

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Iora, a common bird, but hard to spot without practice.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Get Started in Birdwatching

Sometimes I am invited to present a slide show on birds of Bangladesh at gatherings. When I finish, some common questions come from the audience. "How do I start birdwatching?", "What are some good spots in or around Dhaka?", and "If so-and-so is a 'common' bird how come we never see it?"

As we saw in this column last week, Bangladesh is extraordinarily rich in birdlife. After you have had some practice, you can see plenty of birds in an hour or two in a place with trees, or an open field, or near water bodies. You should carry a pair of binoculars, wear comfortable shoes, dress in muted colours, and carry a field guide. Arm yourself with lots of patience. A camera with telephoto lens is helpful if you want to identify the birds later.

Identification was the most difficult problem I faced when I started watching birds. Recognizing a bird beyond our commonest ones (*fingey, doel, shalik, bulbul*) – caused me a great deal of frustration. I would pore over books and field guides, search the Internet, and finally in desperation call on a friend or two who knew about birds. It was a struggle every time.

My breakthrough came when I joined the Bangladesh Bird Club, founded by our eminent birder Enam Ul Haque. This knowledgeable, dedicated, hard-working and friendly group accelerated my avian education. Once I had climbed over the initial hurdle of about 15-20 birds, it became much easier to identify other ones.

Today if I see a bird I cannot identify I am excited because there is a good chance it is a "lifer" for me, that is, the first time in my life I am seeing this bird – a different reaction than five years ago!

Where to find these birds? Dhaka's

parks, as well as the Botanical Garden and Zoo, are home to many species of birds. In winter, migrant birds arrive there, swelling the bird population. (Incidentally, migrants include not just ducks, but also many types of songbirds.)

If you have time to explore beyond Dhaka, say, a few hours on a weekend morning, there are good birding places close by. The fields of Purbachol have many species of birds, but it is best if you go with someone who knows the right spots so you don't waste time searching. Jahangirnagar University and Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute (BLRI) in Savar are well-known to bird enthusiasts. There are rich spots in Keraniganj across the Buriganga, but you will need a guide.

Ready for multi-day trips? You can visit the haors and reserve forests of Sylhet. A trip to Sundarban is rewarding in many ways, but birding is a big attraction for me. For the more adventurous, the chars along our coastline, including Nijhum Dwip, offer magnificent birding. In recent years, the chars of Padma river in Rajshahi have yielded unusual species, but I am yet to visit them.

Once I became attuned to birds, I began to see more common birds, for example, ioras, bee-eaters, munias, woodpeckers and swifts. Before, I had hardly noticed them.

This is the time many people set goals for the year. Why not put birdwatching in your list of new year's resolutions? It will give you many hours of pleasure, teach you about our beautiful country and open nature's secrets to you.

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All sorts of bedclothes from different hospitals are being dried in the sun after washed in the clean and polluted water of the Buriganga. The photo was taken yesterday from Kamrangir Char area on the outskirts of the capital.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

A misplaced focus

Authorities plan planetarium in zoo area, prioritising awareness of distant stars over animal wellbeing

ANWAR ALI with ANDREW EAGLE

Rajshahi Zoo was once a prime recreation facility for city-dwellers and visitors. But since the city corporation took responsibility for its management in 1996, the zoo's grounds have steadily dwindled in size. The latest move pits science against science, with a planetarium to be constructed on the zoo's land. The development will leave both the zoo's visitors and animals with little room to move.

Originally, the zoo was spacious. It was established from 1972, on 82 bighas of land, which in the British era had been a racecourse.

Until 2003, its western edge featured a 16-bigha deer enclosure where at least 350 deer lived. Along the eastern boundary were roomy cages for monkeys, baboons and chimpanzees. Between them were lions, tigers, hyenas, bears, snakes and birds; along with displays of domesticated animals. All of the animals were housed in ample-sized enclosures.

"We could hardly see the whole zoo in a single day," recalls one local, Murad Parvez, who knew the zoo when it was in prime condition.

RAJSHAHI ZOO



Trees being felled to clear an area for the proposed planetarium.

PHOTO: STAR

In more recent years, Rajshahi City Corporation has pursued a series of development projects on the land. Projects valued at Tk 23 crore have been approved since 2010.

Then, in February 2016, a further six bighas was offered on a long-term lease to the science and technology ministry as the site for the country's second Novo Theatre planetarium, a Tk 226

crore project. The Public Works Department is slated to commence the facility's year-long construction this month.

The PWD also published an advertisement in some national dailies inviting bids for tender in this regard.

Curiously, the land value assigned by the land ministry, in lease documents dated May 11, 2016, is the paltry sum of Tk 1,000.

Rajshahi Zoo, which once had a rich collection of animals, is in a sorry state. Some of the animals, including lions, tigers, hyenas and civets, have died over the years, due to neglect, accidents and loneliness.

With a view to reducing maintenance costs meanwhile, the size of the deer herd was reduced to 54, with their enclosure now covering three bighas.

Currently what is left of the rest of the zoo is squeezed into 13 bighas, with the remainder of the land having been redeveloped into a children's park, picnic areas, roads, restaurants and offices.

"The zoo is so small now that it barely takes an hour to see it," says Murad Parvez. "The zoo has been painted into a corner."

