

# MISTNET

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Indian Bird Conservation Network





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**Mission Statement**

'Conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity through action, based on research, education and public awareness.'

*BNHS is BirdLife International partner designate*



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Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*  
by Anant Zanjale

Views expressed by the contributors in the MISTNET are not necessarily those of the IBCN/BNHS.  
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## Wetland IBAs and Ramsar

Among the 466 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified in India, about 175 are wetlands. For the conservation of wetlands, there is an international treaty called the Ramsar Convention. In 1971, eighteen nations concerned about wetlands and waterfowl met in a place called Ramsar in Iran and agreed to establish a convention, which is popularly known as the Ramsar Convention. Its full name is “The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat”. Over the years, waterfowl was relegated to a side and other features, such as cultural and historical importance, geological values, and other biodiversity were added in identifying wetlands as Ramsar Sites. Adding new criteria may itself is not bad, because the scope of wetland type to be included in the Ramsar list has increased, but relegating waterfowl to the background is not proper. In the original treaty, the main importance was on waterfowl.

Since India became a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention in 1981, only 25 wetlands in the country have been identified as Ramsar Sites. These 25 sites do not represent the rich biodiversity and wetland types found in India. These 25 Ramsar Sites are not located in all the geographical regions or states of India. For example, 10 Indian Ramsar Sites are located in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, four in Kerala, and the remaining in other states, while there is no Ramsar Site in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.

The BirdLife International has four main criteria for identification of an IBA (see [www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/global\\_criteria.html](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/global_criteria.html)). The fourth criteria A4 and its four subdivisions are very similar to Ramsar Criteria 2, 4, 5 and 6. Based on our IBA book, *Important Bird Areas in India*, and including some new data, we have listed 135 potential Ramsar Sites, representing all the states and biogeographical regions of India. We could not identify any potential Ramsar Site in Chhattisgarh, mainly due to lack of information. Some hilly states, such as Nagaland and Meghalaya also do not have potential Ramsar Sites, at least based on the information available to us. Perhaps after the publication of our book, people will gather and share information, and perhaps some new sites would be identified that fit the Ramsar criteria.

By the time you receive this issue of *Mistnet*, our book titled “Potential and Existing Ramsar Sites in India” will be released. Besides the potential sites, we have also described the 25 existing sites, totalling 160 sites. A copy of this book will be distributed to contributors and state coordinators (SC) of the IBCN.

Here the role of state coordinators (SC) comes into play. The next meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) on Ramsar Convention is going to take place in October in Soul, South Korea where India will be represented by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), which is the nodal agency of the Ramsar Convention in India. Such meetings take place every three-four years, and in each meeting of the COP, countries announce new Ramsar Sites. For example, in the previous COP Ramsar Convention held in 2005, India had announced declaration of six more Ramsar Sites, bringing the total to 25 sites.

New Ramsar Sites are declared by the Government of India on the recommendations of the state governments. Therefore, the SCs should meet forest officials of their state, and the Forest Minister and try to convince them to get some more wetland sites (listed in our book) to get in the Ramsar list. Many sites listed in our book are already identified by the MoEF under the Wetland Conservation Programme, so the task becomes easy. If a wetland is listed under the Wetland Conservation Programme or under Ramsar, the Government of India gives funds for its protection and wise use. This will be another ‘selling point’ for some state governments, as they will see *moola* if their wetlands come in the Indian Ramsar list! In our country, money is the mover and shaker. Let us use it for the noble cause of conservation.

Asad R. Rahmani

Rudrasagar Lake is an identified Ramsar Site in Tripura



Pic: Anwaruddin Choudhury

# Rudrasagar – A potential IBA in Tripura in north-east India

**Anwaruddin Choudhury, IBCN State Coordinator, Assam**

While work for the monumental volume of the *Important Bird Areas in India* (Islam and Rahmani 2004) was going on, we had difficulty in getting a first hand account of the potential sites of Tripura, a state in northeastern India. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a good number of ornithological works by Allan Octavian Hume and E.C.S Stuart Baker covering parts of Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur but there was no coverage of Tripura. In recent decades also, we had a good number of published papers and books on various parts of the northeast, but again Tripura remained little known.

