

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Brown Hawk-owl, Hail Haor, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

OWL

The first bird that many remember from childhood might be an owl. In my case, there was a massive Krishnachura tree just behind our house. A family of owls lived in a cavity in the tree about twenty feet from the ground where the trunk forked into two main branches. Whenever I looked at them they stared back intensely. Being a child, I found this unsettling and avoided going under the tree.

Humans have attributed significance and meaning to owls for as long as 30,000 years – the age of a cave painting of an owl in the South of France. In folklore, owls have been considered mysterious and evil in many cultures, portents of bad luck. However, in other cultures owls are a symbol of wisdom. For example, the Bangla name of Barn Owl is *Lokkhi Pecha*. *Lokkhi* means bearer of good luck.

The main reason why people are fascinated by owls is their eyes. Compared to the size of their heads, owls' eyes are large. They are set facing forward (eyes of other birds face sideways.) They often stare back, unblinking, creating uneasiness. They are also immobile and owls must rotate their head 180 degrees to "look around."

At the same time, their eyes give owls fantastic vision, particularly at night. The retina of an eye, where light is collected, contains millions of sensors of two types: rods and cones. Rods are sensitive to low light and cones are sensitive to brighter light. The owl's retina contains a preponderance of rods giving them extraordinary nocturnal vision. Coupled with acute hearing and fast, silent flight, owls succeed as nocturnal

predators, hunting by night and resting by day. They catch rodents, small mammals, fish, insects and smaller birds with their sharp claws.

There are two hundred odd species of owls in the world, seen in all continents except Antarctica. They are divided into the owl family (Strigidae) and the barn owl family (Tytonidae). The latter is characterized by a heart-shaped face, as seen in Barn Owls.

In Bangladesh we can see thirteen species of owls covering a gamut of sizes from just larger than a sparrow to the size of a kite. The Spotted Owllet and the Asian Barred Owllet are, in my experience, our most common owls. Brown Hawk-owl, Brown Fish Owl and Collared Scops Owl can also be seen with some effort. Barn Owls can be seen in the city – a kind friend alerted me once when he saw it in his Banani backyard and allowed me to photograph it. The Buffy Fish Owl, a rare species, can be seen in Sundarban. I saw it deep inside the forest from a boat – it was enormous, almost the size of a monkey. The Short-eared Owl is seen in the chaps of the Padma but my day-long search for it was fruitless. Our other owls are rare and live deep in the forests of Sylhet and the Hill Tracts.

A good place to see owls is Dhaka's National Botanical Garden. Look for cavities in the larger tree trunks for Spotted Owllets; a Brown Fish Owl is also known to hang out in the garden. The tea gardens of Sylhet have many Asian Barred Owllets. If you are looking for an owl in a rural area it is worth asking local villagers since owls tend to stay in the same tree.

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SURGE IN DENGUE CASES

Dedicated hospitals still not ready

HELEMUL ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Amid the rise in dengue cases, the government on Monday dedicated six hospitals for treating dengue patients. However, it has been four days, but only two hospitals have started treatment till yesterday.

Officials blamed shortage of healthcare professionals and logistics for the delay. They are hopeful to start soon.

Among the six hospitals, Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital in Dhaka and Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master General Hospital in Tongi have started dedicated treatment.

Asked yesterday, Dr ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, "We will look into the matter."

He said, besides the dedicated hospitals, they have already instructed some other public facilities, including Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, Dhaka Medical College and Hospital and Mugda Medical College and Hospital, to provide dengue treatment, as Covid-19 patients are decreasing.

Death toll 40
28 died in Aug so far
12 in July
184 more hospitalised yesterday

DGHS on Monday dedicated 6 hospitals
4 days on, only 2 became operational
Officials cite shortage of manpower, logistics as reason
DMCH, Suhrawardy and Mugda hospitals to also treat dengue patients

DGHS on August 23 announced six hospitals dedicated to dengue patients, which also included Railway General Hospital at Kamalapur, 20-bed Aminbazar Govt Hospital in Dhaka, Lalkuthi Hospital in Mirpur, and 31-bed Kamrangirchar Hospital in Dhaka.

These correspondents visited the dengue-dedicated hospitals on Wednesday and Thursday and found such a scenario.

Meanwhile, more and more dengue patients are requiring hospitalisation, as cases continue to rise across the country.

At least 184 people with dengue fever were admitted to hospitals in the country in 24 hours till 8am

yesterday, according to DGHS data, taking the total cases this year to 9,304.

Forty people have died of dengue in the country this year, all of whom succumbed to the disease between July and August. Twelve people died in July while 28 died in August so far.

Among the infected, 2,443 took treatment at government and autonomous hospitals, while 6,191 were treated at private hospitals across the country.

Dengue patients have been struggling to get treatment at the capital's public hospitals, as the major facilities are burdened with Covid-19 patients.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, earlier said patients taking treatment at private hospitals was a matter of grave concern.

There is a national guideline for dengue treatment, and DGHS has trained doctors and nurses of government hospitals to abide by the guideline. But the ones working at private hospitals are not trained, and they, in many cases, do not follow the guideline, he said.

