

Hakaluki, Tanguar haors abuzz with more migratory birds

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The number of migratory birds in Hakaluki and Tanguar haors has increased this year compared to that of last year, the latest census shows.

About 34,264 birds of 56 species were counted during a two-day census conducted on January 25 and 26 this year in 42 water bodies of Hakaluki haor. The census conducted on the same days in January 2015 tallied 21,631 birds.

Migratory birds have started flocking to Hakaluki Haor in Moulvibazar, the biggest wetland in the country, delighting visitors with their chirping and fluttering. Birds of different species have come earlier this year and their number is also more than last year, bird watchers said.

Every winter, thousands of migratory birds of different species from Siberia and other colder regions flock to the haor. A team led by the National Coordinator of Waterfowl Census in Bangladesh and prominent bird specialist Enam Ul Haque, conducted the census under the Coastal and Wetland Bio-diversity Management Project (CWBMP) of the Directorate of Environment (DoE).

It was organised by Bangladesh Bird Club and

funded by USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project.

The survey was conducted under 'Enumeration of Aquatic Bird 2007', a project of DoE.

Wildlife specialists, Bangladesh Bird Club and some teachers and students of the zoology departments of some universities were also in the survey team.

The number of birds has risen by one-third from last

year. A good number of unknown birds were found in the haor this year, he added.

The number of winter birds has also doubled in Tanguar haor of Sunamganj over the last decade, as the winged visitors found the overall environment quality at the water body suitable for them.

Another survey, conducted by IUCN Bangladesh, counted 30

species of migratory birds and 1,02,000 individuals this time against 52,299 last year, while the figure was 32,225 in 2014, 17,204 in 2013 and 28,876 in 2012.

The census team found huge numbers of red-crested pochard (8,116), common coot (7,250) and gadwall (14,893) in the Tanguar haor.

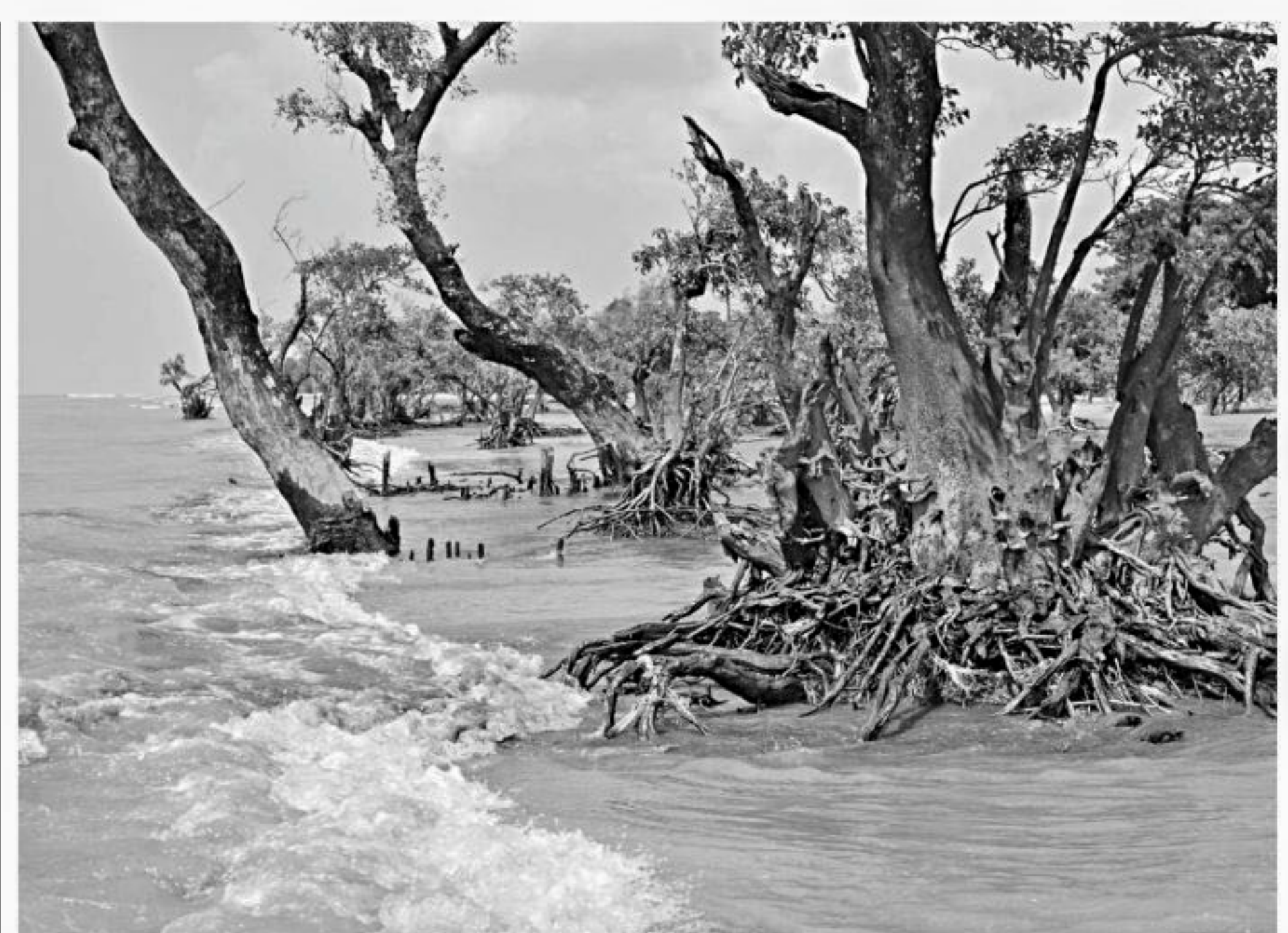
The IUCN team carried out a waterfowl census in

