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FANTAIL
BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
Volume 4 | Issue No. 3 | January-March 2025

BIRD SONGS & SOUNDS

Birdwatchers' Society

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Birdwatchers' Society

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Fantail 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.

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PERSPECTIVES

Courtesy : Aindrila Sarkar Deb

Birds chirping around you is a beautiful realization that life is incredibly good. Let this sound be a gentle break in your routine.

-Hiral Nagda

Editorial

Hello Birders,

Wishing all our readers and friends a joyful and prosperous New Year 2025! May the coming year be graced with peace and harmony, inspired by the serene beauty and melodious songs of our avian companions.

When it comes to experiencing birds, three of the five senses - smell, touch, and taste play little to no role. Sight has long dominated birdwatching and is celebrated as the primary tool for identifying and appreciating birds. However, it's time to shine a light on the overlooked sense of hearing, which is just as vital.

Bird vocalisations are indispensable for understanding their behaviour– be it marking territory, attracting mates, issuing alarms, or simply communicating. Master mimics like drongos even use their calls to deceive and steal food. Without studying bird songs and sounds, these fascinating behaviours would go unnoticed.

Hearing also offers birders a significant advantage: you can detect a bird by its call without ever seeing it. This is especially crucial when distinguishing between visually similar species, such as Green vs. Greenish Warblers or Eastern vs. Western Yellow Wagtails. In many ways, sound is the first clue in birdwatching–a call or song reveals a bird's presence, often guiding the birder to their sighting.

In this issue, we spotlight the role of bird sounds as a powerful and essential tool in birdwatching and ornithology. Drawing from his vast experience as a renowned ornithologist Dr Asad Rahmani has written a fascinating article, **'The Delight of Bird Songs'**. Dr. Rahmani articulates the importance of bird songs beyond their melodic qualities.

Ever wondered how birds create such unique vocalisations? In **'Voices without Chords: The Secret behind Bird Songs'** Dr. Indrani Ghosh demystifies how birds produce complex sound frequencies and tones. Further enriching this theme, birder & physics educator Samim Akhter emphasises the **'Importance of Bird Sound recordings'** while highlighting the steps to do so.

Dr. Partha Pratim Chakraborty (MD) vividly shares how the haunting call of a Kingfisher sparked a lifelong fascination, drawing him into the mesmerising world of these extraordinary birds. Equally enchanting is the Bengali article 'Beyond the Melody: The Language of Birds in My Life' by Sohini Ghosh, where she recounts a touching story of her bond with birds that tap on her window sill, making their demands in charming, unique ways.

Adding a delightful twist, city historian, storyteller, and birder, Amitava Purakayastha,

in his Bengali article, delves into the quirky 18th-century cannabis culture of Calcutta, where individuals earned bird-inspired titles as a testament to their prowess in consuming cannabis–a hilarious and fascinating slice of cultural history. Writing about Bengal Rarities, BWS senior member Santanu Manna analyses the migration patterns of the Firethroat (*Calliope pectardens*) in West Bengal, highlighting key migration routes, stopover sites, and the impact of ecological factors on their seasonal movements and survival.

This month, several of our members had the privilege of attending the launch ceremony of Dr. Asad Rahmani's much-anticipated book, **"Living with Birds"**, in New Delhi. The book is already garnering widespread acclaim, and we extend our gratitude to Dr. Dipankar Ghose for his insightful review, which captures the essence of this compelling work. Living with Birds promises to be a treasure for bird enthusiasts and conservationists alike.

Over the past quarter, the School of Birds initiative has been at the forefront of raising awareness and fostering sensitivity toward birds and nature through various engaging activities. In this issue, we provide a detailed roundup of these efforts, along with updates on Birdwatchers' Society (BWS) activities from other regions. As always, our regular features, including crossword puzzles and birding humour, are here to entertain and inspire you.

It is with great joy that we open this issue featuring 'The Solitary Chukar', a breathtaking oil-on-canvas masterpiece by the gifted Jaipur-based artist, Somendra Singh. The artwork beautifully captures the elegance and solitude of this remarkable bird. Quite befittingly, we close this issue, with an image that captures a heartfelt self reflection from Navin Agarwal, who shares his deeply personal journey into the world of birding and the inspiration behind it. Together, these contributions create a fitting and inspiring tribute to the theme of bird songs, sounds, and their enduring impact on our lives.

We hope you like this issue '**Bird Songs & Sounds**'. Do take a moment and share your comments.

Happy Birding!

Fantail Editorial Team

Bird Art:
The Solitary Chukar

Oil on canvas

Somendra Singh

Somendra is based in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Beyond his professional pursuits, Somendra has a deep passion for capturing nature, wildlife, and birdlife through his paint brush and lens.

THE DELIGHT OF BIRD SONGS

DR. ASAD RAHMANI

Saurus Crane: Unison call of Sarus crane is generally started by a male to be followed by the female, both merging so perfectly that it looks that one bird is calling. Picture by Dhritiman Mukherjee

Kabhii kabhii gul-o-bulbul kii guftugu bhii suno
Ajab nahii-n-koi tarz-e-bayan nikal aae

This couplet is from a poem by a famous Urdu poet, Yawar Warsi. It tells us the importance of bird song in an allegorical way. It says, "Sometimes listen to the conversation of flowers and nightingales. It's not surprising if a new style of expression emerges." Or we can transliterate it this way - "Sometimes we should listen to songs of bulbuls of our gardens. You may not know what lessons you may learn".

It would be a cliché to say that birds and bird songs have fascinated human beings since time immemorial. Birds and their songs have been eulogized in every culture, every civilization and every language. It will be difficult to mention bird songs' cultural, aesthetic, scientific and literary value in this brief article, so I will stick to some facts.

Numerous animals are capable of producing sounds. Tigers roar, dogs bark, certain fish grunt, snakes hiss, frogs croak, and deer bleat. However, no group rivals birds for the remarkable diversity of sounds they create and the versatility of their songs. The melody of birdsong is rivaled perhaps only by the enchanting "songs" of dolphins and whales, about which lots of research has been done in recent decades.

CALL-NOTES

Our appreciation for birdsongs extends beyond their melodic qualities; they serve as a form of communication–a language rich with meaning. While we may not fully comprehend birdsong, we can glean some understanding from the expressions and behaviors of the birds. Ethologists–scientists who study animal behavior–are increasingly unraveling the meanings behind these avian vocalizations. Bird songs and calls are now used in the classification of similar-looking birds, such as warblers (along with genetics). For example, in 2016, the Himalayan Forest Thrush (*Zoothera salimalii*) was separated from Alpine Thrush (*Zoothera mollissima*) based on the song (and a few other characters). Earlier, they were considered as one species. The Alpine Thrush generally breeds above the tree line whereas the Himalayan Thrush breeds in forested habitats.

Just as with human language, not all bird sounds qualify as songs. Most of the sounds birds make are call-notes, akin to human conversations, serving a multitude of functions. Birds in flocks often engage in ongoing dialogue to stay connected. For example, the musical "aang-aang" of Bar-headed Geese (Anser indicus), exemplifies this. These majestic birds continuously call to one another in flight, creating one of nature's most exhilarating sounds. One of my most exhilarating experiences is watching two or three Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), sitting in a shade, 'talking' to each other during a hot afternoon, as if discussing the world's deteriorating environmental situation. I have watched them many times: one will call, the other will shake its head as if in agreement, and thus this conversation will go on for several minutes. After a gap of a few minutes, it will start again.

Red-vented Bulbul: During the Mughal period, the Red-vented and Red-whiskered Bulbuls were popular cage birds due to their melodious songs and cheerful nature . Picture by Dr.Asad Rahmani

While the primary purpose of call-notes is to facilitate contact among species members, there are also "sequestration notes" that help maintain distance among foraging birds. In food rich environment, a mixed flock of birds, called 'hunting party', move like a wave, eating different types of insects/larvae/seed/fruits, as they

methodically glean the forest canopy. The birds call frequently to remain in contact. The contact call is also heard when a pair or a small flock is foraging. What is generally not known much in ornithology circles is the 'sequestration calls' when a bird or a pair is foraging in food scarce environment (e.g., temperate forest in winter). Each individual must cover significant areas in a limited time to find enough food. If birds cluster too closely, competition for resources escalates, leaving food in nearby areas untouched. Consequently, flock members scatter equidistantly over larger territories, maximizing food utilization. Sequestration call-notes allow for this separation while still keeping birds in touch. This is particularly evident when a predator approaches, prompting alarm signals that warn the flock to disperse before harm occurs.

This sequestration notes or call is given to warn conspecific not to come to this area for foraging and keep their distance, i.e., do not duplicate territories to avoid competition for limited food. Please note that these foraging territories are temporary and should not be confused with breeding territories, though the function of both is similar- avoiding competition for limited resources.

Various other bird call-notes express fear, anxiety, pain, intimidation, threats, and greetings. The most recognizable is the danger signal. When an eagle or hawk appears, the nearest vigilant bird, often a bulbul or mynah, emits a sharp cry, prompting nearby birds to vanish into thick foliage. These sentinels not only protect their own species but also safeguard other birds in the area. The classical sentinel role is seen in the babblers of *Turdoides* group. Commonly called 'seven sisters' or '*sath bhai*', when a flock is foraging, one member, the sentinel, sits on a top of a bush and looks all around for danger. Sounding an alarm at the presence of a hawk or a raptor, makes the flock dive for cover. The sentinel is relieved when a satiated member replaces it. To evade predators, many birds, employ ventriloquistic calls, concealing their precise location from threats, particularly during their fledgling stages.

One striking natural phenomenon is the mobbing behavior exhibited by birds towards owls or cats. Birds understand that owls have poor daytime vision, and similarly, ground-dwelling predators like cats or mongooses cannot catch agile birds. Thus, when they spot such threats, birds will swarm them, often led by a House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) or a Black Drongo (*Edolius macrcercus*) issuing characteristic calls. Smaller birds like mynahs, bulbuls, sparrows, warblers, and babblers join in to scold their common foe, while remaining out of reach of the predator. Even tiny birds like Purple Sunbirds (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops alpebrosus*), and tailorbirds (*Orthotomus sutorius*) participate in this raucous display, seemingly relishing the humiliation of their adversary.

Brown-headed Barbet : It is known from ventriloquistic calls that makes difficult to locate its presence in thick foliage. Occasionally, it sits in the open and calls. Picture by Bhasmang Mehta

SONG

A song is essentially a more elaborate form of call-note. Interestingly, the primary function of a song—similar to sequestration call-notes—is to announce the presence of a male in a territory, deterring other males from trespassing. As British ornithologist Edward Max Nicholson noted, "birdsong is a sustained, more or less uninterrupted repetition of one or more notes conforming recognizably to a constant specific type, used by the male as an expression of independent sovereignty." Call-notes tend to be short and erratic, while songs are longer and generally more aesthetically pleasing to the ear. However, sweetness alone does not define a bird's sound as a song. In many species, true song is neither melodic, nor is it restricted to males. For instance, when a male Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) vocalizes "gotre-goo,gotre-goo," it is unmistakably a song, especially as it accompanies a display directed at a female. The loud, raucous call of Australian Kookaburras (*Dacelo novaeguineae*) cannot be called pleasant by any imagination but, they serve the purpose of establishing territories, attracting mates, and maintaining social hierarchy. In polyandrous species, such as the Buttonquail, it is the female that sings to attract males.

Bird songs can be broadly categorized into three types: advertising or territorial songs, signal songs, and emotional songs. The most developed and frequently heard is the territorial song, which is closely related to the birds' territorial behavior. This song serves two simultaneous purposes: attracting mates and repelling rivals of the same species and sex. It is typically sung by males.

To prevent overcrowding and competition for resources, most birds establish territories, particularly during the breeding season. In migratory species, males often arrive first at breeding grounds to proclaim their territories. Initial encounters among neighboring males frequently involve mock fights and displays of aggression. However, excessive aggression is neither desirable nor sustainable, as it can lead to injury and wasted energy. Thus, birds resort to advertising songs. Male birds select prominent perches within their territories and sing an extensive repertoire. When they spot other males, the intensity and volume of their songs increase, leading to a sort of "song-tennis" played over neutral ground. After the initial displays and vocal exchanges, male birds settle into defined territories, while those arriving later may face more challenges in establishing their space. The majority of genuine confrontations occur during this time, particularly when territory is limited.

Sea birds that breed on small oceanic islands have limited nesting sites, but vast ocean to forage. They fight mainly for nesting areas. Constant bickering for space and nesting material keeps pairs at equidistance, which I call 'beak distance', as can be seen in albatross, terns, gulls, guillemots, penguins, etc. In such colonies, each pair is nicely spaced out, leaving a 'neutral area' where incubating birds' beak do not reach even when the neck is fully stretched. In a colony with thousands of individuals, each bird has a characteristic call that is recognized by its mate and chick(s).

The second function of the territorial song is mate attraction; in some species, like the oriental magpie robin and thrushes, this is its primary purpose. In some species, after successfully attracting a female, the male may cease singing. Conversely, in many species, females also produce advertising songs following pair formation, with males displaying aggression towards other males and females towards other females.

Yellow-browed Bulbul: It is found in thick forests of south India and Sri Lanka, and known for its lound characteristic calls. Picture by Kallol Mukherjee

The second category, signal songs, coordinates activities among birds, especially within mated pairs and conspecifics. While advertising and signal songs are similar, the latter does not serve as a warning or threat. Moreover, signal songs are usually short and lack melody. For instance, a nesting female song sparrow is frequently called by her mate to facilitate feeding, thus conserving her time.

Much like human love-talk, signal songs reinforce mutual bonds of friendship. Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) greet each other with a form of unison song upon reuniting after a brief separation. Starlings similarly welcome new arrivals in their flocks with short songs.

The third type, emotional songs, is arguably the most beloved by both birds and humans. Some birds appear to sing purely for enjoyment, and this observation is not merely anthropomorphism. Scientists suggest that such singing may be an outlet for excess energy, akin to how young people burst into song when happy. Nature enthusiasts who have observed tailorbirds, Ashy Wren Warblers, or Pied Robins can attest that these birds sing for the sheer joy of singing. Even outside the breeding season, when songs may not be necessary, some birds can sing for hours. Additionally, the finest rhythms and tonal qualities are often reserved for emotional songs, and during these performances, the birds appear exuberantly cheerful—truly embodying a joie de vivre. This has been proved by experiments. When feel-good chemicals were injected in Starling (*Sturnis vulgaris*) by scientists of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, some birds sang more, clearly showing that they enjoy singing. We need to do such experiments in more species. It is also seen that a healthy bird, in prime condition sings for the sake of singing. While in flocks, bird sing high-rated non-sexually oriented songs. Young birds sing for training, and some rehearsal singing is noticed in some adult birds before the main breeding season. Recent studies tell us that birds silently sing in sleep while dreaming. An article published in Scientific American (vol. 331, No. 4, page 13, 2024), titled 'Dreaming in Song', says, "Zebra finches do something like lip-syncing while asleep, and they seem to silently practice singing a few notes as if learning a new instrument."

DUETTING AND ANTIPHONAL SINGING

A particularly fascinating form of avian vocalization is duetting, unique among animals. In this behavior, typically exhibited by mated pairs, two birds sing in harmony. This phenomenon is especially common in dense tropical forests where visual cues are scarce, necessitating frequent communication to avoid losing one another in thick foliage. A perfect duet results from intensive practice, leading to a unique duet pattern specific to each pair, although some simpler patterns may be species-specific. This specificity reinforces the pair bond, as the bird that responds correctly is indeed the mate.

