffled towards our trusty 'To-To' (aka the electric rickshaw) – our noble chariot for the morning commute. Arriving at the jetty, the air crackled with excitement as the first sightings of waders ignited a chorus of “Wows!” accompanied by the rapid symphony of camera shutters.



The appearance of the elusive Scaly-breasted Rail, a handful of Whimbrels, and Gulls sparked a wildfire of enthusiasm among us. Moments later, the team was aboard MV Ayesha, our vessel bound for the mysterious shores of Jambudwip, bouncing on choppy waves, strong winds and high hopes. Trips such as these are time-sensitive; the exploration

had to be conducted during high tide to ensure the waders were inland and the boat could get closer to the island's shoreline. With a representative of the Forest Department accompanying us, we set sail.

Jambudwip is an isolated island in the Bay of Bengal, about 8 km southwest of Frasergunj (Bakkhali). It is a Reserved Forest, and tourists are not allowed on the island. Forest Department permission is needed before embarking on a trip. During 08-09 February 2020, BWS organised a survey trip to Bakkhali and Jambudwip primarily for surveying waders. On the 9th morning, 12 members landed at Jambudwip to witness an overwhelming number of birds. A detailed count was made; read more about the trip at

<https://birdwatcherssociety.org/bakkhali-jambudweep-feb-2020/>

Almost after 70 minutes of sailing (around 0820hrs), folks disembarked at Jambudwip using a makeshift ladder near the shore. A bit of a tricky act. The landing site was a sea of white sand, further at the edge beamed the mangrove forest. The troop of 22 with scopes, binos and cameras began a trek, scanning the skyline and the beaches for the avian friends. Soon enough, we witnessed vast flocks of waders flying along the farthest edge.



Pic : Soumya Kundu : All aboard MV Ayesha

Waders are strong flyers; flying across oceans, mountains and land, they reach their wintering grounds. One has to be in the right habitat at the right time to catch a glimpse. The majority of wader species eat small invertebrates picked out of mud or exposed soil. Different lengths & types of bills enable different species to feed in different kinds of patches around the same habitat. With flocks of 300+ birds whizzing across, having a wader expert in Sandip Das was a phenomenal asset! Amongst the shorebirds (waders) that we observed included the Broad-billed Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Rudy Turnstone, Black-bellied Plover, Great Knot, Red Knot,

Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Little Stint, etc.. not to forget the lone Great Thick-knee. All sightings are included in the eBird Trip Report at the end.

Over the next 2hrs 30 minutes, the members watched in awe the spectacular birds and their behaviour. No one realised how time flew until frantic calls from our tour leader to evacuate quickly as the tide had started receding, and the boat needed to get back to deeper waters. A few groupies later, with beaming smiles, the team clambered back to the vessel, balancing on the slippery ladder.



**Pic: Suman Das : In pursuit of Waders @ Jambudwip**



**Pic: Ranjan Mitra : Wader Flock @ Jambudwip**

The return sail buzzed with witty banter & animated chatter—reminiscing about lifers, birding highs, sharing identification insights, and reliving the moments that made this expedition unforgettable. For many, it was a lifetime high!

### Day 01 (24 Feb 2024) - Post Lunch

In the post-lunch session, the team took the noble chariot 'To-To' (a.k.a. the electric rickshaw) to Kalisthan Beach. Roughly 5 km northeast of Bakkhali, this is a bustling fishing community. As we arrived, the low tide was at its zenith, drawing the waterline back a couple of kilometres. 13 Common Shelducks ticked off the start of the session. The team split up into 3 groups and ventured into different directions. While the birding activity remained fruitful, with Pacific Golden-Plovers in near breeding plumage, Whimbrels, Eurasian Curlew, Pallas's Gull and a host of other birds, it didn't quite match the splendour of the morning session.