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Members of police stand guard near the central office of BNP at Nayapaltan in the capital yesterday. The party's Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at the time was holding a press conference in the office in protest against the denial of permission to hold a rally marking January 5 as "Democracy Killing Day".

PHOTO: STAR



Ex-caretaker govt adviser Dhiraj Kumar dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhiraj Kumar Nath, a former bureaucrat and adviser to a caretaker government, died of cardiac arrest in a Dhaka hospital yesterday, aged 73.

He left behind his wife and two sons to mourn his death.

Dhiraj breathed his last around 6:10pm at Labaid Specialized Hospital, a day after he was hospitalised as his health condition deteriorated in the last few days, said his son-in-law Subir Chowdhury.

After hospitalisation in the morning, Dhiraj was shifted to the CCU on Thursday noon and then put on life support until his death.

His two sons, who live in Canada, would arrive in Dhaka today to attend his cremation ceremony, said Subir.

Dhiraj, born on January 9 in 1945 at Rafiqpur village of Begumganj in Noakhali, passed his entrance exam from Chaumuhani Modonmohan High School in 1960. He obtained his post-graduate degree in commerce, management from Dhaka University in 1966.

After a short teaching profession at Noakhali Government College, he joined the East Pakistan Civil Service in 1969. He took part in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and then joined civil service.

He retired as secretary of Rural Development and Cooperative Division in 2003. In 2006, he was appointed as one of the 10 advisers to the caretaker government.

Dhiraj also wrote some books, including "Pother Dudharay" and "Shompritir Jonopoday", and columns in the newspapers.

Sundarbans turning into 'sanctuary for poachers'

Due to chronic manpower crisis

UNB, Bagerhat

Protection and preservation of the Sundarbans, world's largest mangrove forest, is being hampered due to the forest department's chronic shortage of manpower and logistics with almost 30 per cent posts lying vacant.

Five patrolling camps have already been shut down due to the manpower crisis. There is only one guard for every nine square kilometers of the forest. However, many of them are on the edge of retirement or physically unfit for the job due to their age.

The forest department's activities in the Sundarbans including averting smuggling of forest resources and poaching are being severely hindered.

Md Amir Hossain Chowdhury, conservator of forest, Khulna circle,

told the news agency that currently 344 among the 1,172 sanctioned posts are vacant. As a result, boatmen are playing the role of forest guards.

Foresters, forest guards and boatmen mainly serve to conserve the forest, but 27 posts of foresters, 14 posts of forest guards and 142 posts of boatmen are lying vacant. Next year, when many will retire, the number of vacant posts will increase further, said Amir.

According to sources, there are 17 stations and 61 patrolling camps across the Sundarbans' four ranges -- Sharankhola, Chandpai, Khulna and Satkhira.

Two to three staffers are required to run each patrolling camp, therefore, it is becoming tougher for the forest

department to guard the Sundarbans regularly and protect forest resources, said Md Mahamudul Hassan, divisional forest officer (DFO) of the East region of the Sundarbans.

Meanwhile, many forest guards demand modern firearms as they have to spend day and night in the deep forest facing various challenges.

Talking to the news agency, Dr Mahmud Hossain, professor of forestry and wood technology department at Khulna University, noted that the Sundarbans works as a safeguard for the people of Southern region of the country against natural disasters.

As the forest guards play the key role to protect the Sundarbans' resources, the manpower must be increased to make

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Zinc essential for male fertility: Study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Presence of zinc in semen is essential for normal functioning of male fertility, a recent study shows.

According to the study, deficiency of zinc affects sperm production as well as fertility capacity.

The study, "Impact of Seminal Plasma Zinc and Serum Zinc Level on Semen Parameter of Fertile and Infertile Males", was done at the Center for Assisted Reproduction and the Biochemistry Department of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), says a press release.

Prof Parveen Fatima, chairperson of the hospital's infertility centre, was the lead author of the study.

The study was organised by INASP, an international development organisation, working with a global network of partners. It was conducted on 16 fertile and 69 infertile men. Their serum zinc and seminal plasma zinc levels were measured for analysis.

According to the press release, zinc is an

essential element required for normal production of sperm cells. Its deficiency is one of the factors responsible for decreased testicular function in infertile males.

Zinc contributes to fertility through its significant effects on various semen parameters. Zinc in seminal plasma stabilises the cell membrane and nuclear chromatin (accumulation of complex proteins) that contain coded functions of life of the sperm cells, adds the release.

In the fertile group, all the parameters showed a positive relationship; and in the infertile, except for sperm morphology, all other parameters showed a negative relationship.

Sperm morphology -- the size and shape of sperm -- is one factor that is examined as part of a semen analysis to evaluate male infertility.

Dr Humaira Bushra of BSMMU, one of the co-authors of the study, said, "Zinc tablets are usually recommended, one tablet a day, for males to overcome the infertility problem. However, the dose varies for people, so we

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Under-construction roof collapses on workers

One killed, seven injured in Gazipur; another dies in Ctg

STAR REPORT

One worker was killed and seven others injured as the roof of an under-construction resort collapsed in Sreepur upazila of Gazipur yesterday.

A portion of the second floor of Sahara Resort crumbled around 12:30pm when the workers were working down there, said Md Akhteruzzaman, deputy assistant director of Gazipur Fire Service.

The resort is owned by Vision Group, he added.

Three units of Sreepur and Joydevpur fire offices conducted a rescue operation till 4:00pm. They recovered the body of Fakir Ali,

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