A slightly modified version of the duet is antiphonal singing, where birds alternate their vocalizations in such a manner that to an observer, it sounds as though a single bird is singing. Antiphonal singing refines the duet, with one mate singing a few notes that the other then takes up, creating a seamless exchange that is difficult to distinguish as coming from two individuals unless both are visible. Sarus Crane and Black-necked Cranes (*Grus nigricollis*) are perfect examples that I have personally observed. Cranes long trumpet call is generally started by a male to be joined by the female, seemingly merging the sound as if it is coming from one bird.

DIALECTS

Recent research has shown that, like humans, birds possess vocal dialects. These dialects do not typically occur in colonial-nesting species as there is a mixing of birds coming from different areas for the sole purpose of nesting. Instead, they (dialect) develop in non-colonial breeders, where nestlings hear and emulate their parents and nearby adults. The dialect differs from the "recognition of parents' call", as seen in colonial birds.

Human dialects are shaped by children learning the intonation, diction, and style of their parents and elders; similarly, fledgling birds learn songs from their parents and mentors. With clear territorial divisions during breeding and rearing periods, young birds seldom encounter unfamiliar individuals of their species. For example, young male White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) learn the territorial song within the first three months after leaving the nest, thus acquiring the characteristic song of their region. In most bird species, the fundamental pattern of the song is inherited, meaning young birds can sing without prior learning. However, tonal nuances and additional notes are learned from adults. Any changes or additions made by parents are copied by their young, resulting in the formation of song dialects. I had this experience when in Assam, I found that the Tailorbird call is quite different from the call that I had heard in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. It is difficult to describe in words what was the difference, but any experienced ornithologists will know that Tailorbirds call differently in different regions of India.

In contrast, colonial birds such as gulls, puffins, guillemots, auks, and ducks, which breed and/or feed in large groups, expose their young to a cacophony of unfamiliar sounds and songs, resulting in a loss of selective learning regarding parental songs. This phenomenon can be likened to children in metropolitan areas encountering

diverse languages and dialects, leading to a hybrid speech. People who speak *sudh* (pure) Hindi are horrified when they listen to *Bumbaia* Hindi.

Sociologists suggest that historically, human dialects changed roughly every 30-40 miles. However, due to increased mobility and intermingling in recent years, such linguistic distinctions are diminishing. Nonetheless, the tone of a Rampuri speaker, for instance, remains distinct from that of a Moradabadi, even though the two towns are only 25 km apart. In birds, dialect regions are often quite small, sometimes only a few miles, with abrupt transitions between them. Geographical barriers like mountains, deserts, and seas effectively separate avian dialect zones.

Dialects, languages, cultures, geographical variations, and biodiversity go hand-in-hand. For example, high habitat diversity, geographical and temperature/rainfall variations leads to more species diversity and cultural and language diversity of humans. Papua New Guinea is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world with over 800 languages and over 1,000 distinct ethnic groups, in an area of 462,840 km^2. Due to its harsh geography, consisting of mountains, jungles, and isolated river valleys, it has over 600 different tribes, over 1,000 distinct ethnic groups and hundreds of different languages. Sometimes, a major river valley divides two groups, each with its own language/dialects. No wonder, nearly 900 species of birds are found in Papua New Guinea, of which 108 are endemic, meaning not found anywhere else in the world.

ONOMATOPOEIC NAMES

According to Mariam-Webster dictionary, onomatopoeic is, "the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it", for example buzz, hiss. The Oxford dictionary has similar explanation, "The formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (e.g. cuckoo, sizzle). The word comes from Greek onomatopoeia or 'word-making'. The English term was first recorded from the late 16th century. A few birds are named after the song that make. Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus conorus*) is the first to come in mind as it is named after its familiar call, heard in the spring and summer. Less know is Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), widely distributed in Europe, Asia and Africa, named as its hollow, far-reaching and trisyllabic call "hoop-hoop-hoop". In Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Urdu, it is called 'hud-hud', and Turkish people call it 'ibibik. The Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) is also named on the sound it makes: kooel, koyal or something similar-sounding. The Lapwing (*Venellus vanellus*) is also known as the peewit in imitation of its display calls.

Hoopoe: Hoopoe is one of the most widespread birds of the world, found in Asia, Europe and Africa. Its name is derived from its 'hoop-hoop' or 'hud-hud' call. It is considered a sacred bird in Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. Picture by Kallol Mukherjee

Here I must mention that in different languages/cultures, the same bird song or call is described differently based on the language and vocabulary. For example, our domestic bantam cock sounds cock-a-doodle-doo in English, but the Chinese listens as woo-wo-wo, and Portugues say, it is saying cocoricó. Interesting the Italian listen is as *chicchirichì*, and Japanese say it is calling 'kokekokko'. In Hindi we say it is saying '*koo-kookad-ko*'.

The Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) popularly known in Hindi as papiha due to its call. However, the same call was heard by British as 'brain-fever, brain-fever', hence its English name 'brainfever bird'. There are hundreds of stories and legends about '*papiha*' in Indian culture. Some say that the British used to become so tired of its persistent calls that they would get 'brain fever', hence its moniker. K. N. Dave in his classical book, Birds in *Sanskrit Literature*, writes on page 132, "The voice of the Hawk Cuckoo never caused 'brain-fever' to the nature-loving except, of course, the love-lorn", and then he adds beautiful Sanskrit excerpts from Mahabharat and Ramayan.

MIMICRY

Another captivating avian behavior is vocal mimicry. While physical and physiological mimicry can be observed in moths, butterflies, snakes, and aardwolves, vocal mimicry appears to be unique among birds. In the animal kingdom, mimicry often arises when harmless species resemble harmful relatives to confuse predators. For example, many edible moths mimic the appearance of toxic relatives, making it difficult for enemies to distinguish between them. Recent studies in Africa have also revealed that the harmless aardwolf mimics the aggressive hyena, thereby avoiding predation. The social significance of mimicry in birds, however, remains poorly understood. Some researchers consider it a primitive trait, while others argue it represents a specialized and evolved behavior.

Prof W.H. Thorpe from Cambridge University's Department of Animal Behaviour posits that mimicry might simply demonstrate behavioral adaptability, which is valuable in various contexts. However, outside a few species, most mimics do not fully leverage their artistic talents in terms of foraging or protecting their eggs and nests. It is reasonable to speculate that, much like humans, birds also enjoy imitation. Prof. Thorpe apart from his academic acclaim was a famous British zoologist, ethologist and ornithologist.

Two of the most renowned song mimics are the Super Lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) from Australia and the Mockingbird from America. The Lyrebird is so skilled in mimicry that it has earned the title of a "one-man band." It can replicate an astounding array of sounds—from the calls of cockatoos and the whirring of their wings to the barking of dogs, the rumble of thunder, the rustling of cattle, a schoolboy's whistle, the sobs of a lost child, car horns, and the croaks of frogs, all with remarkable precision. Moreover, the Lyrebird's original song is both beautiful and powerful; those who have experienced it in Australia's fern-laden forests are unlikely to forget it. YouTube is full of videos, some of doubtful quality, on the mimicry of Lyrebird.

The American Mockingbird, scientifically known as *Mimus polyglottis*, truly lives up to its name. Mockingbirds are the polyglots of the avian world, adept at imitating songs from over forty different bird species, often enhancing them in the process. However, they also display individuality; some stick closely to their own song while others engage in mimicry.

The human fascination with the Mockingbird's song has been immortalized in a popular tune. Nearly a century ago, Richard Milburn, a barber in Philadelphia, was a natural-born whistler and one of his favorite melodies was that of the Mockingbird. Composer Septimus Winner heard Milburn's whistled tune and crafted lyrics for it, which were published in 1855 as the "Sentimental Ethiopian Ballad–Listen to the Mocking Bird." The song narrates a man's sorrow as he hears the Mockingbird sing over the grave of his beloved, and it has since gained worldwide acclaim. The tune is still alive and its various modifications are still popular even after 125 years. I suggest readers to listen to it on YouTube.

Trade in song birds has depleted birds from many forests in Indonesia, Picture by Dr. Asad Rahmani

In Hongkong, Indonesia, Malaysia, keeping song bird is fashionable, Picture by Dr. Asad Rahmani

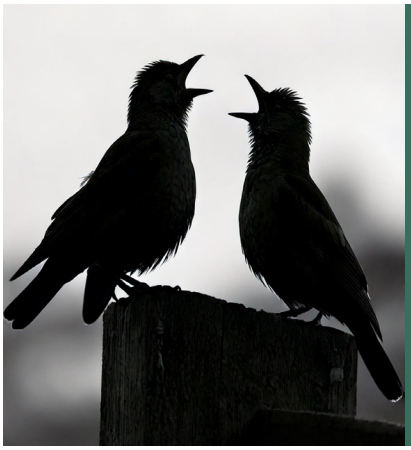
Another distinctive trait of Mockingbirds is their selective imitation; they tend to mimic only the most melodious and pleasant sounds. Furthermore, mockingbirds enhance the songs of other birds, making any sound they produce more appealing. Longfellow aptly captured this in his verse, noting that from a mockingbird's "little throat" flows "floods of delirious music that the whole air and the woods and the waves seem silent to listen."

Closer home, we have the Blue Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*) that sings melodiously for many minutes throughout the day, that is why locals in Kashmir call it '*hazar-dastan*' or tellers of hundred stories. Next time you listen to a bird song, try to find out what message it is conveying to us. Probably, with rapid developments in AI we will one day find out the messages of *gul-o-bulbul* that poet Warsi so beautifully mentioned in his couplet.

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.



VOICES WITHOUT CHORDS:
THE SECRET BEHIND BIRD SONGS

DR. INDRANI GHOSH

True to their sounds of music as well as cacophony, the birds have a unique vocalization structure not seen in any other groups of animals. Sounds are modes of communications or signals. In comparison, to other modes of communication, sound is more effective and can reach audiences at different distances. Communication signals transmit information about a signalers status, intentions, actions, etc. Acoustic communication system includes three primary components: signal senders, receiver and the transmission of signals through the medium. The signals are transmitted through often complex surrounding that can distort the signal in both temporal and frequency domains, and also mask or absorb signal energy leading to diminished signal amplitude. Signals then reach one or more receivers that perceive the signal with an auditory system that has been shaped, at least initially, by other selective factors, such as for the perception of predators or prey. **In this article, we focus on the vocal source of acoustic signaling in birds.**

A bird's way of producing sound is similar to that of human beings with a subtle difference. In humans, voice is generated through airflow from the lungs. When one intends to speak, the air pressure builds up below the larynx. The increased air pressure forces the vocal folds apart, creating a narrow slit. Air from the lungs is then forced through the slit, leading the vocal folds[1] (vocal cords) to vibrate. The vibrations create sound waves within the mouth, nose and pharynx. The sounds are then shaped into speech by the mouth, lips teeth and jaw.

The birds do have larynx but it is not their voice box. They produce sound through an organ unique to them called the "syrinx", which is located at the caudal end of the trachea. The reason for the sound box to be deep seated near the tracheobronchial junction for birds is an unsolved mystery.

It would be good to understand the respiratory system of the birds to understand the mechanism of sound production through syrinx. Birds have fine tubes (parabronchi) in their lungs through which gas exchange takes place. The parabronchi are perfused through the bellows-like action of the air-sac system. The air sacs are separated into two functional sets, anterior and posterior to the lung. One of the anterior air sacs, interclavicular air sac, surrounds the tracheobronchial juncture-syrinx. The unique design of the bird's respiratory system allows ventilation of the gas-exchange surface with oxygenated air during both respiratory phases (inspiration and expiration).

This supports the high metabolic activity of birds and facilitates remarkable patterns of vocal behavior.

The syrinx is devoid of numerous vocal folds. Vibrations of tissues (labia) at the walls of the syrinx, created due to the air flowing, sets up a self-oscillating system that modulates the airflow and produces the sound. There is an added advantage, the long supravocal tract (comprising of respiratory pathway above syrinx, i.e trachea and other supravocal structures) help produce loud sounds. It is notable to mention that myoelastic-aerodynamic (MEAD)[2] theory is applicable to sound producing mechanism for both human and birds. Generally, the phonation occurs during expiration. The narrowing of the syringeal airway produces increased air velocity that brings the elastic tissues together. Closing of the syringeal valves and/or increasing the resistance to stretching in the tissue generate opposing forces that cause reopening of the airways. This creates a dynamic wave along the caudo-cranial axis of the fold and switches from diverging to a converging profile, which allows the oscillation to be self-controlled.

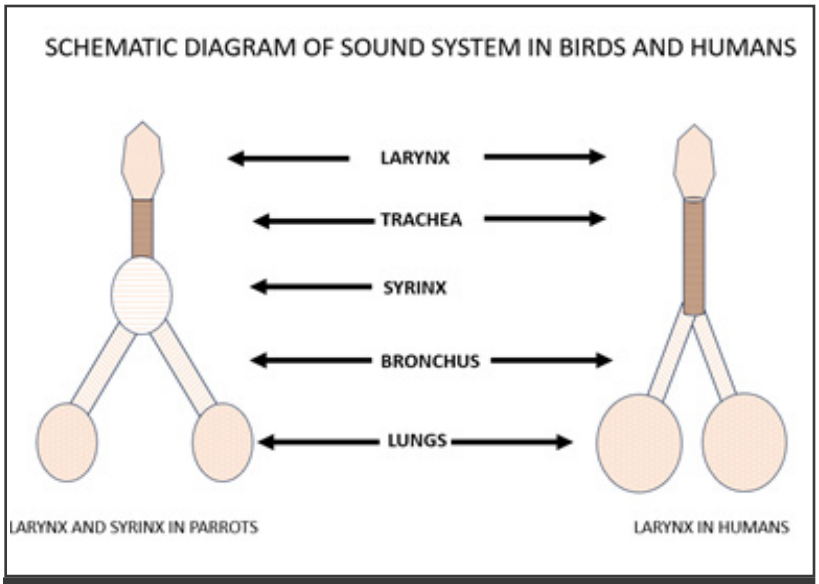


FIGURE 1: COMPARISON BETWEEN SOUND ORGANS IN BIRDS AND HUMANS

The major differences between the human and birds sound producing organs larynx and syrinx are summarized below.

Table 1: Structural and functional comparison between larynx and syrinx

Structure and function	Larynx	Syrinx
Location	In the neck region.	In the chest region.
Structure	Built of cartilages, scles,ligaments. Has several muscular folds .	Built of cartilaginous rings, vibrating membranes, and muscles.
Sound production	The laynx uses only 10% of the air that passes through its vocal folds.	Syrinx is more efficient. Uses 100% of the air that passes through it.
Vocalizations	Vocalization through vibration of muscular folds of larynx.	Can produce complex vocalizations due to lateralization (with muscles on the left and right branch modulating independently) such as singing two notes at the same time.

The position, structure and musculature of the syrinx determines the variation in sounds of birds and also used as taxonomic characteristics. Aside from this major impact, it is unknown to what degree the substantial morphological variation in cartilage shape and arrangement becomes relevant for the range of acoustic features that can be produced. The labia varies from thin to being thick. The taxonomic distribution due to evolutionary innovations are presented below:

- **Number of sound sources:**

  The presence of two-three sources allow for multiple independent simultaneous tones.

