

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

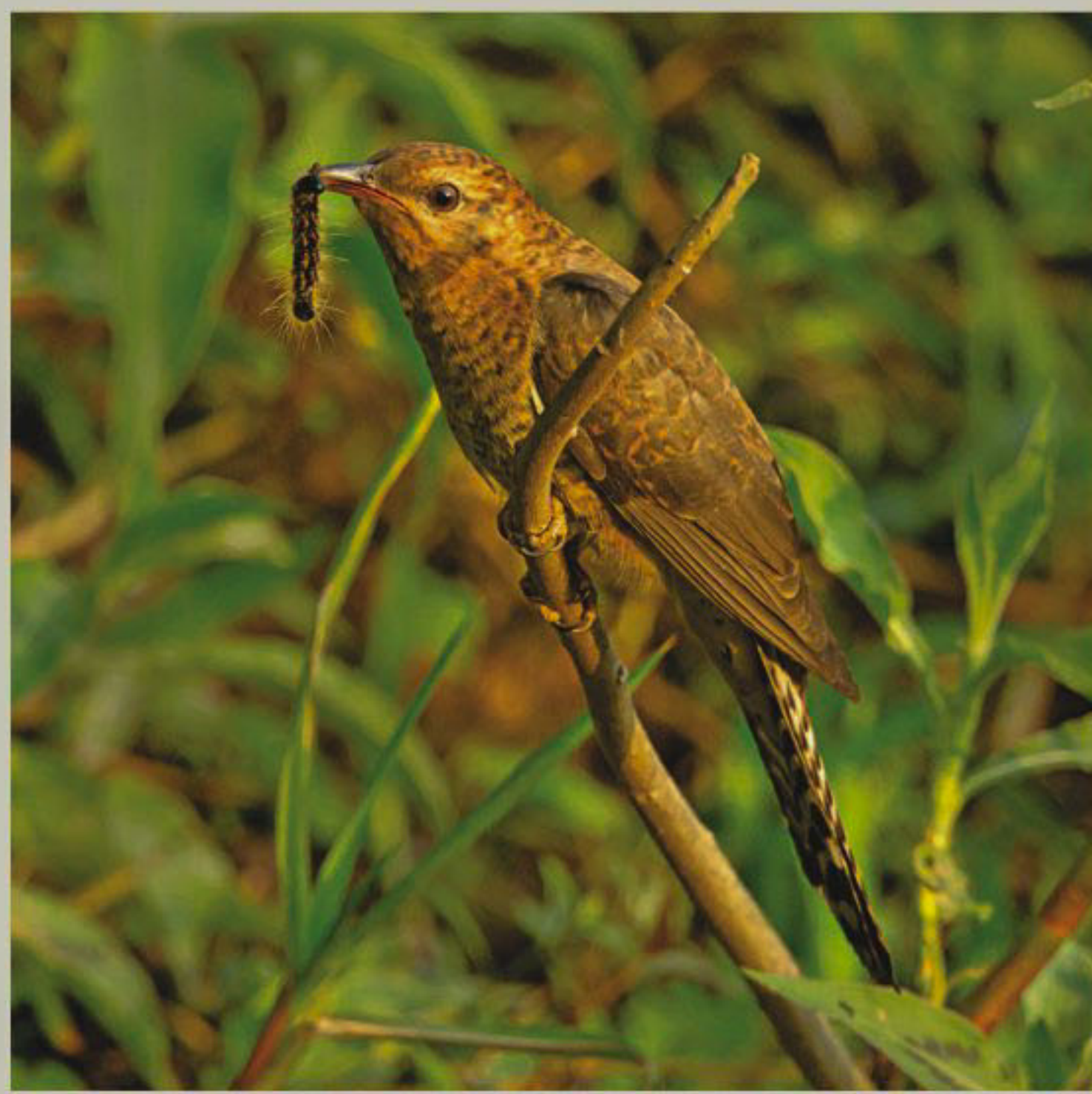
Finches, Beaks and Darwin

When Charles Darwin started his voyage from England to South America on board the H.M.S. *Beagle* in 1831, he was twenty-two and, having completed studying at Cambridge, was looking forward to becoming a pastor in rural England. His official position was ship's naturalist. He was also gentleman companion to ship's Captain Robert FitzRoy, himself an educated person, who worried about the loneliness of leading the ship through this long voyage. Darwin himself was an avid naturalist who had built collections of insects and learned how to preserve bird specimens.

