

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Masked finfoot showing lobed feet.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

The Masked Finfoot

Whenever we hear “Sundarban” we think of the Bengal Tiger, our national animal. While this magnificent animal stirs the imagination, there is another special creature that resides in Sundarban and deserves our attention. It is rare, endangered and beautiful.

The masked finfoot is a bird found in very few places – Bangladesh, Myanmar, and a few other countries. About the size of a domesticated duck, it is distinguished by a black patch running across its face and eyes like a mask. For many passionate birders around the world, it belongs on their list of must-see rare birds.

Masked finfoots belong to the finfoot group of birds which also includes the African finfoot and the (South) American finfoot. There are only one thousand or fewer masked finfoots in the world, the majority of them in Bangladesh. They live in the eastern part of Sundarban.

What makes them special? Their unique appearance, for one thing: after watching one for a few seconds you quickly realize it is unlike any other bird. It swims like a duck but it is not a duck. Its feet are not webbed like ducks’ feet. Instead, it has plump toes called “lobes” which enables it to climb trees (which ducks cannot.) It is a poor flier but it can run fast.

I saw my first masked finfoot ten years ago while on my maiden voyage to Sundarban, the highlight of an eye-opening trip. On this morning, our guide suddenly came running to the deck of our boat yelling “Masked Finfoot! Masked Finfoot!” The bird was busily poking around in the mud and grass of the canal bank and took off in a hurry as our boat approached. I had never heard of it before, but two British birdwatchers on board were elated. Since then, I looked for it during every visit to Sundarban, but I

found it only once more. Last week, however, I was able to observe – and learn something – about it.

Our masked finfoots are entirely dependent on Sundarban ecology. They build their nests on mangrove tree branches that extend over smaller creeks. They usually pick their meal from the mud on the banks of creeks during low tide, typically crabs, small insects, crustaceans, small fish and worms. Often these items are trapped in the mud when the tide recedes; that’s when the bird goes hunting on the exposed muddy banks of Sundarban’s creeks.

Since masked finfoots are elusive and found in inhospitable terrain, not much is known about them. An independent research project called the Sundarbans Finfoot Research Project has studied them. Sayam U. Chowdhury is Principal Investigator and Nazim Uddin Prince is Program Manager of the project. Over the last eight years the project has studied various aspects of this little-known bird, including its nesting habits, reporting its findings in scholarly journals. Currently the project focuses on breeding behaviour of the bird. One research finding: a progressive shift in the bird’s habitat preference, with changing tree preference and breeding distribution suggesting a move towards freshwater areas upstream.

After looking at them for some time, I could tell that masked finfoots are nowhere near as wily and skittish as wild ducks are. They – and their eggs – fall prey to man and other predators. Part of the Finfoot Project’s efforts has been to reach out to the Sundarban community to save this bird. We need to do all we can to ensure the unique masked finfoot survives and thrives in our country.

www.facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow ihtishamkabir on Instagram

'Life could've been different'

Aila victim tells his tale at 3rd National Climate Hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Atiar Rahman's life was different before cyclone Aila.

He had 10 Bighas of land and a tin roofed house in Kalinagar village in Shyamnagar of Satkhira. His two sons and a daughter used to go to school too.

But the cyclone destroyed it all.

Aila washed away the embankment of the Kapotakkho river on that fateful day of May 25 in 2009. Along with it Atiar's house and the crops that he planted on his farmland also got washed away. He took shelter on a highway with many others whose stories are not any better.

Penniless and without livelihood, Atiar tried his luck in the trade of honey collection in the Sundarbans. But it did not work out for him. Having no skill in survival techniques in a forest, he lost an eye and suffered severe injuries in a tiger attack.

Although one side of his body paralysed and he mostly depends on his wife and children, Atiar now lives by pulling rickshaws. “But life could've been different if the embankment was maintained properly,” Atiar lamented.

“I heard the government is helping the poor and the distressed, but I never got that.”

Atiar was telling his story in the third National Climate Hearing yesterday in the capital's Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh.

Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL) arranged the hearing with a focus on embankment maintenance.

Radha Rani from Kamarjong in Gaibandha described how the Brahmaputra suddenly devoured her entire village in 2016 while Aayna Bibi from Holdebonia of Uttar Betkashi under Koyra in Khulna narrated their sufferings following the Aila.