  - There is a single source of sound. Where the syringeal labia are suspended on tracheal rings, there is only one sound. For example in rartites, pigeons and parrots, etc.
  - There is more than one source of sound. If the syrinx is located below the tracheobronchial junction, there are two sound sources, one on each bronchus. They produce two independent tones simultaneously that are also controlled independently. Secondly, if the two sources are tuned to different frequency ranges, total frequency range expands substantially. This mechanism is found in oscines[3] , paleognaths such as ostrich and Neognaths such as penguins, puffins, rails, etc,.
  - Three sources are found in tracheophone suboscines[4] (birds in suborder Tyranni of Order Passeriformes). A third source has evolved where a pair of tracheal membranes present on the ventral and dorsal surface on the of the trachea right above the syrinx.

- **Morphological specialization:**

  Affects the frequency range, resonance for few frequencies

  - Skeletal elements protrude from the cartilage on which the labia is attached.
  - Large bulb-like structure on their syrinx – Male ducks.

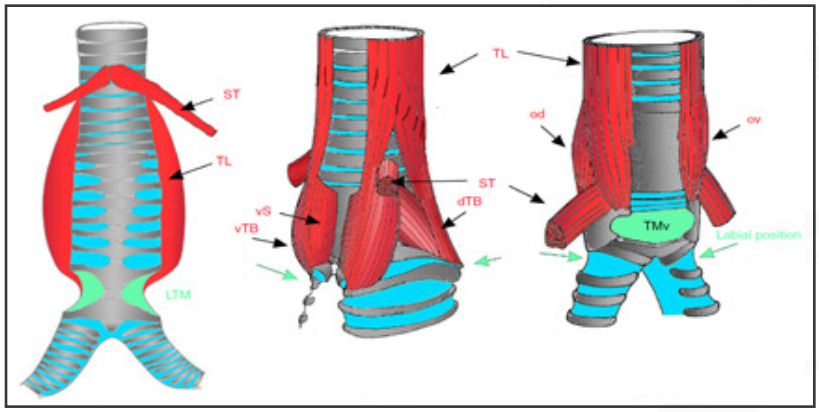


Figure 2: Schematic illustration of different types of syrinxes in birds[5]

- **Vocal fold layering:**

  The number of folds in the labia or membrane facilitates the generation of a broader frequency range. This degree of layering is often seen in the oscine (song birds) and also in suboscines.

- **Intrinsic syrinx musculature:**

  TIntrinsic syrinx musculature: The original set of syringeal muscles comprises of abductor and adductors. New musculature has developed in the syringeal areas in several clades independently, which are known as 'intrinsic musculature'. These additional muscles help in increased control over sound frequency and amplitude.The oscines were observed to have an elaborate set of intrinsic syringeal muscles though these are also present in suboscine passerines, parrots, hummingbirds, and several other taxa.

Superfast musculature:

Syringeal muscles in oscines and doves show specialization for rapid contraction kinetics. High muscle contraction-relaxation speed requires several parallel adaptations that includes superfast myosin and increased speed of calcium cycling between sarcoplasmic reticulum and myoplasm. This adaptation is found in oscines and probably sub-oscines, parrots.

Neural substrate for vocal imitation learning:

Neural substrate for vocal imitation learning: The signals is sometimes learnt through imitation. Neurobiological studies conducted majorly in oscines reveal minute details of the acquisition practice and production of stereotyped acoustic behaviour. The neural substrate for vocal imitation learning is present in oscines, parrots, hummingbirds, etc,. This adaptation helps in increased vocal repertoires, independent control of multiple sound sources. multiple sound sources.

1 *The terminology vocal cords are more often used by singers. Current research has resulted in better understanding of anatomy and function of larynx leading to the change in terminology of vocal cord to vocal folds.*

2 *Elemans, C.P., Rasmussen, J.H., Herbst, C., Düring, D.N., Zollinger, S.A., Brumm, H., Srivastava, K., Svane, N., Ding, M., Larsen, O.N., et al. (2015). Universal mechanisms of sound production and control in birds and mammals. Nat. Commun. 6, 8978.*

3 *Denoting passerine birds of a large division that includes the songbirds. They are vocal learners*

4 *bird of the suborder Tyranni of the order Passeriformes (perching birds, or passerines)*

5 *Abbreviations: ST, m. sternotrachealis; TL, m. tracheolateralis; LTM, lateral tympaniform membrane; vS, m. syringealis ventralis; vTB, m. tracheobronchialis ventralis; dTB, m. tracheobronchialis dorsalis; Od, m. obliquus dorsalis; Ov, m. obliquus ventralis; TMv, ventral tracheal membrane, the dorsal counterpart of which is not visible in this view.*

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About Author

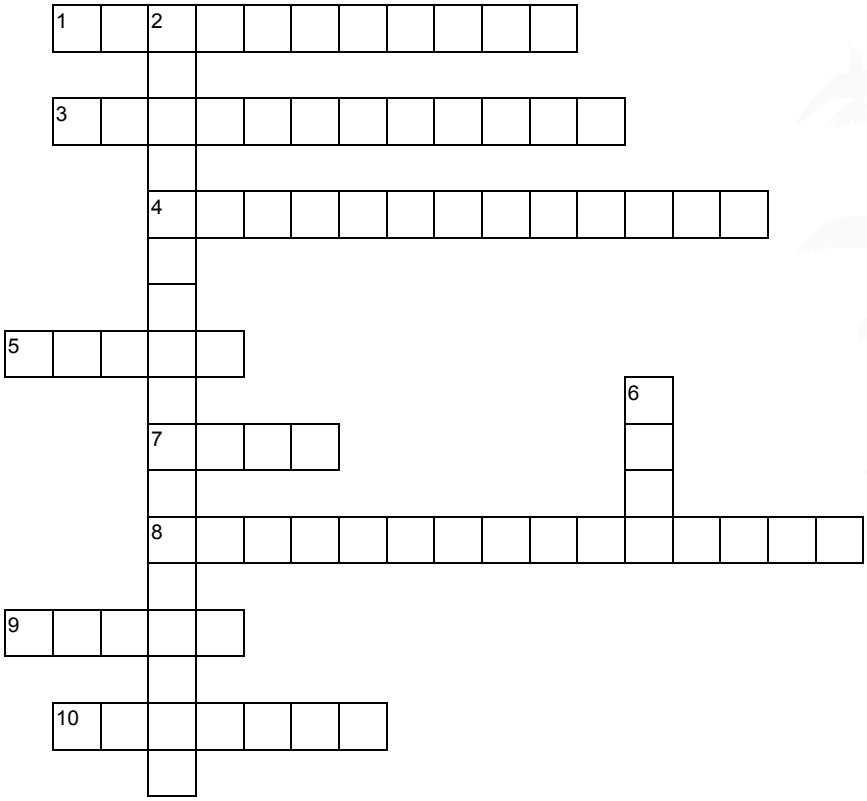
Dr. Indrani Ghosh

Dr. Indrani Ghosh, an avid nature lover, is an environmental consultant with a deep passion for sustainability and conservation. Recently, she has rekindled her interest in birding, finding joy and inspiration in observing the avian world. Her keen eye for detail and love for nature continue to shape her professional and personal endeavors.

CROSSWORD

HIYA CHATTERJEE

What Is It?



Across

1 This well-known novel was named after a bird that can imitate 200 sounds

3 This bird's song sounds sad and wistful

4 This bird has the loudest, alarm-like call in the world

5 Birds such as the common loon make this human-like sound

7 The male ruffed grouse makes this deep thrumming sound that sounds like a popular musical instrument

8 This bird's inimitable call had earned it the name 'thunder-pumper' and 'belcher-squelcher'

9 A harsh sound associated with frogs, but also made by some birds like the common raven

10 A bird sound that used to be the name of a social media platform

Down

2 This bird is a scientific and musical wonder for the way it sings with its wings

6 A call made by some owls, 'what a _!'

Yellow-eyed Babbler: Picture by Samim Akhter

IMPORTANCE OF BIRD-SOUND RECORDING

SAMIM AKHTER

From ancient times, humans have always been intertwined with nature in various ways. Whether you're in a bustling city or a secluded wilderness, you can't start your day without the cheerful melody of birdsong. It's not just a soothing sound to relax to, but also a reminder of the beauty of the natural world. All we have to do is take a moment to listen and appreciate its wonders.

Bird sound recording, also known as bird vocalization or bird song recording, is an essential tool in the study and preservation of bird species. It provides invaluable insights into avian behavior, migration patterns, and the health of ecosystems. As human activity continues to alter natural habitats, the importance of bird sound recording has grown significantly, becoming a key aspect of ecological research, conservation efforts, and environmental monitoring.

Check out this recording of the springtime dawn chorus from 2023 at Jaguli Grassland in Nadia District, West Bengal, India!

Picture by Samim Akhter

IF YOU ARE A BEGINNER, WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

To begin this amazing journey, awaken your curiosity by listening to the beautiful and diverse sounds that birds create. Over time, you'll be able to recognize different bird species just by their calls, which is a rewarding skill to have. All you need to start is a sound recorder and to learn some recording techniques. You can even share your recordings on Macaulay Library or Xeno Canto to contribute to the study of natural history. So why not take that first step? I promise it will boost your serotonin levels and make you feel great!

SONG & CALL, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

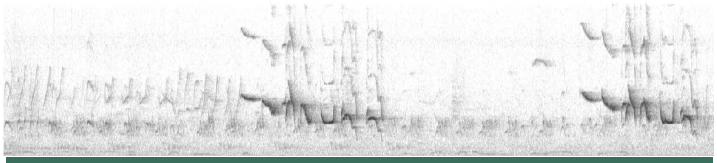
Bird song and bird call are two distinct types of vocalizations that birds use for different purposes. Bird songs are mainly longer, more complex, and melodious, used mainly by males during the breeding season to attract mates, establish territory, and scare off rivals.

In contrast, bird calls are shorter, simpler, and often repetitive, used year-round for a variety of functions such as communication between individuals, warning of danger, or identifying oneself to others.

While songs are primarily associated with mating and territory and are most common in the spring and summer, calls are used throughout the year for everyday interactions, including contact calls between parents and chicks or alarm calls to signal threats. Thus, songs tend to be more elaborate and seasonal, while calls are functional and more frequent.

Oriental Magpie-Robin: Picture by Samim Akhter

Here is an example of difference between song and call of an Oritental Magpie-Robin:



Oriental Magpie-Robin (Song)

Click to listen

Oriental Magpie-Robin (Call)

Click to listen

IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING BIRD SOUNDS:

I. Understanding Bird Behavior and Communication

Birds use vocalizations for a variety of reasons, from attracting mates to establishing territory, warning of predators, and communicating with flock members. Each species has a unique repertoire of sounds that can reveal much about their behavior and social structures. By recording these sounds, researchers gain a deeper understanding of how birds interact within their communities and adapt to their environment.

For example, songbirds are known for their intricate songs, often learned from adult tutors. These songs may change in response to environmental factors such as the availability of food or the presence of rival birds. By documenting these vocalizations over time, scientists can observe how these factors influence song variation and the health of populations.

II. Monitoring Bird Populations and Biodiversity

Bird song recording plays a crucial role in monitoring bird populations and understanding their distribution. In many regions, especially remote or difficult-to-access areas, direct observation of bird populations can be challenging. Sound recordings, however, allow to detect the presence of birds in an area by identifying specific calls or songs. This non-invasive method of monitoring can be conducted over large areas and repeated over time to assess population trends.

III. Assessing Ecosystem Health

Birds are often considered "indicator species" because they reflect the health of their environment. Changes in bird populations, behavior, or vocalizations can point to larger ecological shifts. For instance, a decline in the frequency or variety of bird songs may indicate habitat degradation, pollution, or climate change. Conversely, an increase in bird diversity or vocalization activity can signal a healthier, more balanced ecosystem.

Sound recordings provide a permanent record of bird activity that can be compared across years or decades, helping researchers track long-term ecological trends. In areas where environmental changes are rapid or difficult to monitor, such as urban or coastal regions, bird sound recording can offer real-time data on ecosystem conditions.

IV. Conservation Efforts and Habitat Protection

One of the primary goals of bird sound recording is to support conservation efforts. As human activity leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, many bird species face increasing threats to their survival. Sound recordings help identify critical habitats for conservation, monitor species at risk of extinction, and assess the impact of conservation measures.

For example, recordings of endangered species like the Kakapo or the California condor can aid in the development of targeted conservation strategies, such as habitat restoration, captive breeding programs, and anti-poaching efforts. Furthermore, bird sound recording can help enforce legal protections for birds, as it provides concrete evidence of their presence in protected areas.

V. Technological Advancements in Bird Sound Recording

Technological advancements have significantly improved the way bird sounds are recorded and analyzed. Compact and high-quality microphones, digital recording equipment, and machine learning algorithms allow for clearer and more accurate recordings, even in challenging environments. In some cases, remote recording devices can be left in the field to capture bird sounds 24/7 without disturbing the birds.

Moreover, the development of software tools for analyzing bird sounds has made it easier to identify species, assess vocalization patterns, and detect subtle changes in bird communication. These advancements have expanded the scope of bird sound recording, enabling researchers to study birds in ways that were once impossible.

SOME OF MY FAVOURITE RECORDINGS!

Bachman's Sparrow	Common Loon	Western Hooded Pitta	Red-wattled Lapwing

Click on the bird name to listen

LASTLY

Bird sound recording is a powerful tool that offers a window into the lives of birds and the ecosystems they inhabit. It helps scientists monitor bird populations, assess the health of ecosystems, and develop effective conservation strategies. Beyond its scientific value, bird sound recording holds a deeper connection between humans and the natural world, encouraging efforts to protect and preserve our avian neighbors for future generations.

In a time of rapid environmental change, the ability to record, analyze, and understand bird sounds has never been more important. Through continued research and technological innovation, bird sound recording will remain a critical component of global efforts to safeguard biodiversity and protect the planet's ecosystems.

> *My recordings might be helpful to scientists or researchers who are trying to study bird sounds, or bird distribution, or things that we haven't even imagined.*
>
> *-Archie Jiang, sound recordist and undergraduate at Cornell University.*

...and the closing note is dedicated to a Common Potoo. Click below to Listen.

Common Potoo

About Author

Samim Akhter

Samim Akhter is a Physics educator based in Barasat with a passion that extends far beyond the classroom. As an avid birdwatcher, he is particularly drawn to bird sound recording and the fascinating field of soundscape ecology. Immersing himself in nature, he finds joy in observing the sights and sounds of the natural world and continuously expanding his knowledge. When not exploring the outdoors, Samim enjoys reading, listening to music, and engaging with a community of like-minded individuals who share his love for nature and learning.

The "brave" Black-capped Kingfisher

THE WEIRD NOISES THAT WOKE ME UP & DROVE ME TO "THE LAND OF KINGFISHERS"

DR. PARTHA PRATIM CHAKRABORTY

It first happened in an early morning during one of the springs in Kolkata, not long after I grew an interest in birding and bird photography. I was lying in my bed in the comfort of the air conditioner, sound asleep hugging the body pillow. And then, the very "scream", that made me sit bolt upright. The shrill "peu-peu-pow" kind of shriek sounded like a caterwaul within my room; but I found everything around me in place. I soon realized that the noise was outside my bedroom window, and I traced it to a nearby tree. To my utter surprise, I found a kingfisher (Picture 1) with a large scarlet bill basking in the early morning sun and calling in tandem.

