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Guess which goose is coming as dinner

By Mir A Zaman

"Osh-shikar! Osh-shikar!" cries the man out loud every time a car rushes by along the New Elephant Road. The shikars, the Bengali synonym for games, in his hands are three migratory birds tied together.

He is not alone. There are four or five more like him.

Their marketing strategy is the same. Whenever they see a car coming in, they display the shikars and cry out. "Osh-shikar!" They are a regular feature in winter, that's when the migratory birds start coming in from Siberia and other arctic areas. Ironically, the birds, which fly thousands of miles away from home to the tropical land of ours in search of food, become delicious dishes themselves.

The tragic element in the whole story is, however, lost on the vendors. For them, the guest birds are nothing but produce to be sold to whoever is ready to pay. Eco-systems, endangered species are terms they are not familiar with and don't care much about.

"People sell chicken and I sell these," said the middle-aged man, a familiar face at New Elephant Road in winter. "It's what I do for a living."

Although they sell the shikars, they are not the shikars, or hunters. They don't set the traps for the ducks, geese and other migratory birds that fly in in winter. From November to January these birds take refuge in the ponds, beels and haors at different places across the country. The haor in Sylhet, Chalan Beel in Rajshahi, the forest in Madhupur and Srimangal attract the majority of the guest birds, and of course, the hunters, who set the snares to catch them.

The hunters sell the birds to local traders. The migratory birds are then sent to the key cities of the country by road along with poultry of the regular kind. The trucks are off-loaded at the wholesale markets at Kawran Bazar and Mohammadpur. From there the birds go to street-side vendors.

"We don't catch them," said another vendor, as if he were making a confession. "We buy them from the markets and sell them here."

The migratory birds are expensive.

"I have got three Siberian ducks," said the man. "It will

cost you 1,800 taka."

The price they ask is often double the amount they eventually settle for. Often, it takes them the whole day to sell the few birds they have in their possession. Some just ask the price out of curiosity while some lose interest at the very beginning.

Buying three ducks for 1,800 taka is not something I can afford," said the pedestrian, a junior executive at a private enterprise.

There are quite a few who simply hate the idea of having a migratory bird for lunch or

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