**Pic: Sagar Adhurya : Triumphant Birders at Kaalishthan Beach (Henry Island)**

### Day 01 (24 Feb 2024) - End of Day

While returning from Jambudwip and during the after-lunch session, an idea was mooted to explore Lothian Island (Lothian Wildlife Sanctuary). All the leaders, including Kanad and Soumya, echoed the sentiments and reworked the logistics. Thus, the second day's endeavour was to check out a new location secluded from public access. This location, known as Balu-Char, lay within the Lothian Wildlife Sanctuary; a permit from the Forest Department was needed, and it was accessible only by boat from Bhagabatpur. The Forest Department was kind enough to help us with the necessary permission and a



boat for this trip. A combination of a larger boat and a smaller boat was essential to get closer to the birds.

Back at the base camp, i.e. our place of stay, the team assembled after a quick refresh for a highly engaging session addressed by Sandip Das about Waders, their behaviour, feeding habits and other intricacies. Sandip spoke about the **first West Bengal record of sighting the rare & endangered Nordmann's Greenshank (*Tringa guttifer*) by Mr Milan Mandal - DFO South 24 Pgns at Lothian Island on 14 Feb 2022;** in addition, he

also narrated his own experience a year ago of how they sweated out to see the Nordmann's Greenshank at Meidinagar Beach, WB (read the published report at [https://indianbirds.in/pdfs/InPress\\_DasETAL\\_NordmannsGreenshank.pdf](https://indianbirds.in/pdfs/InPress_DasETAL_NordmannsGreenshank.pdf)). It seems the chosen location at Lothian Island was an ideal habitat for this bird, amongst others. It was a hugely exciting and gratifying session. Lots of interactions, high on spirits and upbeat with learnings for all.



Pic: Sonkha Misra : Participants at the session on Waders conducted by Sandip Das

A lip-smacking dinner with ice cream for dessert capped an inspiring and fruitful day. Without a doubt, camaraderie and humour were unwavering companions throughout the day and for the entire duration of the camp.

## Day 02 (25 Feb 2024) - Morning Session

We trooped out at 0500hrs for steaming cups of tea to recharge the human batteries after a short overnight rest and rolled into the bus for a 2-hour bus journey to Bhagabatpur Ghat. Those who missed a wink the night before had enough opportunity to catch up during the ride.

Bhagabatpur Ghat (Jetty) on the bank of the Saptamukhi Estuary. It also houses a crocodile project of the Forest Department where Estuarine Crocodiles and the Batagur Baska tortoise species are bred. It is the closest gateway to the Lothian Island Wildlife Sanctuary. Numerous migrant birds winter in the sanctuary.

We set sail on a passenger vessel at 0800 hrs, partly cruising along the National Waterway 97 during high tide, toeing a smaller 8-9 seater boat. The idea was to tranship closer to the shoreline into the smaller boat for going across to the island shore. On the way along the dense forest, we sighted Common Redshank, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Black-hooded Orioles, Brown-headed Gulls, Great & Little Cormorants, Great egrets, etc. 'Balu char', the target destination, took almost 90 minutes to reach. The waterway was quite choppy and windy. Nearer to the destination, we started observing flocks of flying waders.



Pic : Lothian Island WLS and our rendezvous point

It was announced that the larger vessel would lay anchor as close as possible to the shore in a narrow channel; it would then tranship the members on to the smaller boat to drop them nearer to the shoreline. Coinciding with the announcement came a chorus of VOWS! and UFFS! Amidst the flapping feathers and squawks of the regular avian crowd, not one but two majestic Eurasian Oystercatchers strutted their stuff! It was like spotting a pair of celebrities at a local diner - rare, jaw-dropping, and totally unexpected! You might think, "What's the big deal about a couple of birds?" Well, let me tell you, these weren't your average feathered friends. We're talking about some seriously sizeable, attention-grabbing shorebirds here! The excitement was so palpable that you could practically taste it in the salty sea breeze. Here is the kicker: the vessel's pilot suddenly found manoeuvring the boat a big challenge as navigating through a sea of ecstatic birders all clamouring for the best view! It was like trying to steer a ship through a sea of overly enthusiastic puppy dogs chasing a tennis ball.