Dr Ripon Das, divisional medical officer of Bangladesh Railway Hospital, told The Daily Star on Wednesday that they did not get any directives to run the hospital as a dedicated one.

"We are going to send a requisition to the ministry concerned to run the hospital as a dengue-dedicated one and will prepare 100 beds in this regard," he said.

Ripon said they need reagents in their lab, at least one pathologist and a lab technician, as they only have a single pathologist now.

He said dengue patients need 24-hour lab support and only one person cannot provide that.

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For the first time since April 2, National Zoo in the capital opened up to visitors yesterday. Fittingly, they thronged the zoo, meeting for the first time numerous cubs born during this closure.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'Who will take liability for this?'

Man yet to be found 3 days after falling down drain in Ctg; CDA, CCC playing blame game

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Three days have passed since vegetable trader Saleh Ahmed (55) fell into a roadside drain at the port city's Muradpur area, but fire service's rescue team is yet to trace him.

Biplob Kanti Nath, team leader of the diving unit of fire service, said they could not trace the man as of yesterday evening. He said the accident occurred as there was no retaining wall or any demarcation mark in the drain area.

"My father fell down the drain on Wednesday morning due to the sheer negligence of the authorities," said a grief-

stricken Mohammad Mahim, Saleh's son. Mahim has been at the spot for the last three days along with fire service personnel, searching for Saleh.

"The authorities could have at least put up a red flag, warning people of the drain there. That way, this accident could have been avoided," Mahim said.

"Who will take liability for this accident?" he asked.

Meanwhile, residents said with most of the city canals as well as secondary and tertiary drains remaining uncovered and unfenced, accidents have become a common scene during waterlogging, and

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No coverings, no barriers, no warnings, these wider drains of the port city are possible death traps for unsuspecting pedestrians. And when the streets are submerged due to waterlogging, there is no way of knowing where danger lurks. This photo was taken yesterday from Muradnagar area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

'An inexhaustible source of inspiration'

45th death anniversary of national poet observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 45th death anniversary of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam was observed yesterday in a befitting manner.

Different political parties, and socio-cultural and professional bodies observed the day by paying tribute at the poet's grave on Dhaka University campus and by arranging discussions.

The poet passed away at the then PG Hospital, now Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, in the city in 1976. He was buried with state honour beside the Dhaka University Central Mosque.

Yesterday, the day's programme started with Quranic prayers at the DU Central Mosque. Awami League leaders, led by its general secretary Obaidul Quader, who is also road transport and bridges minister, placed a wreath at the grave of the poet, reported BSS.

Besides, the party's associate bodies and pro-AL student organisations also paid homage to the national poet, maintaining social distancing.

Members of Bangladesh National Awami Party and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party also paid tribute to the poet at his grave, said separate press releases of the political parties.

Marking the day, teachers, students, officers and employees of DU held a procession, led by DU Vice Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman, which proceeded towards the poet's grave at 7:15am, reports our DU correspondent.

They paid glowing tributes to the poet by placing wreaths at his grave. Later, at a discussion at DU, Prof Akhtaruzzaman termed Nazrul an "invaluable resource of Bengali language and literature" and the nation's "inexhaustible source of inspiration".

National Professor Rafiqul Islam said, "Nazrul's rebellious poems changed the course of Bengali poetry. Nazrul will always be remembered... as long as there is Bengali language and literature," he added.

Nazrul wrote nearly 3,000 songs and composed many of them, which are known as Nazrul-Geeti or Nazrul Sangeet.

The nation got inspiration from his poems and songs during the Liberation War and all democratic movements and struggles.



New frog on the block!

Researchers discover new-to-science species from country's south-eastern forests



PHOTO: COURTESY

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

The worldwide scientific community is too often bombarded with bad news – from first time ever rains at the Greenland ice summit to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) doomsday forecast, there is hardly ever a reason to celebrate.

Yet for Bangladesh's nature enthusiasts, there is cause to celebrate. Researchers have recently discovered and confirmed a new-to-science species of frog from Bangladesh's south-eastern forests – Chattogram and Cox's Bazar.

It is a "ribbiting" story of a group of young researchers scouring the lowland, mixed-evergreen tropical forests of Bangladesh in the height of monsoon to collect specimens that they believed might lead to a new discovery. And their hunch was right.

The stocky, semi-aquatic frog, specimens of which were collected back in 2019, has been named *Phrynoglossus swanbornorum* or Swanborn's Puddle Frog in English and Chattgai ar gata bang in Bangla, according to the scientific paper titled "A new species of *Phrynoglossus* Peters, 1867; *Dicroglossidae* from southeastern Bangladesh, with comments on the genera *Occhiozyga* and *Phrynoglossus*."

The paper was published in the international peer-reviewed journal *PeerJ* on the 19th of this month.

The authors are Creative Conservation Alliance's (CCA) Hassan Al-Razi, Marjan Maria, Shahriar Caesar Rahman Fahimuzzaman Nobel, Scott Trageser, and Jagannath University's Assistant Professor of Zoology Department Md Asaduzzaman.

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