Having accomplished its main mission of surveying South America's coast, the *Beagle* reached the Galapagos Islands in 1825. Darwin's work during the five weeks here led to his theory of evolution by natural selection.

Seen through the lens of history, Galapagos finches that Darwin collected played an important role in his discovery of evolution. There are thirteen species of this bird family spread out over the islands. The species differ in many ways. Famously, the beak of each is slightly different in shape and size. Each species uses its beak in a different manner. For example, two species use their beak to shape tools. They will take a small twig or branch and, using their beak, sharpen it. Then they will use it to poke into dead branches to extract worms.

According to popular belief, Darwin had his "Eureka!" moment of discovery of evolution while studying the finches of the Galapagos Islands. It would seem that one fine day in Galapagos, Darwin, while examining these finches, had a flash of insight: starting with the same ancestor species millions of years ago, the finches on different



A plaintive cuckoo using its beak, Moulvi Bazar. PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

islands had adapted – evolved – differently to suit their environment.

In fact, Darwin did not pay much attention to the finches while at Galapagos. After coming home to London, he donated his Galapagos collection – including the finches – to a scientific organisation. Scientists were excited at this windfall and began studying the various specimens. In particular, the famous ornithologist John Gould was amazed by the finches and wrote a newspaper article on them. His study of the finches attracted Darwin's attention who eventually found them to be consistent with natural selection.

But evolution was not an instant revelation to Darwin. It took him over twenty years of dedicated work to complete his magnum opus, *The Origin of the Species*, one of the most important and controversial

books of science.

The Galapagos finches thus constitute one of the most important bird tribes in the history of science. Ironically these birds are not part of the "true finch" family (which includes birds like goldfinch and our rosefinch) but are related to the tanager family of birds. They continue to be studied today by scientists in search of life's mysteries.

Incidentally, the beak is hugely important for birds. It is used for eating, sipping nectar, hunting, grooming, building nests, fighting, cutting food, breaking wood to look for worms... In recognition of this uniqueness, many Bengali birders prefer to use the word uncommon "chonchu" rather than the common "thot" for beak.

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Seven 'wartime' grenades found in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Police recovered seven grenades and ammunition from a septic tank at a compound of Sadar Hospital in Naogaon yesterday.

Zakirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Naogaon Sadar Police Station, told The Daily Star that some workers found the ammunition around 1:45pm while cleaning a compound for constructing a building there.

Informed by the workers, police rushed to the spot and recovered seven grenades and forty rounds of bullets.

Police suspected that the ammunition might have been dumped there during the Liberation War.

However, police could not confirm if the grenades were still alive.

Boy killed, 30 hurt in Sunamganj clash over football match

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A student was killed and 30 others were injured in a clash between two groups over playing football on the field of Abdul Gafur High School in Dakshin Sunamganj upazila of Sunamganj on Thursday evening.

Gilman Ahmed, 14, son of Abdul Kadir of Badeshari village in the upazila, was a class X student of the school.

The two groups first had an altercation during the football match leading to the clash, Sunamganj police Officer-in-Charge Al-Amin quoted locals as saying.

Both the groups used sharp weapons and sticks during the clash. Gilman, who was hit in the back, died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital at night, said Hazi Nurul Islam, chairman of Jawabazar Union Parishad.

No case was filed till yesterday afternoon.

Meanwhile, at least seven were injured in a gunfight between two groups over fishing in Shanir Haor of Islampur village in Jamalganj upazila of Sunamganj on Thursday night.

Of the injured, five were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital while the other two to Jamalganj Upazila Health Complex.

The supporters of Abu Samad and Shafiqul Islam of the village engaged in the gunfight as there was a longstanding dispute between the two over the issue, Jamalganj police Officer-in-Charge (investigation) Md Mustak Kamal quoted locals as saying.

Being informed by locals, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, he said.

Bullet-hit body of missing Shibir leader found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A Shibir leader was found dead in a field at Hingerpara village of Harinakunda upazila in Jhenidah, 21 days after he had gone missing.