The smaller boat sailed alongside our trusty vessel, ready to unleash the first wave of intrepid explorers onto the scene. Adrenaline pumping; it was like the opening act of a blockbuster movie, anticipation hanging in the air like a thick fog. But amidst the chaos of the waves and the balancing act, our wader expert Sandip dropped the bombshell: Nordmann's Greenshanks were in the flock. Cue the collective gasps of awe from the crowd and the keenness to see it before it took to wings.

Soon, the entire team was on the sand patch, wading through the knee-deep, squishy, slippery shore, as we gasped and giggled at the rarest of the rare birds. This wasn't just any old bird sighting; this was the holy grail of rare species! You could practically feel the energy crackling in the air as everyone scrambled to catch a glimpse of these elusive feathered marvels.



**Pic: Soumya Kundu : Observation post for Waders @ Lothian Island**

It was like a treasure hunt on steroids. A wild, priceless and extraordinary day! This Lothian Island, secluded far from madding crowds, housed a good population of endangered and near-threatened species ... perhaps a safe habitat for them!

The interesting thing worth noting, and as pointed out by Sandip, was that in the large flock consisting of Eurasian Curlew, Great Knot, Red Knot, Black & Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover and Nordmann's Greenshank, there wasn't a single small wader; it was essentially a flock of medium-sized to large waders! The smaller waders consisting of Temminck's Stint and Tibetan Sand-Plover stood separate at a patch further away inland.





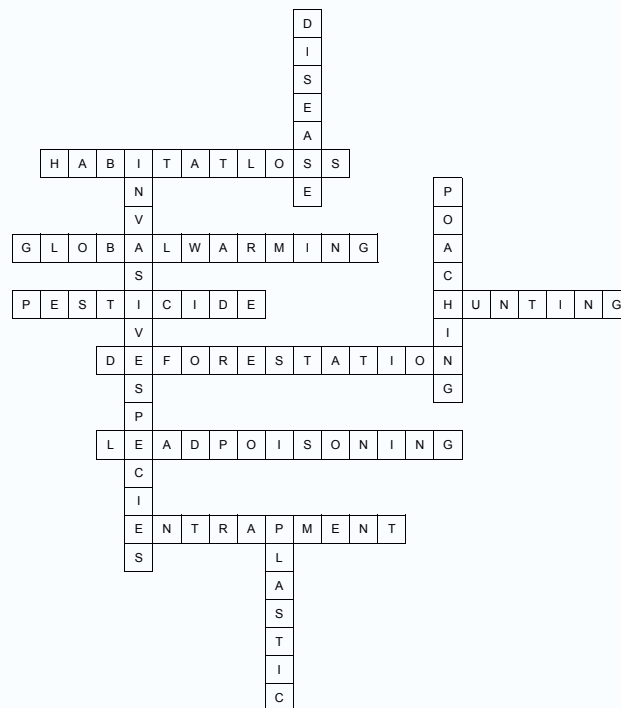
**Pic: Rituparno Majumdar : Returning to main vessel after sighting the Nordmann's Greenshank & Eurasian Oystercatcher @ Lothian Island**