Three selected local public representatives

from Gaibandha, Satkhira and Khulna also spoke at the programme.

The representatives explained how hard the locals work to protect the embankments. Raising allegations of negligence and corruption by Water Development Board officials, they said the government officials never repair the embankments when its needed the most and as a result, those remain vulnerable to any natural disaster most of the time.

After hearing the plights of the victims, a jury panel said maintenance of embankments is very crucial in a country like Bangladesh that is crisscrossed by rivers. Every year people face a huge loss of lives and property due to unmaintained embankments.

Climate change has an impact on rainfall pattern and an erratic pattern of rainfall causes sudden and recurring floods in Bangladesh. On the other hand, with the intensity and frequency

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



A TREASURE TROVE OF BOOKS... Young booklovers have fun with pop-up books at a stall inside Suhrawardy Udyan. Yesterday belonged to them as the month-long Ekushey book fair was abuzz with their chatter enjoying the “Shishu Prahar” or Children's Hours -- from 11:00am to 1:00pm on Fridays and Saturdays. The photo was taken around noon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Kamal meets Hefajat chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday paid a courtesy call on Hefajat-e Islam chief Shah Ahmed Shafi in Chittagong.

The minister met him at Al-Jamiatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Moinul Islam (Hathazari Madrasa) in Hathazari in the afternoon.

Talking to the reporters after the visit, the minister said, “He [Shafi] was ill. That’s why I visited him.”

“We didn’t have any political discussion. I came here to see him and sought his blessings. He prayed for the country,” said Kamal.

A treat for young bookworms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

“Taslima, wait!” called Sabrina.

But, it was almost impossible to stop her. She was having too much fun!

Not only the seven-year-old was welcomed by an array of books with bright and colourful pictures as soon as she entered the Suhrawardy Udyan, there was also a corner there, dedicated solely to children like her.

It was after all a Friday yesterday and Taslima went to the Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela along with her mother, Sabrina Akhter, in the morning to enjoy the literary fair.

The morning belonged to the children. They were also given preferences while entering the fair at Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan.

The fair was abuzz with their laughter and chatter while their parents were



also busy browsing through books searching for favourites as well as new adventures.

“This is something my daughter loves the most about the fair... running around and selecting books on her own,” said Sabrina while standing in front of the stall of Tonatuni. Meanwhile, Taslima was busy picking her favourites.

During the month-long fair, on every Friday and Saturday, two hours, from 11:00am to 1:00pm, has been declared as “Shishu Prahar”. Children can play and learn at the same time,

said Bangla Academy Director Jalal Ahmed.

Shefali Begum, a resident of Mohammadpur, was browsing through books near Nazrul Mancha inside Bangla Academy in the afternoon.

“Today [yesterday] being the week-end, I’ve decided to come early and buy books for my family,” said Shefali, also a banker.

She bought quite a few books including a reprint of Rabindranath Tagore’s “Chokher Bali” from Muktohdara.

Meanwhile, inside the Udyan, people crowded “Onnya Prakash”, where Shumanta Aslam’s “Sporsher Bairey” was one of the popular choices. But most of the booklovers still preferred

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

রঙ করতে ঘরময়
ধুলো-ময়লা আর নয়

BERGER
express
painting

সবার কাছে বাড়ি রঙ করা মানেই সারা ঘরে ধুলো-ময়লা এবং রঙের ছড়াছড়ি। এইসব পেইন্ট থেকে মুক্তি দিতেই বাজার পেইন্টস্ নিয়ে এসেছে এন্ট্রপ্রেস পেইন্টিং টুলস্। বাড়ি রঙ করার এই আধুনিক সার্ভিস দ্বারা স্বয়ংক্রিয় যন্ত্রপাতির মাধ্যমে ধুলো-ময়লা কম ছড়িয়ে সাধারণ পদ্ধতির তুলনায় অনেক কম সময়ে ঘর-বাড়ি রঙ করা যায়। রঙ হয় নিখুঁত উজ্জ্বল এবং নিশ্চিত করে স্মুদ ফিনিশ।

FREE CALL
08000-123456

BERGER
Trusted Worldwide

Unitrend_BGR_056718