

Bird Watching at Gojoldoba

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This January, 2019, four of us from Prakriti Samsad made a short visit to Gojoldoba to watch the migratory birds.

Gajoldoba, in North Bengal is a unique paradise for migratory birds. It is famous for the first reservoir formed by the Teesta Barrage which was built for an irrigational purpose. It is a beautiful quiet place, 37km from New jalpaiguri. It is a haven for birds and a great favourite among bird watchers.

The short 12 hour overnight journey by Uttarbanga Express from Sealdah, brought us to NJP, in the early hours of morning. A car took us near the barrage where a boatman cum guide was waiting for us. The journey from station to the barrage is quite picturesque through Baikunthapur forest with occasional human settlements. After a quick breakfast, keeping the luggage in the car we proceeded to the ghat. Getting down the stairs, we reached the simple alighting place where a dinghy equipped to carry only two passengers awaited us. We had hired two of them. With the help of the boatman we boarded it and sat down gingerly. We carried lunch with us. There were some more boats carrying birders. Mostly young men with high powered camera, with telescopic lenses. Many of them are more of photographers than birders. Very good pictures are posted by them in the social media. Many of them are wild life photographers. Gajoldoba is indeed a blessing for them. The birds are pretty fearless and swim about nonchalantly even though people in boats move about. The local people do some cultivation, gather fodder. We saw buffaloes submerged in the banks. Birds take them as part of their surroundings. There were flocks of different species of birds which often flew en masse and settled in different places in the waterbody. We were sitting on the boat for six hours. The weather was pleasant, ride was smooth as the water is not deep. In some places, the boatman got down and ferried the boat which got stuck in the mud. Some places were deep. Some time in between, the boat was put on hault as we quickly had our dry lunch. But some places were deep too and had to be carefully maneuvered.

The dense reed bed or hogla jungle in the water body are used by birds for shelter and as a hiding place.

It is very lovely and engrossing to watch birds and observe their behaviour in this setup.

We were very fortunate and enthralled to spot a flock of Northern lapwings. Considering they make such a long journey from temperate Eurasia, flying a long distance, adds to the amazement. It is mainly black and white, but the back is tinted green and it is the shortest-legged of the lapwings. The male has a long crest and a black crown, throat and breast contrasting with an otherwise white face. Females and young birds have shorter crests, and have less strongly marked heads, but plumages are otherwise quite similar. We watched their behaviour for a long time.

We were delighted to see Common Mergansers. We had this bird as a priority on our wish list. These are fish feeding ducks having serrated edges to their bills to help them grip their prey, so they are often known as "sawbills". The boatman took us through circuitous route to observe them. Initially they were elusive, would just fly off before we could have a good look through binoculars. They also dive under water fully, disappearing suddenly. During the day there were many boats with birders and they just flew off. As the day was ending, number of boats decreased. We were patiently there and were rewarded by seeing them at close quarters. There were mostly females with just a few males

which had dark, iridescent- green heads. It was such fun to see them as I saw them for the first time to my heart's content.

As the sunset hour was approaching, visibility became poor. It got a little chilly and we had to call it a day. We disembarked from the dinghy at the ghat with a stiff back but quite happy and satisfied. We even had a walk on the barrage itself. In the failing lights we saw some birds near the barrage. I was thrilled to find a Great Crested grebe, another one on my wish list.

We took the Kanchankanya train and reached Sealdah early morning next day. For a short getaway, it was quite fulfilling for me.

Foot note: As the place is getting importance, state government is developing it into a tourism hub. It was inaugurated as a Mega tourism Hub in October 2018. A rest house has been built near the barrage. Rooms can be booked from Kolkata itself. People come here for boat rides or picnic and safari in the forest nearby.

As people concerned with environment and seeing the degradation of space used by wild life, we were apprehensive of this mega project.

Most people do not have the awareness of respecting nature and giving space to wild life. It is difficult to demarcate areas for boat rides and place for the winter visitors.

Local villagers do need to boost livelihood. Tourism helps them. We have to be cautious. If not done with proper planning, the birds will stop visiting their wintering abode. We have to decide who will be the losers.

CHECK LIST OF BIRDS SEEN AT GOJOLDOBA (27.1.2019)

Team Members: Maitreyee Das, Soma Jha, Dalia Set, Anuradha Chaudhuri

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> |
| 2. Little Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i> |
| 3. Indian Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i> |
| 4. Great Crested Grebe | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> |
| 5. Great Egret | <i>Casmerodius albus</i> |
| 6. Intermediate Egret | <i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i> |
| 7. Little Egret | <i>Egreta garzetta</i> |
| 8. Lesser Adjutant | <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i> |
| 9. Asian Openbill | <i>Anastomus oscitans</i> |
| 10. Ruddy Shelduck | <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i> |
| 11. Northern Pintail | <i>Anas acuta</i> |
| 12. Common Teal | <i>Anas crecca</i> |
| 13. Spotbilled-Duck | <i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i> |
| 14. Mallard | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> |
| 15. Gadwall | <i>Anas strepera</i> |
| 16. Falcated Duck | <i>Anas falcata</i> |
| 17. Eurasian Wigeon | <i>Anas penelope</i> |
| 18. Northern Shoveler | <i>Anas clypeata</i> |

19. Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
20. Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
21. Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
22. Black-shouldered kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
23. Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus migrans (lineatus)</i>
24. Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
25. Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
26. Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
27. Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus bimantopus</i>
28. Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
29. River Lapwing	<i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>
30. Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
31. Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
32. Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
33. Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
34. Pallas's Gull	<i>Larus ichthyæetus</i>
35. Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
36. Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
37. Asian Pied Starling	<i>Sturnus contra</i>
38. Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
39. Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
40. Blyth's Reed War (call)	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
41. Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
42. Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
43. White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba (dukhunensis)</i>
44. Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>