We arrived at Melaghar on a foggy morning (15 January 2008) and hired a country boat.

The spectacular landmark, 'Neer Mahal', for which Rudrasagar is well known, was not visible due to thick fog. Slowly we moved amidst large flocks of Lesser Whistling Teals *Dendrocygna javanica*. Very few other ducks were visible except for some Cotton Pygmy-Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*. Suddenly some pochard-like ducks were noticed towards the west. With the help of a pair of binoculars, I could identify them to be Ferruginous Ducks *Aythya nyroca*, a Near-Threatened species, but a few individuals did not look like them. We moved a bit closer, from where I could identify them as Baer's Pochard *A. beari*, at last a globally threatened species (listed as Vulnerable)! Only four were there. They were

## MONITORING FOR CONSERVATION

also very wary and took to flight with the slightest disturbance. Other ducks seen were small numbers of Gadwall *Anas strepera* and Common Teal *A. crecca*.

The Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* was the only stork visible around, although I expected a few Lesser Adjutants *Leptoptilos javanicus* also, which were, however, conspicuous by their absence. Little Cormorants *Phalacrocorax niger*, Common Coot *Fulica atra*, egrets, Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, jacanas, a few unidentified smaller waders, an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and an immature Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* were the other noteworthy observations.

By forenoon, the magnificent view of 'Neer Mahal', summer palace of the Tripura kings became visible. This was some sort of a 'lake palace' built on the lines of the famous Pichola Palace of Udaipur, by the then Maharaj Birbikram Kishore Manikya in 1930. The palace has both Hindu and Islamic architecture. The Tourism Department has introduced motorboats for tourists, which has its own drawbacks. Besides making the water murky, a few large fish are also getting killed by propellers. The birds are also often disturbed. Then there is siltation and reclamation of the edge for winter paddy cultivation. There is a large brick kiln nearby. However, the plastic glass and packets thrown by tourists and picnickers seem to be the greatest threat at the moment. Every year in the months of July and

August, a boat festival is held; however, its impact on the resident breeding birds is not known.

Rudrasagar is located in Tripura West district (23°30'N, 91°20'E). It is 55 km from Agartala and 8 km from Sonamura, the nearest town connected with all-weather roads. Its present area is about 3 sq km, while in the monsoon, it spreads to more than 5 sq km. It has been included among the select wetlands of Wetlands International where waterfowl populations will be monitored for 20 years. Rudrasagar is already a Ramsar Site and is a potential Important Bird Area.

#### Recommendations

First and foremost is to clean its banks of plastics and other garbage. The mid-winter waterfowl count should be carried out on a regular basis. Reclamation and siltation should be checked. Motorboats for tourists should be replaced by country boats. Since it is the largest natural lake of Tripura, industrial activities in the vicinity should be restricted.

#### Acknowledgements

Kamal Banik, the State IBCN Coordinator, Debabrata Lodh of Dishari NGO, Raju Biswas (driver) and Sanjib Barman (boatman).

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#### Noteworthy Species Count at Rudrasagar on 15 January 2008

LITTLE CORMORANT <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	52
OPENBILL STORK, ASIAN OPENBILL <i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	92
LESSER WHISTLING TEAL <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	1,700
GADWALL <i>Anas strepera</i>	10
NORTHERN SHOVELLER <i>Anas clypeata</i>	4
FERRUGINOUS DUCK <i>Aythya nyroca</i> <b>Near threatened</b>	7
BAER'S POCHARD <i>Aythya baeri</i> <b>Vulnerable</b>	4
COTTON TEAL <i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	47
OSPREY <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1



# Danapur Military Cantonment (IBA): The largest breeding site of Asian Openbill in Bihar

D.N. Choudhary, Ajit Kumar and Gopal Sharma, IBCN members

The Danapur Military Cantonment (DMC) is the largest breeding site of the Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* in Bihar. The Asian Openbill has been found breeding here since the last 20 years or more as per local information. We have been regularly watching these birds and their activities since the last 5 years. On an average 7,000–8,000 individuals breed successfully between the months of June to December every year. Though few birds are also seen in the month of January (up to third week).