Picture 1: Stork-billed Kingfisher shouting "peu-peu-pow"

Click to listen Stork-billed Kingfisher

Her colors, a mixture of vibrant scarlet, olive-brown, buff and dark green-blue, were as dramatic as her call. Being a novice in the field of birding at that point of time, I was unaware of the different species of the kingfisher family, leave alone the calls they make. Soon I learned that it was a Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*).

Another noise that used to jolt me awake was a whistle like piercing "ki-e-ee-ee-lililili ki-e-ee-ee lililili ki-e-ee-ee lililili" trill moving across my room. After many futile attempts I could track the sound to a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) perched close to my balcony in a cloudy morning.

Picture 2: White-throated Kingfisher

Click to listen White-throated Kingfisher

Those two incidents taught the new birder in me a very important lesion; learning bird calls/songs is a great way to identify birds. Having listened to the two distinctly different calls from two different members of a same family in my backyard, I decided to take a step forward by engaging myself in the pursuit of the other species of Kingfisher. If someone wants to learn more about them, what better place to start than with the Sundarbans, home to 8 odd species of Kingfisher, aptly called "the land of kingfishers".

Kingfisher! When did I first hear about them? I find it really hard to recall. It could well be those colorful pre-nursey picture books with glossy pages. Having done my schooling in a suburban area of the southern West Bengal in the late nineties with Bengali medium, I was familiar with the word "মাছরাঙা" during my childhood; but 'kingfisher'? I never knew. However, one thing is for sure: The word 'kingfisher' has always stuck in my mind since I had my first sip of beer, brewed by the United Breweries, in my teenage, only to get reinforced by the thrill of my first flight with the Kingfisher Airlines in early 2000.

Jump-cut, February 2023. I found myself on a motorboat, cruising along the maze-like tributaries of the brackish water river intersecting the mangrove forest of the Sundarbans. These forests host a lot of kingfishers, varying in size, colour, and also in the way they ''talk''. It was not a long wait before I spotted this nice little fellow perching on a twig just above the water level (*Picture 3*); and, Oh my gosh, it looked familiar to me. I had seen her featuring in the label of my first bottle of beer and on the tail of the aircraft on my first flight. This was a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). As we sailed closer, I could hear the faint short "chee chee", repeated two or three times. The size of the bird and the loudness of its call were a perfect match. The orange colour of the lower mandible told me that it was her.

Picture 3: Common Kingfisher shrieking "chee chee"

While returning to my stay at the fag end of the day, the guide drew my attention to a bird sitting alone on a low branch overhanging the water, a Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*). The jet black head, white collar, glistening blue tail, blood-red bill and the orange-rufous underparts aflame in the slanting rays of the setting sun was a treat to my eyes (*Article header photo*). The fellow was very courageous and allowed us astoundingly close, almost within touching distance. I could easily make out even the finest details of its plumage, but could not hear its call. After sometime the "Black Beauty" took the flight with a cackling "ki-ki-ki-ki-ki" revealing the white flashes on the underwings.

The trip in the next morning started off with the sighting of a Collared Kingfisher (*Todiramphus chloris*). The "kek-kek-kek-kek" call was audible from a distance in the serene and peaceful surroundings. As we drove our boat closer, the contrast between the white collar and the greenish-blue crown and upperparts looked even more beautiful (*Picture 5*). The brighter blue wings and tail further added to its aesthetics. The combination of the colours reminded me of the government-owned properties of my state. By virtue of its plumage, the Collared Kingfisher might provide a tough competition to the White-throated Kingfisher for the "coveted crown" of the state bird of West Bengal, it ever catches the appropriate eyes.

Picture 5: Collared Kingfisher making the "kek-kek-kek-kek " call

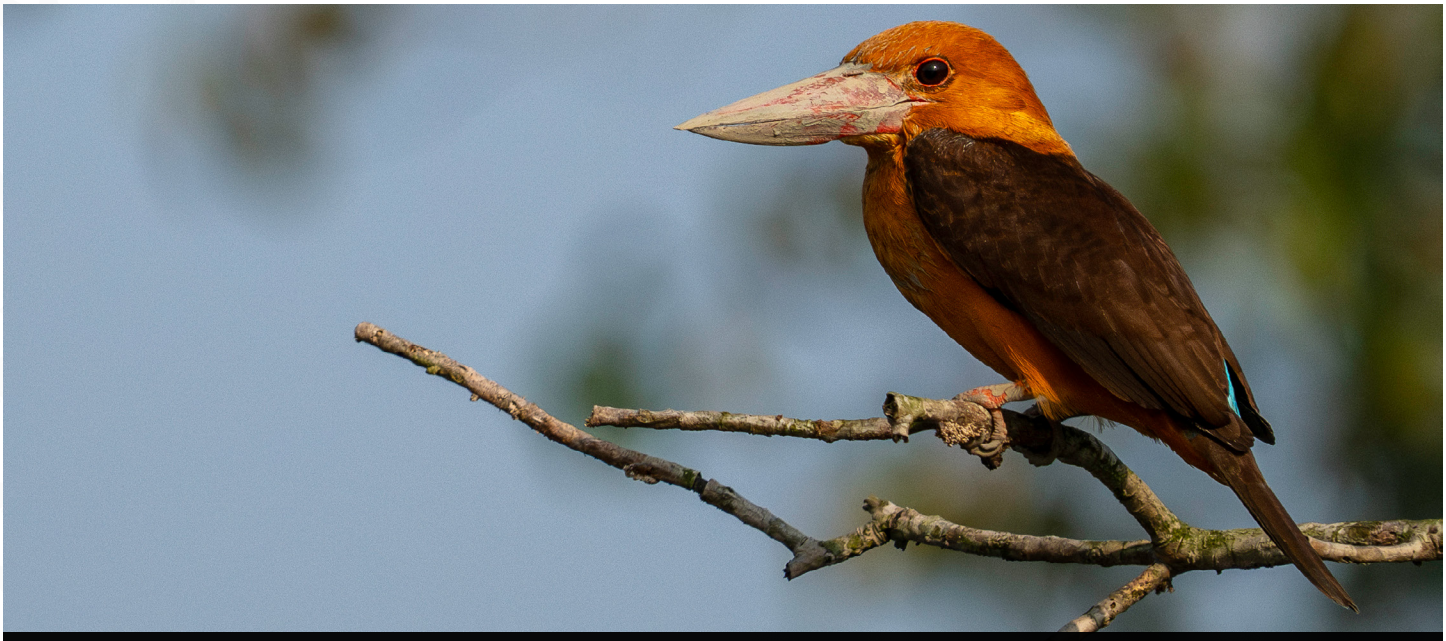
There were few more species to search for, but so far, so good.

Next came the Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), sitting far away on a dead head log. It did not wear the colourful feathers like its other colleagues, but carried the timeless elegance of black and white. It was pretty shy and had a large "circle of fear". The bird wanted us not to come any closer and it flew away once we approached closer (*Picture 6*). I missed its sharp "chirruk chirruk" notes.

Picture 6: Pied Kingfisher

Click to listen Pied Kingfisher

Then we decided to try our luck in a different creek and our effort seemed to pay off. The flash of the orange of dark brown colouration of a Brown-winged Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis amauroptera*) was easily visible from a distance. Slowly but steadily, we approached her. Then started the game of patience, that lasted for about 30 minutes. We waited to listen to her call, but, painted her scarlet bills with mud, she sat close-lipped all along (*Picture 7*). My watch showed five past five; it was time to leave the jungle and we headed back to our stay. As we were about to disembark, a White-throated Kingfisher came from nowhere, sat on the mast of our motorboat for seconds, and flew away whistling "ki-e-ee-ee-lililili ki-e-ee-ee lililili ki-e-ee-ee lililili"; a circle was completed.



Picture 7: Brown-winged Kingfisher displaying her vibrant colours.

The trip to the Sundarbans was my first 'official' birding tour, and I could not have asked for more. I captured five different species in frame and three of them cheered me up with their chirps. The success story might well be put down to the so called "beginner's luck". By the way, please take a note that I did not spend a word or two about the kaleidoscope of avifauna and mammals, the forest complex offered to me in addition to the kingfishers. To add to that the culinary delights, that came with the tour as a "perk". In the Sundarbans, unlike any birding trip, you earn a lot of calories, and burn almost none; hence you are likely gain one to two kilograms overnight. While driving back home, I drew up a checklist of the remaining species of kingfisher found in India, the Ruddy, the Crested, the Blue-eared, the Blyth's, and the cutest of them all, the Oriental Dwarf. I won't mind carrying the "beginner's luck" while exploring these avian beauties in my future endeavours.

All photographs by author

Stork-billed Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher call recorded by Samim Akhter
White-throated Kingfisher call recorded by Priyam C

About Author

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Dr. Partha Pratim Chakraborty is an endocrinologist by profession and holds the faculty position in the Department of Endocrinology, Medical College, Kolkata. He is a wildlife enthusiast with a keen interest in birds. His love for birding and bird photography has now grown into a full-blown passion.

Striated Babbler: Picture by Upamanyu Chakraborty

সুরের বাইরে: আমার জীবনে পাখিদের ভাষা

(BEYOND THE MELODY: THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS IN MY LIFE)

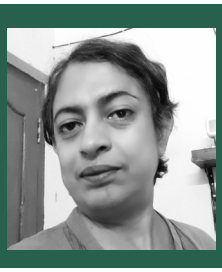
সোহিনী ঘোষ

মঙ্গলকোট বিডিও অফিস-চত্বর। আমার অফিস–আবাসন। সামনে বিশাল এক শিমুল গাছ। সে গাছে কত যে পাখির আনাগোনা! [https://ebird.org/checklist/S172577520] আবাসনের বাসিন্দা আমি, আমার কর্তা আর রোজকার অতিথি অন্তত পাঁচ-ছয় প্রজাতির পাখি। এদের মধ্যে সাতসকালে জানলায় বসে গুটুরগু করে দুই জোড়া কণ্ঠী ঘুঘু (Eurasian Collared Dove)। আমার আর অ্যালার্ম লাগেনা। ওদের আলাপচারিতা ঘুম ভাঙানোর জন্য যথেষ্ট। তারপরেই আগমন হয় একদল ছাতারের (Jungle Babbler)। দুপুরের দিকে আসে দুটি কাক (House Crow) আর তিন-চারটি শালিখ (Common Myna)। মাঝে মাঝে দেখা দেয় তিন-চারটি হরিয়াল (Yellow-footed Green Pigeon) আর একটি কাঠঠোকরা (Black-rumped Flameback)। আহা, বুলবুলি (Red-vented Bulbul) আর পায়রাদের (Rock Pigeon) কথা তো বলতে ভুলেই গেলাম।

এই আবাসনে আসার পর থেকে জানলার গ্রিলে থালায় পাউরুটি, চাল, গোটা-মুগ ডাল আর বড় এক বাটি জল রাখা শুরু করেছিলাম, শিমুল গাছে পাখির মেলা দেখে। আর অমনি নানা ধরণের পাখি খেতে আসা শুরু করে। বলে রাখা ভাল, খাবার দেওয়ার আগে হরিয়াল [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/kkPgoH8uWsM] আর বেনেবৌদের [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7Ee6UyTCgkE] আসা যাওয়া ছিল আবাসনের জানলায়। বোধহয় অন্য পাখিদের উৎপাতে তারা আর জানলায় এসে বসে না। এদের মধ্যে ছাতারেরাই দলে ভারি। তারা খুব রাগী। আর তাদের টিম-লিডার, এক লেজ-কাটা ছাতারে সবচেয়ে বেশী রাগ প্রকাশ করতো। সে এসে পাঁউরুটির টুকরো দেখতে না পেলেই রেগে গিয়ে জানলার কাঁচে অনবরত "ঠকঠক, ঠকঠকঠক, ঠকঠক" এই করতে থাকতো (চাল, ডাল ওর ঠিক মনে ধরেনা)। ওর বকা খেয়ে কোনো মতে দু-তিনটে পাঁউরুটিকে খুব ছোট টুকরো করে প্লেটে দেওয়া, তারপর শান্তি। সপরিবার তারা মিনিট পাঁচেকের মধ্যে পাঁউরুটি সাফ করে ফুড়ুৎ। ছাতারেদের পিছনে লাইন দিয়ে বসে থাকে চার-পাঁচটি বুলবুলি। যতক্ষণ ছাতারেরা খায়, ওরা পাশের জানলায় বসে অপেক্ষা করে। ছাতারেরা চলে গেলে ওরা খেতে আসে। খাবার কম পড়লে কিচির-মিচির করে ডাকাডাকি করে, কিন্তু জানলায় টোকা দেয় না। তবে খাবার চাওয়ার সময়ে বুলবুলিরা মোটেই শিষ দিয়ে ডাকে না, একটু কর্কশ ভাবেই কিচ-মিচ শব্দ করে। পাঁউরুটির পাশাপাশি চালও এদের বেশ পছন্দ। ছাতারে আর বুলবুলিদের একটা মিল আছে, অন্য পাখি খেতে এলে এরা তেড়ে যায়, কিন্তু ছাতারেদের নিজেদের মধ্যে কোনো বিরোধ নেই, যেমন নেই বুলবুলিদের মধ্যে। এই একই জানলায় আসে তিনটি শালিখ, কখনো বা চারটি। এদের মধ্যে কিন্তু অত ভাব নেই। একে অপরকে ক্যাঁ ক্যাঁ করে তাড়া করে খেতে খেতে। আর আসে দুটি কাঠঠোকরা। এরা চাল, ডাল, পাঁউরুটি, কিছুই খায় না। জানলার কোণে কোণে চলে বেড়ানো পিঁপড়ে, মাছি বা অন্য ছোট পোকা এদের খাদ্য। গাছের ডালে কাঠঠোকরা অনেক দেখেছি, মানুষের আভাস মাত্র পেলে এরা লুকিয়ে পরে। এ হেন পাখি আমার জানলায় খেতে আসবে, তা আমার কল্পনারও অতীত। তারপর একদিন সকালে আমার কর্তা মশাই প্রথম আবিষ্কার করেন, কাঠঠোকরার খেতে আসাটা নিমিত্ত মাত্র। আসল আকর্ষণ জলের পাত্রটি। সেখানে সে জল খায় না, সোজা জলের পাত্রের মাঝখানে বসে অন্ততঃ পাঁচ থেকে দশ মিনিট ধরে স্নান করে।

সেই স্নানের ভিডিও করা হল, কাঠঠোকরার ভ্রূক্ষেপ নেই [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/o9nhtU5ahL0?feature=share]। অবশ্য জানলার ভিতরটা ওরা দেখতে পায় না, তাই আমরা এত কাছ থেকে ওদের দেখার সুযোগ পাই। বলছি বটে, কিন্তু তাই যদি হবে, তবে কাকেরা কী? তারাও খেতে আসে, খাবার বাসায় নিয়েও যায়। কিন্তু যেই না আমি ঘরের দরজা থেকে এক পা বাড়িয়েছি জানলার দিকে, অমনি কাকবাবাজী ফুড়ুৎ। এর থেকে আমার মনে হয়েছে আমার এখানে যে সব পাখি আসে তাদের সবার থেকে কাকের শ্রবণ ক্ষমতা বেশী।

