

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Herd of Spotted Deer, Sundarban.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Sundarban Wildlife

We often equate Sundarban's wildlife with the Bengal Tiger. Indeed, it is a magnificent creature and justifiably captures our imagination. But you have to be extremely lucky so see it during a tourist trip to Sundarban.

Thankfully, the diversity of wildlife in Sundarban extends well beyond the tiger. One can see many animals with moderate to high probability during a short tour of Sundarban.

In my experience, the most commonly seen animals are deer, wild boars, monkeys, monitor lizards and dolphins. Somewhat less likely, but still very possible, are sightings of crocodiles, otters and snakes. Smaller wildlife include mudskippers, several types of crabs, a wide selection of beautiful butterflies (including the Sundarban Crow butterfly), and various insects, including *Apis dorsata*, the giant honeybee.

Which is my favourite?

The Spotted Deer of Sundarban (Axis axis) is possibly the most beautiful deer in the world. It is common and widespread in Sundarban. These are exquisite creatures with a rich, rust-coloured coat with white spots which persist through their life. Watching them is always a pleasurable experience for me.

On every Sundarban trip I have taken, deer sightings have followed a pattern. Towards the beginning of the trip, soon after the launch enters the forest, I catch one or two glimpses of Spotted Deer. As the boat enters deeper into the forest, deer become more commonplace. For example, they can often be seen in places with stretches of *Keora* trees, where they stand on their hind legs to reach the leaves. The trees appear neatly and uniformly pruned at the height they can reach.

Before the tour ends, there may be a large-scale sighting. While walking on a boardwalk such as the one in Kotka, I have seen large herds of Spotted Deer

in the distance. Their movement is often dictated by the tides which flood the land around the boardwalk. They come in to eat the *Keora* leaves when the tide is low and start moving back inland as the tide rolls in. Therefore, being there during low tide increases your chances of seeing a large herd.

The Rhesus Macaque monkey is sometimes found in the company of Spotted Deer.

If the deer evokes calm and affectionate feelings in us, the Estuarine Crocodile elicits awe and fear. It can grow as large as twenty feet and weigh up to a thousand kilograms. This reptile is considered endangered in Sundarban, with perhaps 150 mature individuals living in the waterways of the forest. More often than not, it is spotted by a staff member of the boat when, to the tourists, it appears as a log lying on the riverbank. But as the boat comes closer, it becomes possible to discern its features including the long scaly tail which it uses like a whip to attack unsuspecting prey. It may look sleepy and relaxed, but when the boat comes too close for comfort, the crocodile can move into water with startling swiftness.

On the waters of Sundarban you may see swimming lizards called Water Monitors. The confluence of two waterways is the best place to look for dolphins, which, being mammals, have to jump (briefly) for air.

Snakes hibernate during winter and are more likely to be seen in summer and monsoon. My most memorable snake was a Monocled Cobra that nested inside the labyrinthine root of a giant uprooted *Keora* tree. The smaller green and brown vine snakes are more common but camouflage well.

The Small-clawed Otter is by far the cutest wildlife of Sundarban. It is the subject of next week's column.

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Woman found dead at home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police recovered the body of a woman from her residence in Noyarhat area of Bayezid yesterday noon.

The deceased was identified as Mukta, 32, wife of Md Saiful Alam, said police.

"Mukta is a former apparels worker and her body was found hanging in her bedroom," said Sub-inspector Kazi Ripon Sarker of Bayezid Police Station.

SI Ripon said Mukta's in-laws informed police around 11am and police recovered the body around noon in the presence of her family members.

Police found the door of the room open where her body was hanging from the ceiling fan, said SI Ripon, adding that police prepared the inquest report with the help of deceased's younger sister.

Quoting family members, Ripon said Mukta and

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Bangladesh Garments Workers' Solidarity (BGWS) organised a photo exhibition yesterday on Rana Plaza tragedy. Titled "Otit Ebong Bortomaner Bojhapora", the exhibition was held on the spot where the building once stood. Attended by victims and their family members, the exhibition displayed seven photos taken by Taslima Akter, coordinator of BGWS. Attendees demanded capital punishment for building owner Sohel Rana.

PHOTO: STAR

Poor quality, service obstacle to road safety

Speakers tell public hearing on BRTA, BRTC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Poor quality of road construction is creating hindrance to ensuring road safety in Rajshahi region while substandard services by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation are aggravating the situation.

The opinions were expressed at a public hearing in Rajshahi city yesterday with Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Md Nazrul Islam in the chair. Top officials, contractors, commuters, drivers, activists and journalists participated in the hearing.

Abu Darda Khan, an official of Rajshahi Education Board, said due to poor quality, the newly-constructed roads are getting damaged within months of construction.

"Everything has an expiry date, but our roads don't have any," he said. He demanded that the authorities concerned fix an expiry date for roads and hold contractors responsible when those get badly damaged beforehand.

Echoing him, Secretary Nazrul Islam said, "We are spending a crore of taka for constructing per kilometre of road but those are not even lasting three years."

He asked executive engineers to bring responsible contractors to book. "We are installing 23 modern weight scales across the country to control overloading of vehicles."

Sadek Ali, a contractor, alleged that the country has more than a hundred listed contractors, but only a handful are getting

works repeatedly.

"Those contractors are not being able to complete the works and are employing others, mostly who are not contractors, resulting in poor quality of roads," he said.

In reply, Nazrul Islam said Central Procurement Technical Unit monitors the tender process. "Bidders are selected considering their ability and experience."

Contractor Mamunur Rashid said they often get the work order just before monsoon.

Truck owner Rabiul Islam said movement of unauthorised three-wheelers on highways creates problems. "Drivers of three-wheelers bribe police to overlook them," he alleged.

Many alleged that people get harassed while availing services at BRTA offices. At times, they also have to pay bribe to get things done. The premises also remain crammed with brokers and middlemen.

Speakers also demanded that BRTC increase buses on regional routes and improve services.

The secretary said they were unable to increase buses due to influence of private bus owners. "I will discuss the issue with higher authorities."

He urged people to alert them of any mismanagement or corruption and expressed regret that they could not stop plying of three-wheelers on highways.

He also directed BRTA and BRTC officials, present at the hearing, to look into the discussed problems.

Six killed and several injured in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Six people were killed and 16 others injured in road accidents in four districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

A child was killed and four people were injured yesterday in a collision between a truck and CNG-run auto-rickshaw on Cumilla-Sylhet highway in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila around 10:30am.

The child, Hamim, died on the spot and four individuals -- including his parents, Morshed Alam and Nazma Begum -- were admitted to the Sadar Hospital in Brahmanbaria.

In Teknaf, two people were killed and at least 11 injured after a motorcycle collided

with a locally-crafted vehicle on Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway around noon.

The deceased were identified as Haji Gura Mia, 45, and Md Ayas, 15, police said. Ayas was a Rohingya refugee and so were the injured.

In Jamalpur, two people were killed in separate accidents in Jamalpur municipality and Islampur municipality yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Ripon, 35, hailing from Bogabaid area under Jamalpur municipality and Bakkar, 60, a resident of Polobandha village under Islampur municipality.

Dewanganj-bound Teesta intercity train from Dhaka hit Ripon, who was walking along the rail tracks and talking on his phone,

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Visitors roam the gallery on the first day of Ruposhi Bangla National Photo Exhibition, organised by Bangladesh Photo Journalist Association in partnership with Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka. The photo was taken yesterday.

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