The Danapur Military Cantonment (DHC) (25°38'32" N, 85°02'06" E) is a highly protected area under the jurisdiction of the Indian army and is situated on the bank of river Ganga, about 12 km from Patna (capital city of Bihar) and about 3 km from Danapur Railway station. It is a recruitment, as well as a controlling centre for Jarkhand, Orissa and Bihar and has an area of about 400 hectares. A big water canal passes at the south of the cantonment, ultimately joining the river Ganga. The DMC has a rich plant diversity and has

large numbers of trees comprising mainly Sal *Shorea robusta*, Shisam *Dalbergia sissoo*, Mango *Mangifera indica*, Neem *Azadirachta indica*, Tamarind *Tamarindus indicus*, Shemul *Bombax malabarica*, Peepal *Ficus religiosa*, Banyan *Ficus benghalensis*, and Ashok *Polyalthia longifolia*. Mostly these trees remain loaded with storks nests between June to December. These plants provide a good roosting as well as breeding site for these birds. The birds feel well protected here with the armymen eagerly offering protection



Pic: Gopal Sharma

Nesting of Asian Openbill at the Danapur Military Cantonment

## MONITORING FOR CONSERVATION



Pic: D. N. Choudhary

Creating awareness about the IBA site among school students is one of the major roles played by the Site Support Group

to them. Danapur-Ara road which bisects the Cantonment area remains busy all day round. Apart from these, the breeding birds do not feel any disturbances and stay here. Considering the assemblage of large number of breeding Asian Openbill, the DMC has been declared as an IBA of Bihar.

The Asian Openbill start to assemble in the DMC from the month of June every year (generally second week or sometimes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of June) and stay till January. In the first phase, few birds arrive and inspect the area. By the middle of July, thousands of them arrive and start nest-building on the trees in and around the DMC.

Competition for site selection and nest building is very high. Few individuals which are unable to occupy the trees in the cantonment, shift to build nests on the nearby trees outside the protected area. The nests are constructed preferably at the top of the tree. Some birds also use the older



Pic: Ajeet Kumar Singh

Painted Stork nests along with the nests of Asian Openbill

nests, with slight addition and alteration. Although the nests are built from the twigs of peepal, banyan and tamarind trees, they are lined with the green soft leaves of Ashok, perhaps for cushioning the nests. During its breeding season, one partner remains busy in the collection of the soft leaves

from the Ashoka tree and the other is found arranging them inside the nest.

The nests are so closely built, that the distance between two adjacent nests are found to be hardly ½ - 1 meter apart. Nest building concentration is also very high. We recorded 112 nests on a single peepal tree in the canteen





Pic: Gopal Sharma

Painted Stork nesting on a Peepal tree

area. Nests were situated at a height of 5-10 meter from the ground. In the canteen campus, maximum nests were found at 5-6 meter height. Canteen customers easily watch their activities from a very close distance. Few birds were even moving on the ground, searching for food for their chicks in the campus without caring about the people moving close to them. On an average two chicks were recorded in a single nest. In October, parent birds start training their juveniles to fly. During this phase many chicks fall from the nests. In such cases, the parents try to feed them for some days. If the chicks fall down within the boundary wall, they get security from the army men otherwise they generally die or get killed by dogs or jackals. Most of the storks leave the DMC area by the end of November, while the remaining leave in the month of December. But few of them are also seen roosting near the nest or flying over the Cantonment area even in the month of January (upto 3<sup>rd</sup> week). Army men

provide safety to these breeding birds. So there is no case of poaching or egg lifting.

Though it is complete monocolony of the Asian Openbill at DMC, earlier also no other wetland birds like heron, egrets or cormorants were found to breed with the Asian Openbill at this particular site. But recently in November, 2007 we succeeded in recording seven nests of the Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* at DMC. Out of seven, 3 nests were located on a single peepal tree and the remaining 4 were on two separate but adjacent Ashoka trees. These nests were surrounded by a large number of nests of the Openbill Stork with chicks.