আবাসনের অন্য একটা ঘরের জানলায় চাল খেতে আসে দু-জোড়া কণ্ঠী ঘুঘু আর দু-জোড়া গাঙশালিখ (Indian Pied Starling)। তারা নিঃশব্দে চাল, ডাল, যা পায় খেয়ে যায়। গাঙশালিখরা ছানাদের জন্য খাবার নিয়েও যায়, কিন্তু কোন আওয়াজ করে না। এই জানলাতেও ল্যাজ-কাটা ছাতারে তার দলবল নিয়ে হানা দেয়। এখানে চালই খায়, পাঁউরুটির জন্য বিদ্রোহ করে না। কিন্তু এমন হিংসুটে যে গাঙশালিখের খাবারে তাদের ভাগ বসাতেই হবে। এই ভাবে মাস ছয়েক চলার পর হঠাৎ একদিন দেখি টিমলিডার ল্যাজ-কাটা ছাতারে আর আসছে না। অন্য ছাতারেরা আসছে, পাঁউরুটি না পেলে একটু কর্কশ স্বরে চেঁচামেচি করছে, তবে জানলায় টোকা মেরে বকাবকি একদম বন্ধ। আমার খুব মন খারাপ। চার-পাঁচদিন পর দুপুরে হঠাৎ অন্য ঘরের (যে ঘরে গাঙশালিখ আর ঘুঘুরা খেতে আসতো) জানলায় "ঠকঠক ঠকঠক, ঠুক ঠক"। একটু অচেনা তালে ঠোক্কোর। তাও মনটা নেচে উঠল। 'নিশ্চয়ই ল্যাজ-কাটা ফিরে এসেছে!' চুপিচুপি গিয়ে দেখি, ওমা! গাঙশালিখ! ওদের থালার খাবার শেষ হয়ে গেছিল; দুটি গাঙশালিখের একটি উদাস হয়ে আকাশের দিকে চেয়ে বসে আছে, অন্যটি জানলায় ল্যাজ-কাটার ঢঙে ঠোক্কোর মারছে। আবার তাড়াতাড়ি চাল, ডাল দিয়ে শান্ত করার পালা। ল্যাজ-কাটা আজও ফেরেনি, কিন্তু একটা গাঙশালিখ বুঝে ফেলেছে ল্যাজ-কাটার খাবার আদায়ের পদ্ধতি। আর সে নিজের মত করে তার প্রয়োগ করে চলেছে।



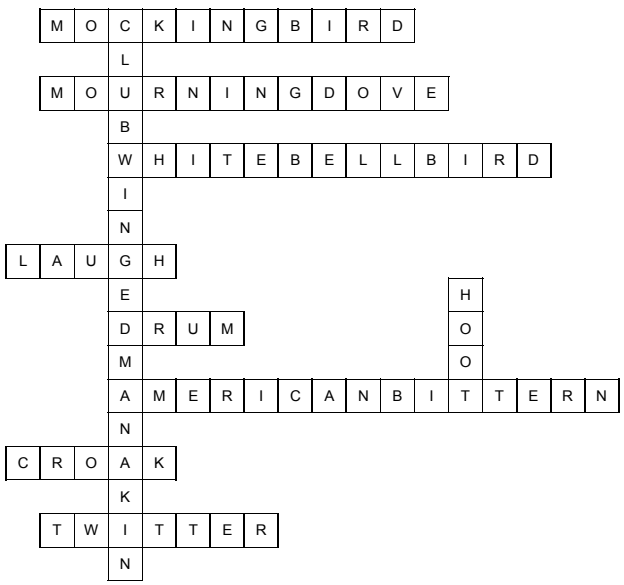
About Author

Sohini Ghosh

Sohini Ghosh is a government employee. Bird watching is her passion and she also indulges in short stories and poems .

Answers of Crossword

What Is It?



Across

1 This well-known novel was named after a bird that can imitate 200 sounds
3 This bird's song sounds sad and wistful
4 This bird has the loudest, alarm-like call in the world
5 Birds such as the common loon make this human-like sound
7 The male ruffed grouse makes this deep thrumming sound that sounds like a popular musical instrument
8 This bird's inimitable call had earned it the name 'thunder-pumper' and 'belcher-squelcher'
9 A harsh sound associated with frogs, but also made by some birds like the common raven
10 A bird sound that used to be the name of a social media platform

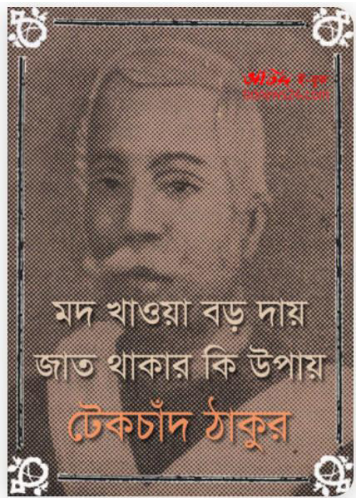
Down

2 This bird is a scientific and musical wonder for the way it sings with its wings
6 A call made by some owls, 'what a _!'

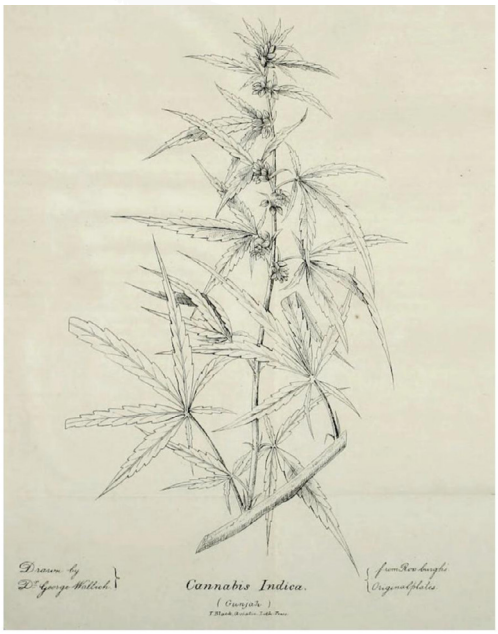
Swarno Chhatare Illustration by W3webhelp

পক্ষীর দল: রীতিমত পাখি হয়ে ওঠার সাধনা করতেন সেকালের পক্ষীর দলের সদস্যরা

অমিতাভ পুরকায়স্থ



বইয়ের নাম 'মদ খাওয়া বড় দায়, জাত থাকার কি উপায়'। তবে টেকচাঁদ ঠাকুরের এই বই শুরু হয়েছে মদ নয়, গাঁজার গল্প দিয়ে। সেকালে বাঘ, হাতি পাখির সমীক্ষা সম্পর্কে গ্রামের মানুষের উৎসাহ না থাকলেও, গ্রামে মাতাল বা গেঁজেলের সংখ্যা জোগাড়ের উৎসাহ ছিল। তেমনি এক গ্রামে কোন ভদ্রলোক কিছু দিবস অবস্থান করছিলেন; সেখানে দেখলেন, প্রায় সব লোকই অহোরাত্র অবিশ্রান্ত গাঁজা খাচ্ছে। এই ব্যাপার দেখে তিনি জিজ্ঞাসা করলেন যে, এ গ্রামে কত লোক গাঁজা খায়? গাঁজাখোরের মধ্যে একজন উত্তর দিল – "আমরা সকলেই গাঁজা খাইয়া থাকি, গ্রামের শালাগ্রাম ঠাকুর ও আমাদিগের টেপিপিসি যাহার ৯৯ বৎসর কেবল তাঁহারাই খারিজ আছেন।"



Drawing of *Cannabis indica* featured in O'Shaughnessy's article on the plant in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1839) — Source.

আঠেরো উনিশ শতকের কলকাতার দেশীয় সমাজে অবস্থা ছিল প্রায় তদ্রুপ। কিন্তু সত্যি বলতে এদেশে নেশা হিসেবে প্রাচীনতম ঐতিহ্যের ধারা বহন করে চলেছে *Cannabis sativa* নামের উদ্ভিদ থেকে উৎপন্ন গাঁজা, ভাং, চরস। কালীপ্রসন্ন সিংহের লেখা 'হুতোম প্যাঁচার নকশা'-তে কলকাতায় গাজনের থেকে শুরু করে নানা ধর্মীয় ও সামাজিক অনুষ্ঠানের অনুসঙ্গ হিসেবে এই নেশার উপস্থিতি। দেড় ভরি আফিম, দেড়শ ছিলিম গাঁজা থেকে দেড় মন গাঁজা, দুই মন চরস - পর্যন্ত মৌতাতের লম্বা তালিকার শুনিয়েছেন তিনি। তবে হুতোমের দুনিয়া, অর্থাৎ উনিশ শতকের দ্বিতীয় ভাগের কলকাতা নেশার ভাঙা হাট। অন্তত গাঁজার নেশার ক্ষেত্রে তো বটেই। সেই ক্ষেত্রে স্বর্ণযুগ হল পলাশীর ঠিক পরের সময়ের কলকাতা। শোভাবাজারের রাজা নবকৃষ্ণর সময়েই নাকি উত্তর কলকাতায় জন্ম নিয়েছিল 'পক্ষীর দল'।

পক্ষীর দলের সৃষ্টিকর্তা ছিলেন বাগবাজারের শিবচন্দ্র মুখোপাধ্যায়। তিনিই অনেককে কলকাতায় উড়তে শেখান। এঁদের একখানা পাবলিক আটচালা ছিল, সেইখানে এসে সকলে পাখি হতেন, 'বুলি' ঝাড়তেন ও 'উড়তে' শিখতেন। অষ্টাদশ শতাব্দীর শেষ ভাগ

থেকে ঊনবিংশ শতাব্দীর মাঝামাঝি পর্যন্ত সময়ের কথা। তারপরই বোধহয় পক্ষীর দল ও বটতলার আড্ডা দুইই উঠে যায়। কারণ হুতোম দুঃখ করে বলছেন : "এখন আর 'পক্ষী'র দল নাই, গুখুরি ও ঝকমারির দলও অন্তর্ধান হয়ে গ্যাচে, 'পাখি'রা বুড়ো হয়ে মরে গেছেন, দু'একটা আধমরা বুড়োগোছের 'পক্ষী' এখনও দেখা যায়, দলভাঙা ও টাকার খাঁকতিতে মনমরা হয়ে পড়েছেন, সুতরাং সন্ধ্যার পর ঝুমুর শুনে থাকেন। আড্ডাটি মিউনিসিপ্যাল কমিশনারেরা উঠিয়ে দেছেন, এখন কেবল তার রুইন মাত্র পড়ে রয়েছে।"

Smoking had become institutionalized among some members of the idle rich by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Shibchandra Mukhopadhyay, whose father Durgacharan Mukherjee, made money as a dewan to several English officers, set up a hemp-smoking club in Baghbazar (popularly known as 'Pakshir Dal'), where members were given names of different birds and were expected to warble accordingly. The floor of the club house was carpeted with tobacco leaves and the walls made from hemp-leaves. Members were divided into three classes, according to how much hemp they could smoke. Shibchandra served them sumptuous meals along the hemp (Banerjee, 1989). Hutum also mentions that within bose-para there were two to three hemp smoking club. By 1831 all these clubs were obliterated.[1]

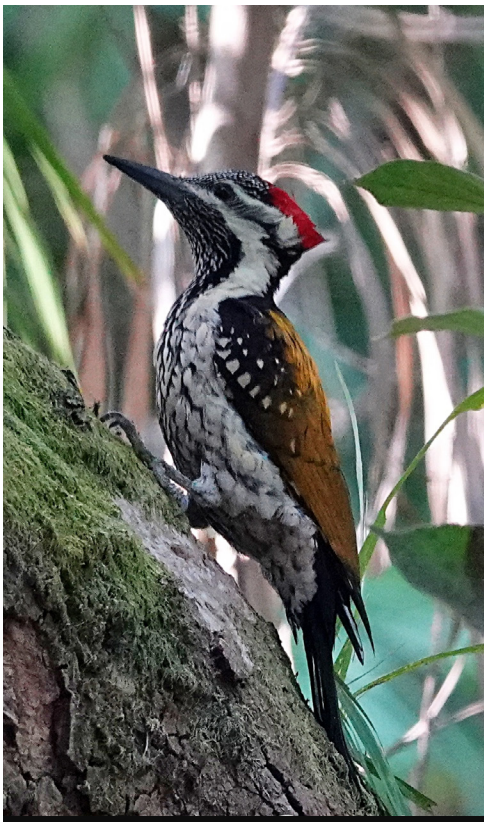
1-The Journal of Social Science & Humanity Research, 3,1(2015)76-88

অনেক বাড়তি কথা হল। এবার আসি মূল পক্ষীর দলের গল্পে। কেউ ইচ্ছে করলেই পক্ষীর দলে সদস্য হতে পারত না। আর কুলীন পাখি তো নয়ই। গাঁজা টানার পারদর্শিতার ওপরই নির্ভর করত 'পাখি' হওয়ার যোগ্যতা। সেই অনুসারেই তারা 'বুলি' পেত। পেত মর্যাদা। আর খগরাজ বা পক্ষীদের 'রাজা' হওয়া ছিল রাজ্যজয়ের চেয়েও কঠিন। পক্ষীর দলের অ্যাডমিশন টেস্ট নিয়ে মজার গল্প শুনিয়েছেন বৈদ্যনাথ মুখোপাধ্যায়। এক ভদ্রসন্তান একদা 'পক্ষী' হওয়ার আশায় আটচালায় গিয়ে উঠেছিলেন। পক্ষীরাজ এগিয়ে এলেন যোগ্যতা নির্ধারণের পরীক্ষা নিতে। সেই ভদ্রসন্তানটি একাসনে বসে পর পর একশ ছিলিম গাঁজা টানলেন। কিন্তু একবারে শেষে সামান্য একটু ত্রুটি হয়ে গেল। নিরানব্বই ছিলিমের পর শেষ ছিলিমটি টানার সময় খুকু খুকু করে একটু কেশে ফেললেন। ব্যাস, আর যায় কোথায়! পক্ষীরাজ গেলেন ভীষণ চটে। এ লঘু পাপের জন্য তাঁকে দেওয়া হল গুরুদণ্ড। তাকে বানালেন একটি ঝগড়াটে আর নিকৃষ্ট পাখি - ছাতারে। বেচারী পরীক্ষার্থী খগরাজের কাছে অনেক অনুনয়-বিনয় করল। শেষে খগেশ্বর একটু তুষ্ট হয়ে নতুন পাখিটির পিঠ চাপড়ে বললেন "বাবু হে, যা বলেছি তা তো আর ফেরে না! হাকিম টলে তো হুকুম টলেনা। তোর স্তবে আমি সন্তুষ্ট। "ছাতারে" নামটা একবারে রহিত করতে পারব না, তবে তারই ভেতর একটু ভালো করে দিচ্ছি--তুই হবি স্বর্ণছাতারে।