Chattannar Beel, Lechuamara, Hatirghata, Berberia, Rowa, Rupaboi, Ballardubi, and adjacent beels of Tanguar haor on January 25-26.

The survey team recorded 30 species of migratory birds from different beels, including some adjacent grounds of this haor, said the National Coordinator of Waterfowl Census in Bangladesh, Enam Ul Haque.



A large number of migratory birds fluttering over Hakaluki Haor, a vast water body in Moulvibazar district, make a captivating sight.



The reserve forest in Kuakata sea beach area of Patuakhali district is gradually shrinking due to frequent tidal surges.

KUAKATA IN PATUAKHALI 250 hectares of reserve forest disappear in 5yrs

Erosion, sand removal by tidal surges causing the menace

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Erosion due to frequent hit by tidal surges causes depletion of the reserve forest in Kuakata sea beach, badly affecting the natural beauty of the picturesque tourist spot where the visitors can see both the sunrise and the sunset from the same spot.

The government declared 5,661 hectares of forest land in Kuakata as National Park in 2005, said sources at Patuakhali forest department.

To make Kuakata more attractive to tourists, the forest department created a tamarisk garden covering about 10,000 hectares of land there.

Shortly after the super cyclone Sidr hit the area in 2007, the forest department planted many trees in

Kuakata. More trees were planted from 2010 to 2012.

But in last five years, at least 250 hectares of forest land was lost to the sea as tidal surges frequently hit the beach, said Mihir Kanti Doe, divisional forest officer.

"We sent several letters to the Water Development Board [WDB], asking them to take necessary steps regarding the matter," he said.

During a recent visit to Gamgamoti area, about eight kilometres to the east of Kuakata Zero Point, this correspondent saw some people cutting a number of trees that had been uprooted due to removal of sand.

Rumman Imtiaz Tushar, managing director of Kuakata Tourism Centre,

said Kuakata tourist spot has lost much of its beauty as the eye-soothing coconut garden and tamarisk garden are disappearing fast.

Under the impact of climatic change, water level of the Bay sees rise every year and so, the level of tidal surges is also getting higher, said Prof Mohammad Ali, chairman of agro-forestry department of Patuakhali Science and Technology University.

Repeated hit by tidal surges remove sand, causing the trees to get uprooted, he said, adding that trees tolerant to tidal surges and salinity should be planted to protect the beach.

Contacted, Abul Khayer, executive engineer of WDB in Kalapara Circle, said a survey is going on to take a project to protect Kuakata beach.

Profitable betel farming sees rise in Jhenidah

A farmer expects to earn Tk 3.5 lakh per bigha this year if weather remains favourable

AZIBOR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Farmer Ramesh Chandra Das of Raigram village in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila has good reason to champion betel leaf. "From growing betel over the last 15 years I was able to build a five-room brick house with a sanitary latrine. I have bought five bighas of land and covered the cost of educating my son, who now studies in Class VIII." Along with his family, Das has become accustomed to good news from betel growing. But this year, earnings have exceeded even his wildest expectations.

According to district farmers it costs about Tk 1.2 lakh per bigha to farm betel, including bamboo stakes, rope, fertilisers, labour and the coarse grass for the shade-roof of the enclosure in which the betel grows. At present

80 betel leaves, which make one "poon" in Jhenidah-speak, fetch up to Tk 140 at the market. If the weather remains favourable, an average farmer will earn up to Tk 3.5 lakh per bigha this year.

Arabinda Kumar Biswas, also from Raigram, is in such an enviable position. From his single bigha cultivated with betel he has already earned Tk 2 lakh. He hopes to double that before the end of peak season, should the helpful weather hold.

"I've made Tk 4.5 lakh so far this season," says Abdul Aziz of Harinakundo upazila, who has cultivated two bighas of betel at a cost of Tk 2 lakh. "I hope for another Tk 2 lakh in sales before April."

Aziz lists the benefits of betel: the crop is well-suited to local conditions,

which makes for good farming; betel leaves are in demand in the market. "Besides," he says, "I incurred huge losses on paddy cultivation in the past. Next year, I will cultivate four more bighas with betel." Similar sentiments are echoed by neighbours Kartik Das, Swapan Das and Jogen Biswas.