We also recorded that the Painted Stork use the abandoned nests of Asian Openbill, with slight modification.

On 20 December 2007 we noticed that one nest (on Ashoka) was abandoned. Thus, out of seven nests, only six survived and the

chicks grew on these. In this way the Painted Stork successfully raised 18 chicks in this season, certainly a matter of pleasure. We have conveyed this message to the army men and their headquarters. They are pleased to see some new feathered friends in their campus other than the Asian Openbill! In the last week of November 2007 we arranged a nature trail for the students of Central School, DMC. The main objective was to make them aware of conservation of our nature and wildlife. About 70 students including both boys and girls participated in these programmes. They were delighted to see these beautiful birds. At the time, the Asian Openbill had started to leave their nests and the Painted Storks were coming to the nests. Our awareness programs will be continued. Recently on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2008, we saw all the chicks on both the sites, with their parents roosting near the nests in the evening hours. However, we are vigilant about them and regularly watch their activities. Hopefully we may add some more information in future.

**Acknowledgements:** We are grateful to Bgdr. A.K. Ahuja Commander, Head Quarter JOB, sub area of Danapur Military Cantonment, for giving us permission to study the birds in the campus. We are thankful to Colonel K.K. Anil Kumar DDG, Recruitment and Colonel Dutta of DMC for their co-operation during the nature trails. We are also thankful to the principal, teachers and students of Central School, DMC, for their participation in the nature trail and also for their co-operation. We are highly thankful to the army men and guards of DMC for taking conservative efforts for these birds and other wildlife.

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February 2<sup>nd</sup> is celebrated as 'World Wetlands Day' as it marks the day when the 'Convention on Wetlands of International Importance' (also known as the Ramsar Convention) was adopted in 1971. India too is one of the signatories of the Convention under which it has designated 25 Ramsar sites so far. However, the day is much more than a commemoration of an agreement signed by a group of officials. It is a day when we reflect on the importance of wetlands in our lives and are thankful for being blessed with so many of them in India. Many of us have strong emotional attachment to wetlands; memories of learning to swim in a pond, boating with a loved one on a lake or looking through binoculars at congregations of migratory birds on a cold winter morning. Wetlands are usually associated with happier times in our lives. This is probably what drives us to create artificial ones in our increasingly unfriendly urban habitats.

Beside their obvious recreational and aesthetic value, wetlands are an important life support system for a

# Vanishing Wetlands -

## Special Reference to the Draft Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2008

**Anand Chandrasekar, Advocacy Officer IBA-IBCN**

myriad of species including us humans. Peering through their calm surfaces, one understands why life evolved from water. Wetlands are complex ecosystems supporting a vast array of life forms from the muddy bottoms to the air-space above them. This is what makes them attractive to thousands of migratory birds who come to breed, feed or just stopover before continuing their gruelling journeys. The seasonal change in wetlands further accentuates this complexity and governs the life cycles of its inhabitants. Many communities such as fisherfolk and farmers are dependent on aquatic

resources and wetland-dependent crops like rice for subsistence and livelihood needs. Wetlands also provide environmental services that are undervalued or not accounted for in national statistics and policies. These services include water storage, groundwater recharge, water purification, soil retention and flood control. These wetland services assume an even greater significance when seen in the context of mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Unfortunately, despite our reverence and dependence on them, India's wetlands are under severe threat. Many



Pic: Kulojyoti Lohkar

The Ramsar Convention advocates 'wise use of wetlands'

## ADVOCACY FOR CONSERVATION

are drained and transformed for residential, commercial and agricultural uses. Dumping of sewage, industrial chemicals and pesticide/fertilizer run-off continue to pollute many of our freshwater wetlands. Construction of canals and dams has altered the course of rivers and streams leading to degradation of wetlands dependent on them. Water politics involving upstream and downstream stakeholders further exacerbate the problem. As a result many wetlands are losing their biodiversity value and consequently their status as World Heritage Sites, Ramsar Sites and/or Important Bird Areas. It is only a matter of time when even their status as wetlands may be threatened.