Jungle Babbler by Abhishek Gupta


Rupchand Pakshi_Rahul Anand_Film_Rosogolla

তবে পক্ষীদের নিয়ে বাজারে সর্বাধিক চালু গল্পটি প্রমথনাথ বিশী-র 'কেরি সাহেবের মুন্সি' উপন্যাস থেকে নেওয়া। সেখানে রূপচাঁদ পক্ষীর সঙ্গে পাঠকের পরিচয় করিয়ে দিয়ে লেখক বলছেন "সেকালে যে-সব মহাপুরুষ একাসনে বসে একশ আট ছিলিম গাঁজা খেতে পারত তারা একখানা করে ইঁট পেত। এইভাবে উপার্জিত ইঁটে বাসভবন নির্মাণ করতে পারলে 'পক্ষী' পদবী পাওয়া যেত। তখনকার কলকাতায় দেড়জন পক্ষী ছিল। পটলডাঙায় রূপচাঁদ পক্ষী আর বাগবাজারে নিতাই 'হাফ' পক্ষী। 'হাফ পক্ষী'র অর্থ এই যে, বাড়ীর চার দেয়াল গড়বার পরে হঠাৎ সাধনোচিত ধামে প্রয়াণ করে নিতাই, তাই লোকে তাকে 'হাফ পক্ষী' বলত। বস্তুত রূপচাঁদই একমাত্র পক্ষী। নিতাই-এর কথা উঠলে রূপচাঁদ দুঃখ করে বলত, ছোকরার এলেম ছিল, অকালে না মরলে একটা আস্ত পক্ষী হতে পারত।



Black-rumped Flameback by Pampa Mistri

শিবনাথ শাস্ত্রী কলকাতার তিনটি বড় গাঁজার আড্ডার নাম বলেছেন। সেগুলি ছিল বাগবাজার, বটতলা ও বৌবাজারে। তার মতে বৌবাজারের দলকে 'পক্ষীর দল' বলা হত। শহরের ভদ্রবাড়ির নিষ্কর্মা সন্তানেরা অনেকে পক্ষীর দলে নাম লেখাত। দলে ভর্তি হওয়ার সময়ে এক একজনকে এক একটি পক্ষীর নাম দেওয়া হত এবং গাঁজাতে উন্নতিলাভ করলে উচ্চতর পক্ষীর শ্রেণিতে প্রোমোশন পাওয়া যেত। পক্ষীর দল সম্পর্কে অনেক মজার মজার গল্প আছে। শাস্ত্রী মহাশয় তার একটি শুনিয়েছেন – "একবার এক ভদ্রসন্তান পক্ষীর দলে প্রবেশ করিয়া কাঠঠোকরা পদ পাইল। কয়েক দিন পরে তাহার পিতা তাহার অনুসন্ধানে আড্ডাতে উপস্থিত হইয়া যাহাকে নিজ সন্তানের বিষয় প্রশ্ন করেন, সেই পক্ষীর বুলি বলে, মানুষের ভাষা কেহ বলে না। অবশেষে নিজ সন্তানকে এক কোণে দেখিতে পাইয়া যখন গিয়া তাহাকে ধরিলেন, অমনি সে "কড়ঠক্ " করিয়া তাহার হস্তে ঠুকরাইয়া দিল !"

বৌবাজার এলাকায় পক্ষীর দলের অস্তিত্ব সম্পর্কে শিবনাথ শাস্ত্রীর কথাটা একেবারে ফেলে দেওয়ার মতোও নয়, কারণ কলকাতার সাংস্কৃতিক ইতিহাসের অন্যতম সাব-অল্টার্ন ধারাভাষ্যকার রূপচাঁদ পক্ষী-র (যার আসল নাম উৎকলবাসী গৌরহরিদাস মহাপাত্র) বাড়ি ছিল বৌবাজার অঞ্চলে। শহরের বাবু কালচার থেকে শুরু করে নানা ধরণের সামাজিক অবক্ষয়ের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদের ভাষা ছিল পক্ষীর দলের গান। কিন্তু লোক মুখে প্রচারিত গল্পের প্রভাবেই হোক বা গাঁজার নেশার প্রতি সামাজিক নিন্দার জন্যই হোক, কলকাতার সাংস্কৃতিক জগতে পক্ষীর দলের বিরাট অবদানের পরিবর্তে মানুষের মনে তাদের স্মৃতি রয়ে গেল স্রেফ একদল গাঁজাখোর হিসেবে।

About Author

Amitava Purakaystha

Amitave Purakaystha is a story-teller, city historian, journalist and birder. He is more popularly known for the walking tours he conducts in the city of Kolkata.

Picture by Santanu Manna @ Piyali Island

WEST BENGAL RARITIES: MIGRATION PATTERN OF FIRETHROAT (*CALLIOPE PECTARDENS*) IN WEST BENGAL: AN ANALYSIS.

SANTANU MANNA

Citation: Manna, S., 2024. Migration pattern of Firethroat *Calliope pectardens* in West Bengal: An analysis. Fantail. Vol4 (Issue3): 34–37

A Firethroat (*Calliope pectardens*) breeding male is characterized by its dark slaty-blue upperparts and a striking glowing orange throat and breast, bordered by a black stripe running from the base of the bill to the upper flank, with a small white patch on the side of the neck. In contrast, the female is a plain brown with a russet tint on the rump and tail, a paler eye–ring, a dark bill, and dark legs. The first–year male closely resembles the female but can be distinguished by a few blue feathers and a silvery neck–patch. The male in non–breeding plumage there is no orange on the throat or breast, the upperparts are more or less uniform slaty–blue, the sides of the head are brownish and the primaries and secondaries are blue–edged.

Examination of birds captured in Bangladesh confirm that adult male Firethroats are unusual in having a non–breeding plumage. Neither of their close congeners, Siberian Rubythroat (*C. calliope)* and White–tailed Rubythroat (*C. pectoralis)*, shows a non-breeding plumage. Adults and first–year males of both species in autumn have a throat and face pattern which more or less resembles that of breeding adult males. Similarly, Siberian Blue Robin (*Larvivora cyane)* has a distinctive

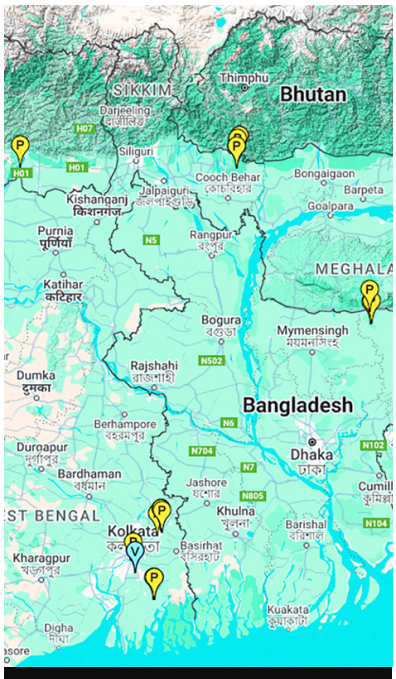
first–winter male plumage, but adult males in winter are identical to those in breeding plumage (Round & Clement 2015:86).

The species winters mainly in Haors (wetlands) in northeast Bangladesh but also as far south as the environs of Kolkata, West Bengal. There are some records in Myanmar & Thailand in winter. It breeds in central southern China in summer (Round & Clement 2015:84). The species was first sighted in West Bengal (WB) in 2012 and other sightings are given in Table–1.

Table–1

Location	Date	Sex	Stay (based on eBird data)	References
Habra, North 24 Parganas	11 March 2012	Adult male	22 days	Das 2012.
Piyali Island, South 24 Parganas	06 April 2014	Adult male	8 days	Mondal 2014
Rabindra Sarovar, Kolkata	26 October 2014	Immature male	1 day	Mondal 2014
Shyamkhola, South 24 Parganas	05 April 2019	Adult male	14 days	Mukherjee 2019.
Buxa TR, Alipurduar	26 December 2023	Immature male	-	Singha 2023.
Buxa TR, Alipurduar	18 April 2024	Adult male	83 days	Sarkar 2024

The sighting records of adult male Firethroats, with brief stays at Habra (22.845° 88.656°), Piyali Island (22.132° 88.599°), and Shyamkhola (22.423° 88.386°) in March and April, suggest that West Bengal serves as a stopover during their passage migration from Southeast Asia both in autumn & spring. According to Praveen (2024), the Firethroat is a passage migrant through South WB.



eBird location


Picture by Santanu Manna @ Piyali Island


Picture by Ashish Gupta @ Buxa

The sighting of an immature/first–year male at Rabindra Sarovar (2014) for a day suggests that the Firethroat could be a vagrant, an autumn passage migrant, or a winter visitor. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012:392) noted that the Firethroat is a vagrant or winter visitor to Meghalaya (a specimen collected by W. Koelz in 18 January 1950) and breeds in south–eastern Tibet and western China (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

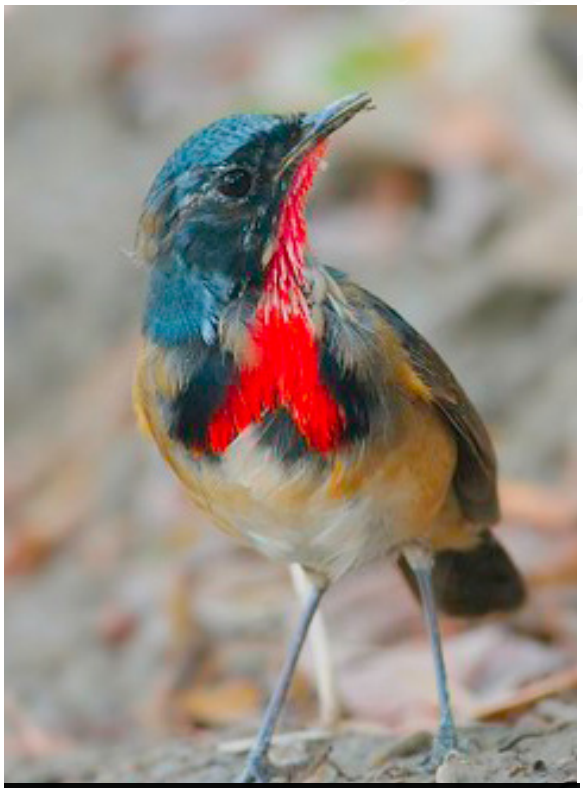
Interestingly, a bird observed at Buxa in November–December that stayed until April clearly indicates that it is a winter visitor to Buxa. These observations reveal the presence of passage migration, long winter stays, and vagrancy of the Firethroat in West Bengal. The schedule and pattern of their movements indicate that the species is mainly a passage migrant in WB.

Furthermore, there are no records of female Firethroats from WB. Birdwatchers might confuse them with females Indian Blue Robin (*Larvivora brunnea*) or Siberian Blue Robin (*L. cyane*), which are challenging to distinguish from female Firethroats (eBird).

Picture by Malay Mandal @ Rabindra Sarovar

Picture by Debdeep Pramanik @ Shyamkhola

Picture by Abhishek Das @ Habra 2



Picture by Parthasarathi Mondal @ Piyali Island

Status: IUCN: Near Threatened, SoIB: NA, WPA: Schedule-II

Acknowledgement: I am indebted to Praveen J for reviewing the article.

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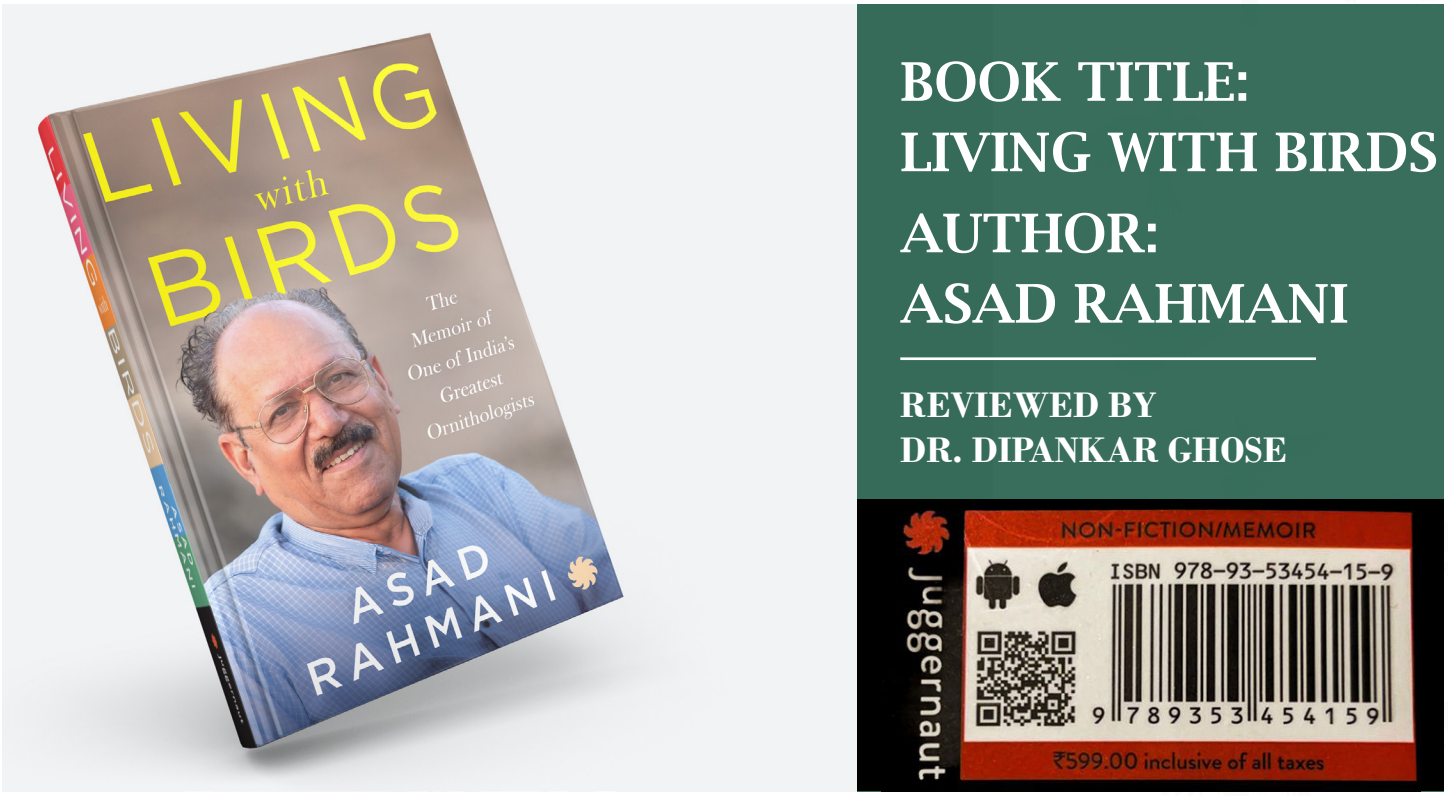
About Author

Santanu Manna

Santanu Manna a founder member of BWS, is a passionate birder, conservationist, and nature enthusiast deeply committed to spreading awareness about birdwatching and biodiversity. A teacher by profession, he is known for his engaging storytelling, extensive field knowledge. Santanu has been an active advocate for use of eBird, and is the leader of the West Bengal Bird Checklist group.



"Living with Birds" by Dr. Asad Rahmani is a memoir chronicling the remarkable life, rich experience, and career of one of India's most distinguished ornithologists. The book offers a deep dive into Dr. Rahmani's decades-long journey in nature conservation, his passion for birds, his mentoring of some of the finest wildlife scientists, and his contributions to securing the future of threatened birds and their habitats in India.

Dr. Rahmani starts his book by talking about his trip to a Sheikha Jheel in Aligarh 44 years ago, in 1980. That Jheel, or wetland, is still there, now a sanctuary, and in one of his recent conversations, he expressed concern about its present status. He has been a conservation crusader, and this book is no different. His association with Sheikha Jheel spans five decades, from his PhD days to now.