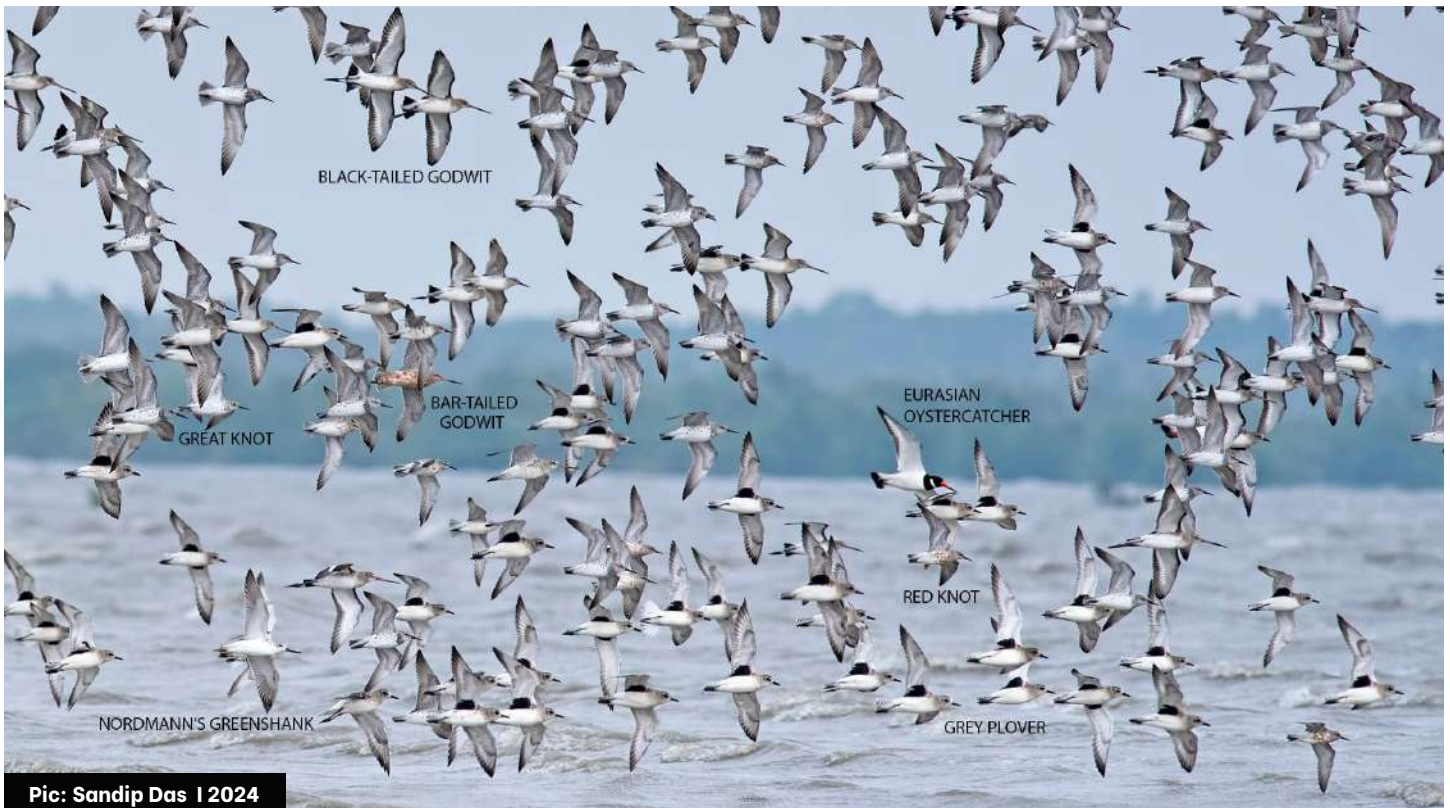
Once all the commotion and euphoria subsided, we heard the frantic call of the vessel's pilot that we could wait no longer and had to leave as the low tide had set in. The boat had to move out of shallow waters at the earliest. In this last act, too, there was a lot of suspense & action. The second batch of members had a rough ordeal getting onto the bigger vessel from the smaller one, with the waves and wind causing significant trouble. For a fraction of a moment, we were all tensed up when the smaller boat had trouble aligning with the bigger vessel for transhipment. After a few near misses, we finally had all the members safely aboard our main vessel. We thus began our return sail to the mainland.

At this stage, it is worth highlighting that for a team this size, observing the waders in peace and identifying them correctly was possible primarily due to the availability of the Pentax PF80 EDA and Nikon ED50 sighting scope. It's a worthy piece of equipment for such trips. Once on terra-firma at Bhagabatpur, we made a quick detour of the crocodile project, followed by lunch. After a worthy meal, with droopy eyes, we headed back home. Thus bringing an end to a thrilling, enjoyable and fun-filled Coastal Camp.