Forests (MoEF) seems to have acknowledged this lacuna in policy and legislation, and is now in the process of preparing a draft of the new Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2008, under the Environment Protection Act of 1986. The draft is still open for comments. The Draft Rules state that all wetlands will be designated into three categories, A, B and C based on a set of criteria laid down in the rules. Proposals for carrying out development activities involving/affecting wetlands will now be referred to the Environment Advisory Committee (EAC), State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and District Wetland Conservation Committees (DWCC) for category A, B and C wetlands respectively. This

#### Actions for the IBCN with regard to the Draft Wetland Rules 2008

1. It is vital for us to designate as many wetland IBAs as Category 'A' as possible, making it difficult for unscrupulous developers to destroy them. Contact IBCN Secretariat for the list of wetland IBAs.
2. It is of vital importance to get as many IBCN members into the State and District Wetland Conservation Committees as possible.
3. It is important to send your comments on the draft (the draft is still open for comments). Please refer the MoEF website [www.envfor.nic.in](http://www.envfor.nic.in) for contact details. Kindly send the IBCN Secretariat a copy of your comments for our records.
4. Use the new Draft Rules to lobby for protecting wetland IBAs from unsustainable use. The document clearly states that ***'No wetland will be converted to non-wetland use unless it is in public interest and detailed reasons are mentioned'***



Pic: B. C. Choudhary

Traditional fishing by local people can be allowed in a Ramsar Site

Current legislation is insufficient to address the threats to our wetlands. Despite the dependence of millions of Indians on wetlands for survival, livelihood and ecosystem services, wetlands continue to be regarded as wastelands by decision-makers. Lack of a clear National Wetland Policy has further exacerbated the 'unwise' use of wetlands at the expense of the nation's water and ecological security.

The Ministry of Environment and

process is along the lines of the Environment Clearance procedures for development projects under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. Under these new Rules, Central, State and District Wetland Conservation Committees have to be constituted. These Committees have the power to identify and delineate wetlands and oversee the preparation of five year Management Action Plans for each wetland.

As custodians of India's wetland wealth, we are obliged to participate in the decision-making process when the opportunity presents itself. The task of wetland conservation is too large and too important a task to be left to the Government or Conventions. We also have the additional responsibility of speaking for millions of farmers, adivasis and women whose survival is so deeply linked to wetlands but who cannot articulate their concerns. The very future of many of India's wetlands and their associated avifauna depends on how we respond to this call for action. Let us prove ourselves worthy.

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# Kharda Dam: A refuge for water birds in Thar Desert

**Dr. Sumit Dookia, IBCN member**

**K**harda Dam is an irrigation dam and annually dries up in summer, making it an important wetland habitat. The water is used basically for agricultural purposes in the downside agricultural fields of the dam. It is situated in the Pali district, Rajasthan and is 40 km from Jodhpur city, but only 25 km from Pali city, on the NH-65. It was built by the erstwhile rulers. The dam is situated near the village named Kharda, with a population of around 1,000 odd people; hence the name of the dam.

It is also famous for its large congregation of waterbirds during the winter months, and attracts small numbers of serious birdwatchers too. The entire dam has an area of 5.37 sq km, with 3.73 sq km of catchments. The dam harbours more than 100 species of birds on any winter day, when large numbers of migratory birds join the local birds. The dam comes under the jurisdiction of the irrigation and fisheries departments and annually contributes revenue for the state.

The bird life of this dam is very diverse; a



Pic: Sumit Dookia

Various threatened species have been recorded around the Kharda Dam

large congregation of nearly 100 Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* was counted in the year 2003, with more than 10-15,000 waterfowl and other waterbird congregating in this area, including the Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*, Spot-billed duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*, Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*, and Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. The nearby hillocks support more than 10 active nests of the Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus*, as also the nests of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*. Major migratory avian fauna includes the Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina*, Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Brahminy Shelduck

**Table 1. List of Threatened birds at Kharda Dam area**

Critically Endangered	
Oriental White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
Long-billed vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>
Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>
Endangered	
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
Vulnerable	
Sarus Crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>
Conservation Dependand	
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>
Near Threatened	
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Greater Stone-plover	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>



Kharda Dam should be considered as an important wetland

Pic: Sumit Dookia



● Long-billed Vulture nesting sites ● Kharda Dam with its catchments

*Tadorna ferruginea*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* and Tufted Pochard *Aythya fuligula*.