In this book, Dr. Rahmani reflects on his early attraction to nature, his childhood surrounded by animals, and how this evolved into a life dedicated to conservation. His career milestones include working at the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), where he served initially as a Scientist and then as its Director. He also shares his experiences working with India's greatest ornithologist, Dr. Salim Ali and his efforts to protect threatened species like the Great Indian Bustard and the Narcondam Hornbill.

He takes the reader to undivided Uttar Pradesh in the '50s and '60s, from the plains and Terai to the hills in Mussoorie, giving snippets into his early life. At an early age, he was exposed to the intricacies of animal behaviour - an unusual relationship between a parakeet and a chicken. He had had many pets during his childhood, occasionally even wild animals like gorals, which were before our country's Wildlife (Protection) Act came into force, so they were not illegal. It's not possible anymore to have wild animals as pets, but he, as depicted in the book's subsequent chapters, made his associations deeper with the animal world.

This book is inspiring and informative for anyone interested in ornithology, Indian wildlife, or the broader environmental movement. It underscores the importance of

balancing development with ecological preservation while showcasing Rahmani's significant contributions to India's biodiversity.

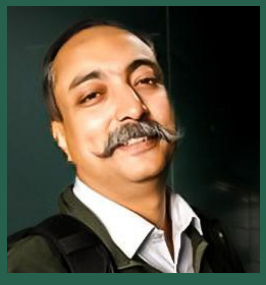
In this book, Dr. Asad Rahmani remains a vocal advocate for the coexistence of development and nature conservation. He traversed more than five decades of zoology, ecology, and ornithology research, from the works of renowned academicians at Aligarh Muslim University to present-day cutting-edge scientists.

The book is written in simple language, giving details of his childhood and the queries that a young mind would have. Most readers would associate those with their childhood. One would assume that the bird that changed his life and many others might be the poor peafowl hunted within the campus of the Aligarh Muslim University. In reality, it's a different species - the Great Indian Bustard. Dr. Rahmani illustrated an elaborate historical distribution of this species. It would have been nice to show this critically endangered bird's past and present distribution on a map of India. That would have immediately affected a reader about the gravity of the situation and the tremendous plight this species has faced.

He made an exciting point in the book - one would see what one wants to see. It's also true for birdwatching - an experienced ornithologist would prefer looking out for differences between warblers. In contrast, an amateur birder would be satisfied after seeing a pair of painted storks.

In the book's tenth chapter, Dr. Rahmani writes about many wildlife researchers turned scientists, professors and present-day seasoned conservationists. He ended the chapter by asking whether he contributed by training so many conservation professionals. Yes, it was apparent from the crowd in the WWF India auditorium, where this book was released on 13 November 2024. Quite a few of his students, colleagues, friends, and associates attended, whose names are mentioned many times in this book, and they fondly reminisced about how much they had learned from Dr. Rahmani and continue to do so.

The book could be considered a lighter version of India's conservation history for five decades. Dr. Rahmani elucidated the formation and workings of many NGOs and departments as well as the work of renowned scholars in the field of wildlife conservation. Anyone interested in the conservation movement of that time will find this book helpful, as it provides critical references and exact dates and months. He made a crucial point about maintaining a field diary.



About Author

Dr. Dipankar Ghose

Dr. Dipankar Ghose is a seasoned conservationist with extensive experience at WWF. Dipankar is a dedicated advocate for wildlife conservation. His passion for photography allows him to capture the beauty of nature, complementing his skill in writing compelling short articles that inspire and educate the public about the importance of preserving our natural world. He has been a member of the Birdwatchers' Society since its inception.

SOARING HIGH : SCHOOL OF BIRDS ROUNDUP

ANANDARUP BHADRA & TITASH CHAKRABARTI

ILLUSTRATIONS: SANTANU KAR

During the period of September to November 2024, in our flagship initiative "School of Birds", we have focused on building our bank of creative and interactive activities while also developing more collaborations with like-minded organizations and institutions to bring these activities to life. Here's a quick look at what we've been up to!

BWS BIRD WALKS

In April 2024 Birdwatchers' Society had collaborated with Early Bird to facilitate a Nature Walk for children (9-13 years). The parents were highly enthused by their children's response to this experience and wanted themselves to be included in future events.

We had learnt Squiggle Bird from Early Bird and a creative activity to channelize the children's spontaneous energy into pen-on-paper activities. We are still using this activity as it continues to be a hit amongst our participants.

Our very own little Sukumar Ray has discovered a new species, the PorcuPeet during the Bird Walk on 10th Nov 2024!

Over the last three months we have organized three more nature walks for children including their parents and guardians. Just through word of mouth, our initial group of 9 parents has grown sizably to 61 active members who trust us to guide them and their children in activity-oriented nature education.

Our field walks are not only restricted to bird watching and understanding their behaviour and habitat, but also include exploration of other aspects of nature, engaging multiple senses. Over the last three months these field visits have been enriched by Tirthankar Roy Chowdhury who has introduced the children to local trees, butterflies, moths, damselflies, dragonflies etc. He has also unveiled a new activity - Smell the Leaf, Guess the fruit.

DID YOU KNOW? Black plum & Rose apple leaves smell like the fruits they bear.

To address the importance of tuning in to the sounds of nature while out in the field, we have developed an original activity called Active Listening.

Point in the direction of the Treepie call!

Our post walk activities are sometimes intuitive, sometimes creative and often intellectually stimulating. It ensures that the children continue their engagement in nature education beyond the obviously attractive and stimulating Nature walk. Our bank of activities has grown beyond Squiggle Bird and its unique variations to include Identify the Silhouette and CrossBird Puzzle, two original School of Birds pen-on-paper activities.

'Identify the Silhouette' is designed to help students learn the various unique shapes specific to the anatomy of bird species which help us identify them. It is also a group activity that parents can do with their children to introduce nature education in their homes.

One of the tougher silhouettes to ID - A Crowriole!

In CrossBird Puzzle we use funny and thought-provoking limericks that help children learn to identify birds by their unique behaviours or through pop-culture references.

Across

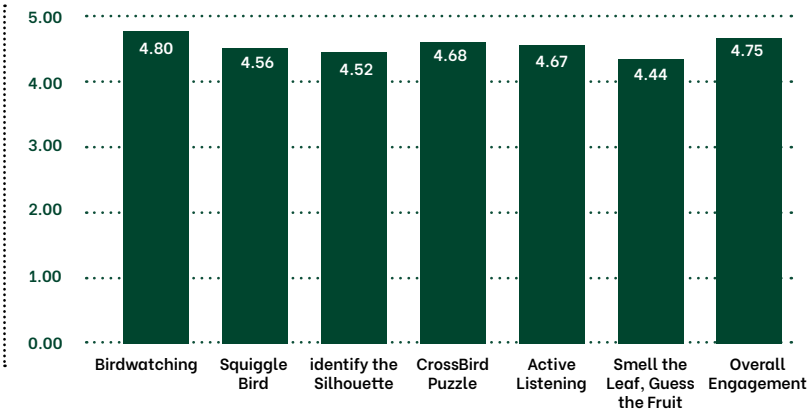
3. "Chirpy perchy"
5. I'm looking for "knock knock" jokes
9. I sew, I stitch without a glitch
10. I soar the skies with eagle eyes

Down

1. I rage, I rage being put in a cage
2. I come in peace & I rhyme with love
4. Deep waters, I do not fear, I don't need a scuba gear
6. Not a pie in the sky, but still pretty high
7. White as snow with long legs to go
8. The one with the pebbles in an Aesop's fable

Test the young bird nerd around you with these riddles!

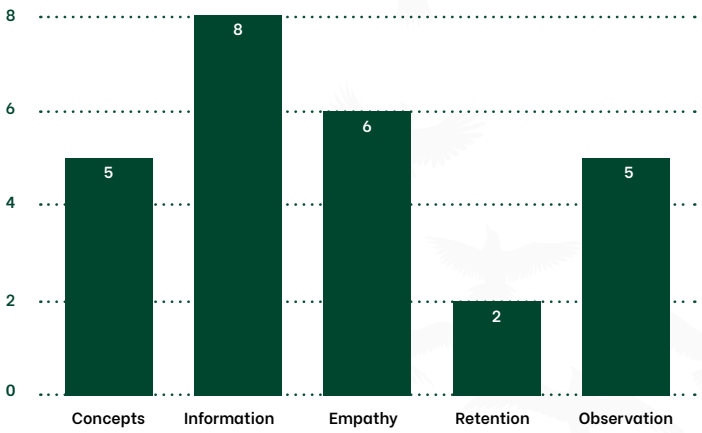
We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from accompanying parents regarding their, as well as their children's experiences in these Nature walks. The following figure shows that all the activities as well as overall engagement have been rated on average around 4.5 or higher out of a maximum of 5.



In short, the children and their parents loved it and the numbers herein stand as their testimony for our cause!

CHILDREN'S WELFARE ASSOCIATION HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS', SARKARHAT, SARSUNA

We've been running a year-long program with **8th graders at CWA (Sarsuna) since April 2024,** starting with engaging indoor sessions during the scorching summer and drenching monsoons. Come winter, we shifted gears to select the most enthusiastic participants and launched a dedicated Nature Club.



The figure shows the number of children picked for the Nature Club based on their classroom interactions and various assignments. They have shown us their interest through their understanding of concepts like evolution, extinction and conservation. They have surprised us with their own unique observations and meticulous documentations of the natural world, as well as through independently gathering information on nature and wildlife. Quite a few children distinguished themselves by displaying empathy for Nature, something we strive to inculcate in our participants. A few students displayed extraordinary retention of concepts and information discussed during the previous sessions. A lively Nature walk with the newly formed Nature Club set the tone, and based on their excitement, future sessions–both indoors and outdoors–promise to be an absolute hoot!

PASCHIM BANGA KHERIA SABAR KALYAN SAMITY

This 3-day workshop was conducted in collaboration with **Keystone Foundation**. We were hosted by Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity (PBKSKS) at their office in Deorang (Rajnoagarh), Purulia (https://www.sabarsamity.in/sabar-samity). The participants were a group of 42 children of the Kheria-Sabar community, a sect of the Munda Adivasi people.

Keeping the ears open to the sounds of Nature!

A live painting of, painting the living!

These children grow up enveloped by nature! They are connected to a deep pool of traditional knowledge. Yet, they are currently more isolated from their rich tradition of folk stories and songs due to the changing socio-cultural landscape.

The workshop was the first step towards addressing these gaps through storytelling. We hope this will empower them to become active stakeholders who can address their own environmental challenges in the future.

Play your role in the classroom without walls!

Santanu Kar -
Our illustrious illustrator & the Master of Puppets!

This workshop has been the highlight of the last 3 months. We will publish the detailed report in the next issue of FANTAIL. The next 3-Day workshop is planned for Jan/Feb 2025.

LOOKING BACK, SOARING AHEAD!

We would like to issue an apology for the typological error in the previous issue. The total number of children who attended our sessions from April to August 2024 was actually 298, for 13 contact hours and a total of 712 children-contact hours. The erroneously printed figure of 349 children, for 23 contact hours and a total of 862 children-contact hours actually represents a cumulative sum of the BWS-School of birds initiative starting from Jan 2024.

From the period of September to November 2024, we have had active participation in collaboration with various Institutions as encapsulated below

Sl No	Event	Location, Date	No of children	Contact hours	Children contact hours
01	**CWA Sarsuna Bird Club Nature Walk**	Rabindra Sarabar, Kolkata 29th Sep 2024	15	02	30
02	**BWS Bird Walk for Children and their parents/guardians (in collboration with Early Bird during Wildlife Week 2024)**	Banabitan, Salt Lake City 6th Oct 2024	17	02	34
03	**BWS Bird Walk for Children and their parents/ guardians**	Rabindra Sarabar, Kolkata 10th Nov 2024	20	02	40
04	**3-Day workshop at Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity (in collaboration with Keystone Foundation)**	Deorang, Purulia 15 to 17 2024	42	20	840
05	**BWS Bird Walk for Children and their parents/ guardians**	Rabindra Sarabar, Kolkata 24th Nov 2024	12	02	24
		Total	86	26	928

This brings the cumulative total number of children who have attended the sessions to 435, for a cumulative 49 contact hours and a grand total of 1790 children-contact hours. We are looking forward to shoring up the numbers further in the upcoming months with fresh collaborations as well as follow up sessions. Here are a snapshot of December 2024 events:

Sl No	Organization / Institution	Date	Program	Number of Children	Duration (hrs)
01	**MCKV Liluah (Batch 1)**	1st Dec, 2024	1-Day Nature Walk	25	2.5
02	**Sushila Birla Girls' School**	5th Dec, 2024	Nature Walk, final session of 3-Day workshop	31	2.5
03	**MCKV Liluah (Batch 2)**	8th Dec, 2024	1-Day Nature Walk	25	2.5
04	**Rotary Club, children of Santoshpur Rishi Aurobindo Balika Vidyapith**	7th & 14th Dec, 2024	1-Day Nature Walk	35	5.0
05	**Happy Mommy Place**	27th & 28th Dec, 2024	2-Day workshop	20	5.5

With an eye on the past, and another towards the future, of life on Earth!

Finally, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who have consistently supported our cause by volunteering their time and effort during our sessions.

A huge applause to :

Pampa Mistri, Sujan Chatterjee, Major Bharatendra Parihar, Arnab Raychoudhury, Priyam Chattopadhyay, Tirthankar Roy Chowdhury, Sudip Ghosh, Swarnab Ghosh, Batul Pipewala, Hiya Chatterjee, Bipash Saha & Dr. Kanad Baidya.

FRESH & RARE SIGHTINGS (ARRIVALS)

PRIYAM CHATTOPADHYAY

Between August and early December 2024, our vibrant community of birders showcased unwavering enthusiasm and dedication to their cherished passion. Their love for birding was truly inspiring. With the onset of migration, our avian visitors have begun arriving in the Indian subcontinent, delighting us with their presence. Here's a list of the captivating stopover guests that left us in awe.