Betel leaf trader Azizur Rahman of Jhenidah says that betel leaf is being exported, which has considerably increased both demand and prices. "It's the high prices that are the crop's allure for the farmers," he says.

The Department of Agriculture Extension in Jhenidah reports that sweet betel leaf cultivation across the district has risen to 2,285 hectares in the 2015-16 season, up from 2,070 hectares the year before and 1,830 hectares two seasons ago.

This year, broad betel smiles can be found across the district, with success meaning different things to different people. "I incurred huge losses from low paddy prices in the past," says Chansal Kumar Das of Singi village, "and my wife has suffered dysentery for years. Finally, because of betel, I was able to take her to India for good treatment and nowadays she also helps in tending our betel crop."

"We used to live on flood prone land in Noakhali," says Narayan Chandra Pal of Raigram. "When we first arrived in Jhenidah in 1968 we lived in a makeshift shack; but now we have a four room brick house and six bighas of land." As long as the betel vines twist ever higher, it seems, so will the fortunes of Jhenidah's betel growers.



A betel garden in Jhenidah district.

2 siblings held with pistol, bullets

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Police arrested two siblings with a foreign made pistol, a magazine and two bullets from Banani area in Shajahanpur upazila of the district on Wednesday night.

The arrestees are Zakiul Alam Rumi, 42, and Sayedul Alam, 33, sons of Md Asaduzzaman of Rahman Nagar of the district town.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided the area and arrested the two with the firearm and bullets around 11:00pm, police said.

Six 'robbers' arrested

UNB, Comilla

Police arrested six alleged robbers from Chowrasta area in Homna upazila of the district early yesterday.

Police said law enforcers, acting on a tip-off, intercepted two CNG-run auto-rickshaws, carrying the gang members, who were going to Homna from Gouripur at around 2:00am.

Sensing the presence of the police team, the gang member tried to flee the spot. Police chased the robbers and arrested six of them while the rest managed to flee.

The arrestees are Akash, 23, Shafiqul Islam, 24, Sumon, 25, Kabir Hossain, 25, of Homna upazila; Mohammad Alam, 35, of Daudkandi upazila, and Rabiul Hasan, 29, of Titas upazila of the district.

Police also seized a pipegun, two bullets, two machetes and four masks from their possession.

Six Jamaat-Shibir men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Police arrested six leaders and activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir from Fulpara village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila yesterday.

The arrestees include Hashem Ali, 50, Jewel, 30, Ashik Islam, 20, Abdul Quader, 22, and Zinnat Ali, 25.

PM'S SPECIAL AID FOR ETHNIC PEOPLE

Beneficiaries of Hakimpur UZ allege fund misuse

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

The ethnic minority people in Hakimpur upazila under the district have alleged misappropriation of the fund sanctioned from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for conducting different development works in last three years.

The office of Hakimpur upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) got Tk 11.05 lakh in 2012-13 fiscal year, Tk 12 lakh in 2013-14 and Tk 18 lakh in 2015-16 fiscal year from the PMO for development works meant for around 3,000 ethnic families in the upazila, official sources said.

The fund is meant for different works including distribution of cattle and building sheds, building biogas plants, giving electricity supply, setting up sanitary toilets and tube-wells, financial help for the school children, distribution of rickshaws, rickshaws and sewing machines and arranging trainings to empower the ethnic people.

"We did not get proper disbursement of the aid fund that was sent from the Prime Minister's Office during the last three years. The UNO office just built 20 toilets and setup 20 tube-wells in four villages, and each family had to pay Tk 500 for it," said Gregory Soren, president of Hakimpur upazila Adivasi Samaj Unnayan Samity.

An official of Public Health Engineering Department was to monitor the toilet and tube-well installation project as per the instruction of the PMO, but Md Abdul Latif, public health official in Hakimpur, said he is unaware about the projects.

In December last year, the UNO office organised a training programme for the indigenous people at his office complex.

Training was to be held for 30 days, but it was concluded within seven days and each trainee got Tk 2,400 instead of Tk 3,000, alleged several beneficiaries.

At a press conference on

January 10, local social workers alleged that the UNO office spent only 25 percent of the fund.

Besides, the stipend fund of Tk 4.00 lakh meant for indigenous students was never distributed among them.

"My daughter, a Class X student, never got any help from the UNO office. It's really hard for us to manage her schooling cost," said Sunil Orao of Malancha village in Hakimpur upazila of Dinajpur.

This correspondent on January 11 visited the office of Hakimpur UNO Md Azharul Islam and wanted to know from him about the projects, he said. "It's a continuous project."

But he failed to show the documents of the project implementation.

"We want that the government carry out an investigation into the allegations of fund misappropriation," said Badal Tigga, former president of Hakimpur Upazila Adivasi Samaj Unnayan Samity.



Swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila, winner of double gold medals in the 12th South Asian Games in Guwahati of Indian province Assam, gets a reception from Bangladesh Swimming Federation as she enters the country through Tamabil border in Sylhet district yesterday.