## Answers of Crossword

### Threats to Birds





**Pic: Sandip Das | 2024**

The 22 BWS members packed the wittiest humour, an eagle eye and huge comradeship. They included – Sandip Das, Kanad Baidya (Dr), Amritendu Mallick, Anshuman Roy, Dev and Krishnakali Baul, Dipankar Sinha, Nilay Raha, Ranjan Mitra, Rituparno Majumder, Sagar Adhurya (PhD), Santu Chowdhury, Sankha Misra, Saptarshi Mukherjee, Shubham Banerjee, Sudip Ghosh, Suman Das, Sourav Mondal, Swarnab Ghosh, Tapasi Mukherjee (Ms).

The eBird Trip report can be seen at : <https://ebird.org/tripreport/206905>





## WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS SAID AFTER THE CAMP!

Post Bakkhali Coastal Birding Camp, impromptu feedback started pouring in. It was thus prudent to present a compilation of reactions received.



**SWARNAB GHOSH**

I thoroughly enjoyed this coastal camping trip. Prior to this trip, I knew a small set of waders, that too not in detail. This trip added to my knowledge of their characteristics, habitat and expanded my horizon. I feel more such camps are required to know about birds. If trip is not possible, monthly webinars on types of birds (pipits, warblers, raptors etc) can be held to enhance our ID skills. Maybe also short quizzes at the end of the sessions to engage the audience. Our esteemed group has many Subject Matter Experts to enlighten us!

I enjoyed the trip a lot. Special mention should be given to the arrangements made by Soumya da of Zig zag tours! We didn't have to worry about travel, food or stay and could focus only on birding. Overall a truly memorable experience with passionate birders!

Thank you Sandip, Soumya, Kanad, Sankha, Tapasi and the rest of the fellow coastal campers for one of the best birding experiences we have had so far. Jambudwip, Lothians, and Sandip's presentation on Nordmann's Greenshank will forever be etched in our memory. Hope to join all forthcoming BWS camps. This photo is from the BWS camp in December 2023.

**KRISHNAKALI and DEV BAUL**







## SOURAV MONDAL

This trip will hold a special place in my heart for a long time, filled with cherished memories of spotting rare birds, listening to captivating stories, exploring unique habitats, forging new friendships, savouring delicious meals, and appreciating the wonderful logistical arrangements. A heartfelt thank you to Kanad, Sandip, Soumya, and Tapasi for their prompt actions, which granted us access to protected forest areas and exclusive habitats that would have otherwise been inaccessible. The anecdotes shared by fellow birders, particularly Sandip's tale of Nordmann's Greenshank and Kanad's explanations were captivating. The knowledge-sharing sessions on eBird, BWS, GBBC, and 'Fantail' magazine were enlightening and motivating. I thoroughly enjoyed and learned a great deal. My utmost respect goes to everyone for their expertise, knowledge and passion.

I eagerly anticipate more such camps, continued engagement with BWS, and the opportunity to reunite with everyone soon.



A Massive Massive Thanks to Soumya Kundu, Sandip Das and Dr Kanad Baidya for this absolutely out of the world Coastal Birding Trip!

I've learned a lot from all my Seniors in this trip! Sandip da's Class on waders was truly marvellous! And Congratulations to the entire team for the Grand Success It was an absolutely delightful experience with ya'll!

## SHUBHAM BANERJEE



## RANJAN MITRA



First of all congrats to all for a very successful trip. I feel honoured to be a part of it. Thanks to BWS and all the participants for the trip.

Special thanks to Sandeep @Sandip Das BWS for the excellent session on waders yesterday with special elaboration on Nordmann's.

Looking forward for more such trips.





Delighted to be part of this trip. Thanks to all for wonderful coordination. Special thanks to Sandip, Kanad, Soumya and Tapashi. Feeling relaxed after reaching home. Waiting for the next call. See you all.