At present this site does not come under any protected area network, but the increased fishing activity, and livestock over-grazing in the catchment areas are identified as the main threats to the wetland. This area needs attention from the birding community and conservationists, as poaching is carried out on a small-scale by the Rajput community of the surrounding villages. The area of the entire dam with a buffer of at least 2 km is a critical habitat for wintering waterbirds, as well as for the Long-billed Vulture breeding in the nearby hillocks.

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### History

A few like-minded friends who had already been enjoying mountaineering/trekking and also bird watching in the adjoining areas of the Himalayas and also other places of the N.E region, assembled in a meeting at the premises of Noonmati Primary School, Guwahati. Early Birds (EB), a nature care group, was thus formed on the 6th December, 1991. The organization was then registered with the registrar of societies, Assam on 10/01/1992 and it never looked back since then. Later on, more people from different spheres of life have joined this group. This group now consists of students, professionals, businessmen and social activists who are otherwise engaged in different professions and to join hands whenever they get time in protection of environment around them. No member is a full time employee of this group and yet with the dedicated effort, Early Birds has earned its name over the years as one of the most formidable environmental groups in this region.

### Objectives

- To indicate love for the wildlife community in general and for birds in particular.
- To make regular and systematic surveys of the wildlife population of north-east India, particularly in Assam and to assist other agencies including the Government ones to do so, and to maintain habitat and breeding places of the wild animals, including the birds in their pristine state.
- To publish such findings from time to time.
- To create an immune belt around the protected areas of the north-east region so that disease transmission from the domesticated to the wild can be checked/reduced by inoculating the domesticated bovine group.
- To keep an eye on the migratory birds, their places of interest in the state and their food habits and family life, etc.
- To mitigate grievances and also reduce man-animal conflict by generating goodwill through such camps for animal welfare in the peripheral villages of national

parks and wildlife sanctuaries of the entire region and also to establish rapport between the Forest Department and the public, as we always move with the help of the former.

- To set up permanent veterinary welfare establishment in the above areas along with human care facilities as and when necessary.
- To photograph rare, endangered, protected and common birds and animals of the north-east region and publish them in newspapers, journals etc.
- To organize and take part in seminars, discussion, film shows, meetings, wildlife art workshop, competition etc. in support of protection of animals.
- To generate interest in bird watching among younger generation and particularly among students, enroll birdwatchers and entrust responsibility of bird counting, identification reporting at various places, specially the IBAs and natural wetlands.
- To help and encourage building of nest boxes and placing them at convenient places to promote birds to multiply.
- To receive, buy and publish books in regional languages for children and distribute them among



Pic: P. Talukdar

Lecture on wetland crisis and other conservation related topics are regularly delivered in various schools in Assam

## IBCN PARTNER'S FACTFILE

students free of cost to promote writers from the state.

- To correspond, co-ordinate with other societies, clubs promoting wildlife, birds anywhere and seek information, data, journals, publications etc. and become members.

### Activity Profile

- Since 1992, Early Birds has organized 117 free veterinary and human camps around the PAs covering 13 PAs of Assam and one in Meghalaya.
- After relentless effort, Early Birds was successful in making Amchang Reserve Forest a Wildlife Sanctuary in 2004.
- Published various books on environmental issues in Assamese to cater to the needs of the school students around the PAs and IBAs.
- We also take care of the street dogs of the city with the help of the Animal Welfare Board of India by regularly inoculating them with anti-rabies vaccination and also by performing Animal Birth Control operation within limits of the permitted fund.
- Since inception, Early Birds has been conducting bird census in Khamranga *beel*, Jangdia *beel*, Deepor *Beel*, Amchang W/L, and Chandubi without any break. During such programmes, we distribute leaflets booklets etc and interact with people for strengthening conservation measures. As a matter of fact, our continuous effort has made Jengdia an IBA site and Amchang a sanctuary.
- Our collaborator on different events is Center for Environment Education, Assam Science Society, Rhino Foundation, Aaranyak, Animal Welfare Board of India, MOEF, WWF-India, Assam State Forest