Jaasim Uddin, 23, son of Khalil Mondol, was the president of Ganna union unit of the pro-Jamaat student organisation, said police.

Harinakunda police Officer-in-Charge Mahtab Uddin said locals first noticed the body of Jaasim who was blindfolded and the legs and hands were tied up. His brother Saifur Rahman identified the body, he said.

Miscreants might have killed him and left the body there, said the OC. The body bore marks of bullet injuries, Mahtab quoted sources at Jhenidah Sadar Hospital morgue as saying.

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A youth holds a set of banners in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club yesterday, demanding an immediate stop to the recent killing, torture and abuse of children.

PHOTO: STAR

End discriminations against women

Urge activists from two rallies in Dhaka

DU CORRESPONDENT

Politicians, academics, and rights activists yesterday called for an end to discriminations at home and workplace against women and establish a repression free and women friendly society.

The call came from two separate rallies, one organised by the women cell of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and another was organised by Nari Sanghati, women's front of Ganasambhati Andolon, marking International Women's Day on March 8.

Speakers at the rally said women were deprived of their rights both by the state and men.

They placed several demands including an end of violence against women, introduction of a uniform family code, full approval and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

against Women (CEDAW), equal rights for women of all classes.

Addressing the rally at the capital's Shahbagh, CPB President Mujahidul Islam Selim said women were being repressed because they worked hard but got lower wages.

"Women are being used as a source of making extra profit," he said.

"The actual purpose of International Women's Day is to conclude the conflict between labour and capitalism of a society and to protect women from exploitation," he added.

"The NGOs and corporate sector is trying to shun the actual purpose of the day. To bring women out of the situation, it is a must to initiate movements."

Laxmi Chakrabarty, presidium member of CPB, called for a better treatment of domestic helps – male or female – whose rights are being violated every now and then.

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Man kills wife over family feud

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A man killed his wife over a family feud at Kadampur Umradagi village of Ranishankoil upazila in Thakurgaon yesterday.

The deceased was Sohagi Begum, 30, wife of Kosim Uddin of the same village.

Inspector (investigation) of Ranishankoil police and also the Investigation Officer of the case Sirajul Islam told this correspondent over the cell phone that Kosim engaged in a quarrel with her wife over a trifling matter around 8:00am.

At one stage of the altercation, he hit her on the head, leaving her dead on the spot, and fled the house.

A case was filed in this connection, accusing eight of Kosim's family members, including him.



Chairman of Summit Group of Companies Muhammed Aziz Khan observes a stone sculpture at Galleri Kaya in the capital, while sculptor Prof Hamiduzzaman Khan and US Embassy official Nancy T Vanhorn look on. The veteran sculptor opened a solo exhibition at the art gallery on his 70th birthday yesterday, showcasing 10 bronze and 18 stone sculptures, five acrylic paintings and 20 drawings.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Hamiduzzaman opens solo exhibit on 70th birthday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's one of the most prolific sculptors Prof Hamiduzzaman Khan celebrated his 70th birthday yesterday by opening a solo exhibition at Galleri Kaya in the capital's Uttara.

Chairman of Summit Group of Companies Muhammed Aziz Khan inaugurated the exhibition titled "Stones-2" in the evening.

Nancy T Vanhorn, press and information officer of the US Embassy, was present on the occasion among others.

The exhibition that will continue till March 18 showcases 10 bronze and 18 stone sculptures, five acrylic paintings and 20 drawings.

"Most of my exhibitions have been on sculptures. But I have been also drawing on papers in huge numbers," said Hamiduzzaman, who has been putting up solo exhibitions since 1968. This is his fifth solo exhibition at 12-year-old Galleri Kaya.

"Most of these drawings are related to sculptures while many were done during my frequent travels. Many of these were unsigned. So I have organised them this year and signed them. These will total more than 3,000! No, these won't be exhibited here," Hamiduzzaman told The Daily Star.

Hamiduzzaman Khan was initially a painter in the late sixties. He turned to sculptures in 1974 and kept on improvising on its techniques and materials.

"Initially for the first 10-12 years, I worked with metal castings. I switched to using metal sheets for the next 10 years. Metal sheets get rusted when kept outside. So in line with changing trends in building materials, I turned to using metal pipes," he noted.

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