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Bengal
Opinion
International
Business
Sports
At Leisure
Entertainment
Sudoku
Sudoku New **BETA**
Crossword
Jumble
Gallery
Horse Racing
Press Releases
Travel

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Knowhow
Jobs
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Calcutta Weather

Temperature
Min : 17.20°C (+0)
Max : 30.60°C (+2)

Rainfall : 0.00 mm
Relative Humidity:
Max : 90.00% Min : 45.00%
Sunrise : 6:3 AM
Sunset : 4:46 PM
Today

Mainly clear sky. Minimum temperature likely to be around 17°C.

Front Page > Calcutta > Story

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Nature lovers flock to Jheel birdwalk

SUBHAJOY ROY



Visitors at the birdwalk at Santragachhi Jheel on Sunday morning. Cricketer Arun Lal was one of the veteran birdwatchers, led by Sumit K. Sen, who helped visitors identify the winged visitors. (Mudar Patherya) Lesser Whistling Ducks on an island in the Santragachhi Jheel. Picture by Gopal Senapati

Schoolteacher Santanu Manna headed for Santragachhi Jheel from his Hatibagan home at dawn on Sunday hoping to sight some migratory birds. He returned satisfied, having seen several up close and confident of identifying next year the five species that had flown in from beyond the Himalayas.

MSc student Riya Bhattacharjee, after an hour at Santragachhi Jheel, was spotting jacanas by looking out for their bronze wings and white marks stretching from the eyes to the neck. She had also learnt that they migrate to the water body from villages in Howrah every year.

The two were among the 100-plus who showed up at the vast Howrah water body on Sunday morning to take part in the birdwalk organised by nature lovers who had cleaned up the lake recently.

With 10 binoculars, two telescopes and books on birds, about 10 volunteers had stationed themselves on the edge of the lake to teach the uninitiated how to identify birds.

"That's a male common teal," a volunteer said to a middle-aged man peering through a telescope. "There is a green mark on its wings. There is also a green circle around its eyes, as if it is wearing green shades."

The volunteer looked in the distance and continued: "Beside the male common teal is another bird with a similar green mark on its wings but not the green circle around its eyes. That's a female common teal."

The rich variety of birds, including five trans-Himalayan migrants, made the walk exciting. "There were three pairs of Northern Pintail, two pairs of Garganey, two pairs of Common Teal and about 25 Gadwalls," said Prosenjit Dawn, one of the volunteers.

About 4,500 birds have arrived at the lake so far. The bulk are endemic birds like the Purple Heron, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Lesser Whistling Duck and the Common Moorhen that generally dwell in the countryside. "A Brown Shrike, which is a winter bird, was also spotted," said Dawn.

Manna, who teaches chemistry at Shyambazar AV School, said: "I felt as if I had been transported far away from Calcutta. You cannot start your day better than by watching and listening to thousands of birds."

It was the third time he was visiting the lake. "There were not many birds around the last time, so I had returned disappointed. But after today, I am determined to return as soon as possible," he added.

For Riya and her 10 batchmates from West Bengal State University, the visit was a part of the curriculum. "We are asked questions on the birds we see here in an elective paper," said the zoology students.

The nature lovers plan to organise more such birdwalks this winter.

"We will hold birdwalks between December 15 and early March and try to attract students. We will teach them how to count the birds at the Jheel, so that next year we have a group of trained volunteers to work for the bird haven," said Arjan Basu Roy, a

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member of NGO Nature Mates that was involved in the clean-up drive.

The population of birds at Santragachhi Jheel reaches its peak between mid-December and mid-January.



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