Courtesy: Early Birds

Tree plantation near Deepor Bheel (IBA and Ramsar Site)



Courtesy: Early Birds

Medicine distribution at cattle vaccination centre is one of the activity of Early Bird

Department, Assam Science Technology and Environment Council, Wild Life Trust, Bombay Natural History Society, and Indian Bird Conservation Network. With Wildlife Trust of India, Early Birds, through a project entitled 'Greater Adjutant Stork conservation programme around Guwahati city' for two years during 2003-04 could make a total difference in the attitude of the common man on the status of the breeding and roosting areas of Greater Adjutant. During project period, Early Birds offered free human treatment camp, free veterinary camp, distribution of *simlu* plants among public and also plantation in and around schools. As a result, the tribal Garo people stopped killing Greater Adjutant for food and many a resident changed their mind to cut and sell tall trees in their private forest. Early Birds is looking forward to continue this project with any other partner for a longer duration.

- Organisation has several eco clubs among students in the wildlife periphery area which rescued and released many wild birds and small mammals back to the wild. The Organisation has also brought many offenders responsible for killing or collecting chicks from the nest of birds like Cattle Egret, Hill Myna etc. to book and registered FIR. There are many instances of seizing catapults and also releasing wild birds from the trader through city Zoo DFO or the nearest police station.
- Early Birds took out a procession with slogans/banners in the Ulubari bazar area, Guwahati city, against killing of a Greater Adjutant, called *hargilla* locally.

Early Birds is grateful to Mrs Manaka Gandhi who arranged an ambulance for our team while she was in the ministerial portfolio.





Pic: Fazlur Rahman

The Demoiselle Cranes feeding in the paddy field just outside the Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary

## Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary (IBA Site)

Fazlur Rahman, IBCN member

The Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, a part of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, is a continuous stretch of dense natural forest in the 'terai' region of Uttar Pradesh. It covers an area of 204 sq.km of forest and is located at 28° - 28° 12' N and 80° - 80° 55' E, 150m-182m above the sea level. The three seasons in this region are summer, winter and monsoon. The annual rainfall of this area is about 1,500 mm. This region is blessed by nature with tall large trees and dense forest, where the Sal tree *Shorea robusta* predominates. There are many aquatic plants e.g. *Phyla nodiflora*, *Cyanotis cristata* and *Salvia plebia* present in the large waterbodies. There are meadows and long stretches of grassland which are an important part of the ecosystem. These grasslands mainly have *Erianthus munja* and *Imperata cylindrica*. Tiger *Panthera tigris*, Leopard *Panthera pardus*, along with five species of deer are found. This area is very

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rich in birdlife. About 400 species of birds have been identified here. The Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* and many species of woodpeckers, such as the Great Slaty Woodpecker *Mulleripicus pulverulentus*, Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium shorii* and other birds too are also seen here. Besides many species of drongos, Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* and Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* can be easily seen in the dense woodland. Threatened species such as the Bengal Florican *Huboropsis bengalensis* and Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* are seen in the grasslands. Among wetland birds, the most noteworthy is the Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, which breeds in the Sanctuary. Many species of storks, ducks, snipes, herons are also found here. Besides the Tiger, Leopard and deer, the Fishing Cat, Leopard Cat,

Hispid Hare, and Sloth Bear are also found. Out of the five species of deer, the Swamp Deer *Cervus duvauceli duvauceli* is worth mentioning. It is the State Animal of Uttar Pradesh.

