

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Mixed Welcome to Guest Birds in City

By A S M Nurunnabi  
At the beginning of winter, a large number of migratory birds arrive in this country from colder climates in Siberia and Europe. The total number of such birds is estimated at five to ten lakhs each year. Their arrival starts from mid-August and it reaches its peak in January-February. They start returning to their original habitats from April.

The ornithologists have identified the impulse that drives the migration of birds of many species. According to them most species of birds, because of their high metabolic rate, require a rich, abundant supply of food at frequent intervals. Such a situation does not always prevail throughout the year in any given region. Birds have thus evolved a highly efficient means for travelling swiftly over long distances with great economy of energy. There are certain characteristics of their migration. The migration flights follow specific routes, sometimes well defined over long distances. The majority of bird migrants, however, travel along broad airways. The speed of migratory birds depends largely on the species and the type of terrain covered. Birds in migration, however, go faster than otherwise. Most migrations occur at relatively low altitudes. Some birds, however, fly much higher—even to an altitude of 14,000 feet. Many species of migrant birds are nocturnal (night time) migrants. Most birds are gregarious during migration, even those that display a fierce individualism at all other times. Birds of similar habits sometimes travel together.

At the height of influx of migratory birds, in January-February of this year, it was estimated by some ornithologists that, as compared with previous years, the volume of their arrival is 40 per cent less this year. One reason for this reduction, according to such ornithologists, may be that

winter this year was much less severe. The other reason may be that the birds face disturbance from large-scale hunting in the haor areas which these birds choose as their temporary abode. The Hakaluki haor in Sylhet shelters the highest number of the guest birds. Srimangal is another important place of their concentration.

A total of 632 species of birds are found in Bangladesh, of which nearly 200 are migratory, according to a noted ornithologist. Of these migratory birds, nearly 25 species are ducks that fall prey to the poachers the most. The other duck species are pintail, brahminy, bareheaded, shoveller, common pochard, common ruddy, shelduck, teal and lag geese.

In the Dhaka city, the main locations of their concentration are the lakes in BDR HQ at Peikhana, Mirpur Zoo, Bangabhaban and the beels and water areas around the city.

Poaching and selling of guest birds continue despite Prime Minister's directive issued a couple of years ago to apply the law prohibiting the hunting of winter birds, witnesses say. Raids by law enforcement agencies are usually rare, and when the law enforcers do come, the hunters flee to remote areas of haors. Netted mostly in the haor areas, the birds are shipped to the capital and other major cities where buyers can afford the prices the sellers demand. The duck species like garganey, mallard, common teal from the Siberian region are found on sale, in peak season of migration, at Elephant Road, Manik Miah Avenue, Panthapath, Bally Road, Mirpur Road, Mouchak Market areas and some other city points.

It is a clear violation of the country's Wild Life Preservation Law, wild life experts say. The law prohibiting hunting of winter fowls pro-

vides a penalty of up to 2 years in jail and Tk 2000/- fine for a person charged with killing or endangering wild life.

There are good and bad effects of the huge influx of the guest birds, but on balance, according to ornithologists, the good effects tip the scale. Among the bad effects may be cited the damage they cause to corn fields when they swoop down on them for feeding. One redeeming feature in this respect is said to be that some of the bird species do not feed on corns. Another redeeming aspect is that in April when boro paddies are ripe for harvesting, it is the time for most of the species of guest birds to leave.

The good effects mainly relate to their environmental impact. The droppings of such large numbers of birds in the water areas turn into plankton which serve as food for different kinds of fish in water areas. As for those species of birds which are land-based, the droppings serve to enhance the fertility of the soil and enrich the vegetation.

They also play a helpful role in pest control—inasmuch as they feed on different kinds of harmful insects and also field mice and rodents etc, which damage crops. On the whole, their influence on the ecology of the regions where they temporarily settle is held to be beneficial, outweighing whatever evil effects their presence brings about.

The Wild Life Society is understood to be campaigning for years to protect the winter birds from the hunters but their appeal has so far fallen on deaf ears, as is felt by some wild life experts.

The responsibility for their preservation is now with the Forest Conservation Wing of the Ministry of Forest and Environment. But lack of funds and initiative are understood to be main impediments in their effectiveness.

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Israeli and Palestinian chief negotiators, General Amnon Shahak (R) and Nabil Shaath (L) sign an agreement in Cairo on Thursday to deploy foreign observers in the mosque massacre town of Hebron. — AFP photo

### Talks on self-rule resume tomorrow

## Israel to start pullout from Gaza, Jericho Apr 12

JERUSALEM, Apr 1: A Palestinian official said on Thursday Israel has agreed to start pulling out its troops from Gaza and Jericho on April 12 and complete the withdrawal by April 30, reports Reuter.

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