2024 Arrivals - Aug 16th - Dec 8th

Sr No	BIRD SPECIES	LOCN - 1	LOCN - 2	SIGHTING DATES
01	Rufous-necked Hornbill	Bagora, Darjeeling	Jhandi, Kalimpong	16 August 2024; 03 October 2024
02	Great Parrotbill	Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary, Darjeeling		16 August 2024; 11 October 2024
03	Brown-winged Kingfisher	Sundarban Tiger Reserve, South 24 Parganas	Sundarban Tiger Reserve, South 24 Parganas	16 August 2024; 06 December 2024
04	Himalayan Prinia	Mirik,Darjeeling	Shivkhola, Darjeeling	17 August 2024; 07 December 2024
05	Spotted Elachura	Ghoom, Darjeeling	Lava, Kalimpong	22 August 2024; 06 October 2024
06	Lesser Shortwing	Sukhia Pokhri, Darjeeling	Buxa, Alipurduar	27 August 2024; 02 December 2024
07	Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	Rongtong, Darjeeling	Rabindra Sarobar, Kolkata	25 September 2024; 31 October 2024
08	Banded Bay Cuckoo	Upper Fagu Tea Garden, Kalimpong	Mahananda WLS, Darjeeling	02 October 2024; 17 November 2024
09	Variable Wheatear	Upper Fagu Tea Garden, Kalimpong		02 October 2024
10	Rosy Pipit	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas	Panchanandapur, Malda	03 October 2024; 01 December 2024
11	Tree Pipit	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas	Dhenua, Paschim Burdwan	03 October 2024; 03 November 2024
12	Red-necked Falcon	Nabagram Balighat, Purba Budwan		08 October 2024
13	Spotted Flycatcher	Ajodhya Hills, Purulia		13 October 2024
14	Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher	Rabindra Sarobar, Kolkata		14 October 2024
15	Red-thorated Pipit	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		03 November 2024
16	White-bellied Redstart	Chunbhatti, Kurseong, Darjeeling		06 November 2024

Sr No	BIRD SPECIES	LOCN - 1	LOCN - 2	SIGHTING DATES
17	Yellow-breasted Bunting	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		07 November 2024
18	Chestnut-eared Bunting	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		07 November 2024
19	Crested Bunting	Ilambazar, Birbhum		10 November 2024
20	Slender-billed Gull	Kargil Beach, South 24 Parganas		17 November 2024
21	Fire-capped Tit	Susunia, Purulia		17 November 2024
22	Gould's Shortwing	Lepchajagat, Darjeeling		24 November, 2024
23	Common Grasshopper Warbler	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		28 November 2024
24	Black-browed Reed Warbler	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		30 November 2024
25	Booted Eagle	AJC Bose Botanic Garden, Howrah	Borshul, Purba Burdwan	30 November 2024; 02 December 2024
26	Greater Scaup	Farakka Barrage, Malda		01 December 2024
27	Himalayan Rubythroat	Gayabari, Darjeeling		02 December 2024
28	Bristled Grassbird	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		05 December 2024
29	Little Bunting	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		06 December 2024
30	Chaffinch	Gayabari, Darjeeling		06 December 2024
31	Snowy-browed Flycatcher	Toryak Khasmahal, Darjeeling	Shivkhola, Darjeeling	07 December 2024
32	Greater White-fronted Goose	Bakreshwar, Birbhum		07 December 2024
33	Eurasian Woodcock	Mongpu, Darjeeling		08 December 2024
34	West Himalayan Bush Warbler	Baruipur, South 24 Parganas		08 December 2024

Species according to Highest Priority by State for West Bengal as per State of India's Birds Report, 2023

About Author

Priyam Chattopadhyay

Priyam Chattopadhyay, an IT professional from Kolkata, is a devoted birdwatcher and photographer with a deep passion for exploring diverse habitats and studying bird migration. Over the years, he has refined his skills, artfully capturing the essence and beauty of birds through his lens.

BWS ACTIVITIES

Verditer Flycatcher by Upamanyu Chakraborty

DOKCHIN DIARY

UPAMANYU CHAKRABORTY

When I got the call from our beloved Kanad da - Dr Kanad Baidya- Assistant Secretary, Birdwatchers' Society (BWS), a doctor, an ardent birdwatcher, and a bibliophile, I knew this trip would be special. He invited me to attend a Nature Guide Training Workshop by the Global Tiger Forum as part of Wildlife Week celebrations from October 3rd to 5th, 2024, on behalf of BWS. Set in Dokchin village, nestled in the heart of South Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary in East Sikkim, it was an adventure I did not want to miss. Ordinarily, I may not have been the first choice to represent BWS, but with Durga Puja nearing, unpredictable weather, and other members tied up, luck was on my side. With excitement building, juggling my commitments, and a long-awaited trip, I decided to be a little mischievous for a change and thought that I would face the balancing act later.

The opportunity carried even more allure when Kanad da put me in touch with Moumita Chakraborty, the 'Red-Panda lady,' our workshop organizer, and my old colleague from the Wildlife Institute of India. The event would also be attended by Sourav da*, (Sourav Mondal) proprietor of Firefox expedition-Moumita's better half, and our cherished president, Babiya da, (Biswapriya Rahut). Beyond the reunion with dear friends, I was thrilled to finally explore Sikkim—a place on my bucket list for years. Though my family took me there as a child, my memories were faint; I yearned to rediscover the region's hidden biodiversity and beauty. The fact that travel, lodging, and meals were all covered was like a reward—an invitation to dive into my dreams for three full days! Moumita asked me to expand my presentation beyond birdwatching, covering all aspects of biodiversity and nature guiding, to provide a wholesome narration to the target audiences, the local nature guides, and homestay owners. With a full schedule, I poured my energy into preparing an engaging and interactive presentation. I was ready!

We set off by road on October 2nd, the road broken and battered from recent rain-induced landslides. Kanad da had thoughtfully replaced my lost BWS cap, reminding me with a chuckle that if I lost this one, Sujan da would not be pleased. Santu da, one of my birdwatching 'Gurus,' and a member of BWS,

whipped up fresh BWS banners for the workshop on short notice. Sourav da took the wheel, as we picked up Dr Anjan Guha, a noted doctor and fellow member of BWS. With Babiya da joining us at Sevoke, our BWS convoy rolled along NH10, battling landslide jams near Melli and finally reaching Rangpo after six long hours. Moumita suggested a longer yet smoother route via Rhenock and Rongli. It was nearly nightfall when we reached Dokchin village. The newly built homestay greeted us with warmth, simplicity, and a cosy hot pot, every bite reminiscent of home. Roshan, our young, polite-speaking, energetic host with a lovely smile jewelled on his face and a workshop participant, cared for us with utmost sincerity, even bringing hot water to each room.

Moumita and Nabanita, our organizers, joined us for dinner and hurried off after a brief chat, knowing tomorrow's workshop depended entirely on their meticulous planning.

Dokchin unveiled itself in the daylight the next day—a picturesque village of scattered huts cloaked in green. The coniferous and cardamom plantations, the 'Khaasmahal' type of vegetation, wove a soft, misty veil over the landscape, hinting at a habitat nurtured by generations. Despite my early morning birding session plan, I woke up late, still feeling the effects of the previous night's banter, which had stretched well into the early hours. My companions couldn't resist teasing me about my leisurely start to the day. Fog blanketed the hills as I sipped tea on the verandah, enchanted by the birdsongs filling the valley. A Yellow-browed Warbler called from the treetops, joined by a Green-tailed Sunbird and Grey Bushchat flitting through the foliage. After breakfast, we walked to the school auditorium, where the workshop began. The village's warm welcome with traditional chants and offerings of 'khaada' and 'tika' marked our arrival, creating a sacred atmosphere.

The workshop ignited after brief remarks from senior officials from the Forest Department. It kindled the wisdom shared by Babiya da, who spoke about nature-guiding tips, ethics, and responsibility and explored Sikkim's bird diversity. As lunch approached, I could not be more overwhelmed by the feast awaiting us: an array of Sikkimese delicacies - 'kinema,' 'gundruk,' 'shishnu' soup, 'sael' roti, 'churpi' salad, 'nakima'—served by women in traditional dress in traditional cutleries sitting around the buffet layout in the middle. The meal embodied the warmth of Sikkimese culture, and each bite celebrated the region's spirit. The thing I missed the most is a dish of pork, or as it is said in Nepali, 'Faaksha', but I can understand that it is not a meat, cherished by everyone, sadly!

Dr Guha's session followed next, covering essential first aid for guides and homestay owners. As the day closed, we planned an early

Grey Bushchat by Upamanyu Chakraborty

birding session with the participants the next morning. Despite the rain's persistence, I hoped for a few hours of clear skies. After the schedule, that chilly night, we huddled together, snugging our legs under blankets, sharing tales, memories, and laughter over a few drinks that extended into the early hours, savouring the bond built through shared passion and proximity to nature's rhythms.

Morning came with a burst of sunlight through my window. I was up very early. The view from the lawn unveiled the Pangolakha range, Zuluk's winding paths, and Khangchendzonga standing tall in the distance. Babiya da and Dr Guha were all set to return. Still, I requested them to extend their expertise for a couple of hours so that our team could be divided into smaller groups for a more immersive birdwatching experience. By 7 am, the team assembled, and after a briefing, we started our birding trek. Leading a group of novices, I chose a gentler approach, focusing on the joy of observing rather than overwhelming them with information. Patiently, we watched each bird, noting their features and discussing their habitats. The light-hearted local names for certain birds–'chichinkhote' for the Green-backed Tit, 'bhangera' for the Russet Sparrow, had a funny rhyming tone when pronouncing, and how the irritating call of 'Kalchura' or Blue Whistling Thrush woke them each morning and deprived them for a cosy morning sleep! All these cheerful loose talks sandwiched between lessons of serious birding –filled the air with laughter as we wandered through the mist. Ongmu, a little teenage girl full of life, with marvellous mischief, childish amusement, flamboyant attitude excitement, and affection, filled my heart more than anything during this trip. She became my favourite student as I heard about her dream to be a good nature guide one day! After breakfast, I delved into more advanced topics, sharing techniques for using eBird, data archiving, field guides, and mobile apps. In Chewang Bongpo's absence, I had to cover the entire workshop day. Chewang sir is a member of BWS and, most importantly, a pioneer in nature guiding in Sikkim! The participant would have learned a lot if he had managed to visit, but unfortunately, the landslide situation in his area was quite bad, and thus, he could not make it.

Despite babbling all day like a Jungle babbler, the participants' enthusiasm lifted my spirits. Some of the locals, like Ongmu, Raju Daju, and especially Rajen Rai from Talkharka - a famous bird guide who needs no introduction- lingered long after; their curiosity was an unmistakable sign that the seeds of knowledge had taken root.

The next morning, six of us trekked a narrow shortcut through the forest. Panting like a dog, I struggled with my camera, binoculars, and the drenched slippery 'chorbaato.' I gladly accepted when Ongmu offered to carry my camera, trusting her with a tool so dear to me. But fate intervened; my camera's display blurred, the dampness of the dense vegetation seeping in. Before I handed it over to her, the damage was already set. Saddened yet undeterred, I resolved to embrace this hike through the lens of my own eyes, letting the

Grey Treepie by Upamanyu Chakraborty

richness of the morning sun, the panoramic view of the Sikkim Himalaya behind the infinite valley with the mighty Kanchanjungha at the backdrop, diverse calls of skulkers and the company of newfound friends.

By the day's end, our checklist grew to 52 species, each one a testament to the hidden biodiversity of Dokchin's hills. After Sourav da's session on nature guiding-based tourism and real life case studies, the workshop concluded. Exchanging numbers, hugging, and making promises to meet again soon, indicated the time to depart!

Thanks to GTF, and especially Moumita and Nabanita, I could enjoy such a workshop with top-notch management and successful execution in the lap of nature with the natives of the soil, exchanging knowledge, sharing cultures, and making a garland of memories stringed togather by a common thread i.e love for nature, biodiversity and a keen will to conserve the treasure trove of the brother of the seven sisters of North East, -Sikkim! Exhausted yet deeply fulfilled, I knew it was the time to retreat! 'Durga Puja' awaited childhood friends arriving home aiming for the most precious yearly meet up. While my heart is forever bound to the wilderness, it also longs for the embrace of family, friends, and tradition. Being a wildlife professional, these little moments with family and close friends fuel me for the whole year away from home, in and around nature. Yet, I was sad to go back, and at the same time, I wanted to! I cannot express the feeling in words, but certainly! When Ongmu asked me to stay for another day, I could not reciprocate her wish as fondly as she asked with delight. Sometimes, I think, adulting is more of letting go! Being philosophic is

Russet Sparrow by Upamanyu Chakraborty

undoubtedly not my trait, but I hate prolonged goodbyes! Goodbyes are good only till it is brief. The prolonged one gives you a feeling of 'closure,' which abbreviates memory intensity!

As Sourav da and I departed, I saw Ongmu wave one last time, her voice swallowed by the mountain mist. I rolled up the window, leaving the words unsaid, the promises unmade. Not every goodbye needs a word; in some places, some people remain in silence, etched deep within, a cherished memory of time shared, laughter, and landscapes yet unspoiled.

You can see the full list of birds in the following eBird links:

https://ebird.org/checklist/S197423897

https://ebird.org/checklist/S197545830

Panoramic view of DOKCHIN

Biswapriya Rahut (President BWS) speaking at the event

With the partricpants - Nature Guide Training Workshop

Author (Upmanyu) with event memento

Author (Upmanyu) Speaking at the event

Biswapriya Rahut (President BWS) addressing the budding nature guides

* *In tradition Bengali culture as a mark of respect 'da' is added after the person's first name, it also signifies that you know the person reasonably well.*

Empowering local communities ...
Birdwatchers' Society & Green Peoples India at Malda

November 10, 2024, saw the launch of a significant initiative at Nayabazar High School, Panchanandapur, through a collaborative effort by the Birdwatchers' Society (BWS) and Green Peoples India. The program aimed to raise awareness about bird conservation and promote bird tourism among fishermen and boatmen in the Farakka Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA).

A key highlight of the event was the distribution of binoculars by BWS to local boatmen, empowering them to engage actively in birdwatching and conservation. This innovative step encourages the community to become custodians of their natural environment and creates eco-tourism opportunities that can enhance their livelihoods.

Distinguished dignitaries, including Shri Sudip Dutta (DM & DC, Malda), Samiran Jha, Sandip Das, Subhasish Sengupta, Sayanta Basak, Siddhartha Bhattacharjee, Nabanita Pandey, Tanmoy Bakshi, Amirul Da, and other forest officials graced the occasion. Their guidance and encouragement highlighted the importance of conserving the unique avian biodiversity of Farakka IBA, home to numerous resident and migratory bird species.

Interactive sessions were held to educate attendees about bird conservation's ecological and economic significance. Experts demonstrated the use of binoculars, enhancing the birdwatching experience and fostering a deeper connection with nature. The local boatmen thanked the Birdwatchers' Society for this empowering gesture.

This initiative marks a crucial step in fostering a sustainable and harmonious relationship between local communities and their natural heritage, paving the way for a brighter future for birds and people.

BWS Founder-member Sandip Das presenting the Birds of West Bengal booklet

Particpants at the session

BWS ACTIVITIES

Gajoldoba

In November 2024, four members of the Birdwatchers' Society visited Gajoldoba Barrage and its surrounding area. 41 species were recorded within a span of 02 hours. Apart from some 90 odd Gadwalls, one pair of Common Pochard, 02 pairs of Northern Shoveller, 08 Eurasian Wigeon and 17 Tufted Pochard were recorded. Only a handful of Ruddy Shelducks were also recorded. A lone Steppe Eagle was observed soaring. The local boatmen were of the opinion that they were expecting good number of ducks to arrive by the full moon. The team members were viz. Mousumi Dutta, Supriyo Ghatak, Chinmoy Saha and Biswapriya Rahut.

Members of BWS team at North Bengal conducting bird survey at Gajoldoba

Purple-rumped Sunbird Picture By Navin Agarwal

Awakened by melody:
A journey into the world of birds through their songs

In 2017, a few birds transformed my world. Moving from the urban buzz of Bangur Avenue to Salt Lake's greener charm, I was greeted each morning by a bird's sharp yet melodic call. It became my natural alarm, drawing me to the window in search of its unseen singer. Later that year, during a visit to Bhimtal, I awoke to a symphony of bird calls echoing through the serene hills. These moments sparked a deep fascination with birds, their melodies opening a gateway to the avian world. The enchanting melody, enriched my mornings and deepened my connection with nature. These simple yet profound encounters marked the start of a lifelong love for birds and the timeless music they bring to our world.

Navin Agarwal

PERSPECTIVES

THE JUVENILE BIRDER IS A PRO-ENTEMOLOGIST. HE LIKES THE BEATLES.

Courtesy : TITASH CHAKRABARTI

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