Jhadi Taal, a huge wetland, has about 50 hectares area in compartment number 5 of the Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary. It is an important habitat for wildlife. Many resident and migratory waterfowl species are found in this wetland. In the winter season, a great number of migratory birds come for wintering here. The wetland is home to the biggest herd of Swamp Deer in north India. About seven hundred Swamp Deer are found in Jhadi Taal. Two pairs of Black-necked storks always make their home here. One half of this wetland has clean water, the other is flanked by various species of water plants and grasses. The resident bird species of this wetland include the Lesser Whistling duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, Purple

Heron *Ardea purpurea* and Bronze winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*. The main migratory birds are Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Bar-headed *Anser indicus* and Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*, Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Northern Shoveller *Anas clypeata* and Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*. Various species of turtles such as the Indian Black Turtle, and Tricarinate Hill Turtle are also found in this wetland. A large number of fish such as *Catla catla*, *Labeo bata*, and *Chagunius chaginio* are found in Jhadi Taal. Water snakes such as *Enhydryis enhydryis* and *Natrix piscator* are also found. To conclude, it should be said that this wetland of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is a hotspot for wildlife.



Pic: Fazlur Rahman

A spectacle sight of the Demoiselle Crane in flight seen by the author at Kishanpur WLS



### Unexpected stay of the Demoiselle Crane

On the morning of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at 9.30, I was asleep owing to the exertion of the overnight journey. Suddenly I woke up to my cellphone ringing, and I found Dr. Jaswant Singh Kalair, an environmentalist and BNHS and IBCN member who lives on the edge of Kishanpur WLS, on the line. On receiving the phone Dr. Kalair had me acquainted about a huge flock of birds that had just landed on his farm.

bottom of this, I set out for Kishanpur on the night of 16<sup>th</sup> October and reached on the 17<sup>th</sup> at Dr. Kalair's farmhouse. When I stepped out of my room, at 6 in the morning. I heard the trumpeting call of the birds. I looked to the sky and saw Demoiselle Cranes in flight, about to land in a crop field to forage. In another five minutes the cranes landed in a nearby field, where only two days earlier paddy crop had been harvested. I was over the moon on seeing such a large number of these birds at such close quarters and being

am glad to write that the administration of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve deployed six staff members and two elephants for regular monitoring and protection of the birds. These employees kept a regular watch on the movement of the cranes. For providing protection to the birds, I am highly obliged to the deputy director of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Mr. P.P. Singh and the range officer of Kishanpur, Mr. Mohd. Gulfam. Dr. V. P. Singh and Mr. Neeraj Srivastava, our IBCN State Co-ordinators, came



Pic: Fazlur Rahman

Demoiselle cranes roosting during mid-day, on the sandbar of the river Sharda, which flows besides the sanctuary

As soon as he began to describe them, I identified the birds as Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*. They numbered around eight thousand, as told by Dr. Kalair. For many days Dr. Kalair and the forest department kept me regularly posted about the movement of the cranes. To the best of my knowledge, and the old records confirms this, these birds never stay for more than two days in the terai region of Uttar Pradesh. It got me wondering what would be the reason behind their stay. To get to the

able to take their snaps. I wanted all the 8,000 birds in one picture! I camped for four days there and traveled all over the area. I was a little apprehensive that the local people might harm them, instead of giving them their due care and protection. Daily at dawn, the cranes would scatter into smaller flocks and return at dusk to the sand island made by the Sharda river. Residents of this area too got excited and happy and the birds became a matter of curiosity. I

on my invitation. Wildlife photographer Mr. Suresh Chaudhari and the Assistant Project co-ordinator of the Terai Arc Landscape projects Mr. Mudit Gupta also visited this area and captured the cranes with his camera.

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To promote conservation of birds and their habitats through the development of a national network of individuals, organisations and the government

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Karnataka



Kerala



Kerala



Wild Haven Madhya Pradesh



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Green Guards, Maharashtra



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Environmental Action Group Maharashtra



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Nature Science (Club's) Society, Maharashtra



Maharashtra



Maharashtra



Manipur Association for Sciences and Society, Manipur



Orissa



Action for Protection of Wild Animals, Orissa



Green Friends, Orissa



Orissa

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