I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to BWS and key individuals involved in the coastal birding trip. It was an enriching experience, filled with awe-inspiring moments as we witnessed diverse avian species in their natural habitat. The seamless coordination and meticulous planning truly enhanced our journey, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the beauty of coastal birdlife. Special thanks to Kanad, Sandip & Soumya whose passion and expertise added immeasurable value to the trip. Your commitment to environmental education is commendable. This adventure has left an indelible mark, and I am sincerely thankful for the opportunity to connect with nature in such a profound way in which I got about 10 lifers!

## **DIPANKAR SINHA**



The trip is a memorable one and I must appreciate the efforts put in by Kanad, Sandip, Soumya and Tapasi. Promptly deciding and arranging our today's birding trip (by all four of you) to Lothian through Bhagabatpur was a commendable one. I am thankful to all for your company. Through this short two day trip, 26 new species are being added to my life list including the endangered one

## **NILAY RAHA**



Thanks BWS and all for this fantastic trip. Thank you Sandip and Kanad for sharing your knowledge and experience with us. Thanks Soumya for the flawless arrangement. And cheers to all of you for making this a memorable trip. Looking forward to the next camp.

## **ANSHUMAN ROY**







একটা দারুন ট্রিপ হল। কনাদদা বা সন্দীপদাকে নিয়ে নতুন করে কিছু বলার নেই। সাগর, অমু, শুভম আর শঙ্খকে নিয়েও তাই। সৌম্যদা অত্যন্ত ভালো ব্যবস্থা করেছিল। অমিতাভদা, সুদীপদা, সন্ত, নিলয়, তাপসীদের সাথে অনেকদিন আগে থেকেই দেখা করার ইচ্ছে ছিল, সেটা সম্ভব হল BWS এর জন্য। আর সুমনদা, দেবদা, ঋতুদার সাথে এটা আমার দ্বিতীয় ট্রিপ। তাই আগের বারের মতই এঞ্জয় হল। বাকিদের সাথে আলাপ হয়ে দারুন লাগল। এইসব ট্রিপের লাভ হল, পুরো রাজ্য জুড়ে পাখি তথা সংরক্ষণ নিয়ে কে কি ভাবছে, কে নতুন কিছু ভাবছে এগুলো নিয়ে জ্ঞান আহরণ করা। এবং এটাই পেয়েছি। এছাড়া ওয়েডার্স নিয়ে প্রচুর ইনফো পেয়েছি, বেশির ভাগটাই সন্দীপদার থেকে।

সর্বোপরি, এরকম কিছু লোকেশনে এক্সপ্লোরেশন BWS ছাড়া সম্ভব কখনই সম্ভব ছিল না। ৫০০ স্পিসিস পাওয়ার পর, কোন ট্রিপ এ ৩-৪ টে নতুন পাখি পাওয়া গেলেই সেটা লটারি পাওয়া মনে হয়। সেখানে দু দিনে ১৪ টা লাইফার। এর পর আর কি বা বলার থাকতে পারে? ধন্যবাদ সবাইকে। পরের ট্রিপটা কোথায় হবে তাড়াতাড়ি ঠিক করা হোক।

ভালো থাকুন/ থেকো/ থাকিস সবাই



**SAPTARSHI MUKHERJEE**



**SOUMYA KUNDU (ZIGZAG TOURS)**

Thanks to Kanad and Birdwatchers' Society for trusting us with the job. We were assigned the task of professionally managing the camp. As always, we gave the basic comfort and safety of the participants the highest priority while designing the tour. Logistics were provided accordingly. Special thanks to Sandip-da, Kanad for their expert guidance and enriching sessions. Special thanks to Sandip-da, Tapasi and Kanad for today's impromptu trip to Lothian. It would remain a high point in our birding career for a long time. It was only possible due to their excellent relationship with the forest department. Participants may follow Zigzag India Tours on Fb and Insta. Our website is functional but still under construction.





Probable victim of pesticide at Purbasthali, 08.01.2017

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