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Calcutta Weather

Temperature
 Min : 20.00°C (-2)
 Max : 30.50°C (+0)

Rainfall : 0.00 mm
Relative Humidity:
 Max : 98.00% Min : 50.00%
Sunrise : 5:47 AM
Sunset : 4:54 PM

Today
 Mainly clear sky.

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Lake's first long-distance fliers - Trans-Himalayan migrants touch down at Santragachhi

SUBHAJOY ROY



A flock of Lesser Whistling Duck at Santragachhi Jheel on Thursday. (Gopal Senapati)

Santragachhi Jheel welcomed its maiden trans-Himalayan guests of the season on Thursday morning with former India opener Arun Lal appropriately putting the first sighting on the scoreboard: a pair of Gadwalls sunning themselves in a hyacinth-free portion of the waters.

By late afternoon, the count of new arrivals in the lake that is being cleaned as part of a citizens' initiative rose to three pairs of Gadwall, a pair of Garganey, two pairs of Cotton Pygmy Goose, three to four pairs of Common Moorhen and 1,200-plus Lesser Whistling Duck.

"We are blessed today with their presence!" exclaimed Arjan Basu Roy, whose Nature Mates-Nature Club has been at the forefront of the save-Santragachhi Jheel campaign.

Cricketer Lal, whose live television commentary during winter matches at the Eden Gardens includes asides like "Look at that, a white wagtail!", said he was delighted to see the rewards of more than three weeks of hard work to prepare the lake for the arrival of the birds.

"To spot the Gadwalls was quite an experience. There were more than 1,000 birds in the lake on Thursday," Lal, among the citizens behind the initiative, told Metro.

Gadwall and Garganey are two of the waterfowl species that make Santragachhi Jheel their winter home after flying across the Himalayas, Myanmar and Nepal.

"These birds breed in Siberia, Tibet, north China, Kailash Sarovar and the Manas Sarovar areas. Their flight path is called the East Asian-Australasian flyway," said Raja Chatterjee, secretary of The Jungles, a conservation NGO that has adopted the bird-rich Purbasthali oxbow lake in Burdwan district.

"During their journey the birds stop at certain places that are like hotels or restaurants to them. They eat enough food and build fat that helps them survive the next arduous phase of their flight to eastern India," Chatterjee added.

Nature lovers are hoping more varieties of trans-Himalayan migrants like the Northern Pintail, Shoveller and the Fulvous Whistling Duck will make Santragachhi Jheel their last stop for the winter over the next few weeks.

Local migratory species like the Cotton Pygmy Goose, the Asian Open Bill Stork and the Common Moorhen have already been spotted at Santragachhi and its vicinity.

"A small flock of Asian Open Bill was seen flying above the lake," said Basu Roy.

As in previous years, a cacophonous colony of the Lesser Whistling Duck is the most visible bird species in the lake. "It is a wonderful sight when they take flight together or play in the lake like children in a splash pool," said a birding enthusiast who lives close by.

On the flip side, the arrival of larger flocks of birds has added to the pressure of cleaning the lake in double quick time.

"More than 1,000 birds.... What a day! This also means we need to get the hell out of this place by the weekend or we could scare off the birds," said activist Mudar Patherya, part of the group that is the driving force behind the operation.

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The immediate target is to wrap up work by November 12.

"After that a skeletal staff of 10 people will clean the periphery or parts where the birds do not venture," Patherya added.

Five floating islands of hyacinth have been created to give the birds space to sit and rest in between providing a spectacle for the nature lover. Just a small way of saying: "Thank you for coming!"

Is Mission Santragachhi Jheel the most successful citizen initiative in the city yet? Tell ttmetro@abpmail.com



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