

MONTHLY REPORT



HEAL

Human & Environment
Alliance League

DECEMBER 2023



The month at a glance

Gathering Intelligence on Hunting
Festivals of Purulia

Wildlife Rescues

Field Updates: Wetland Surveys to
Safeguard Migratory Birds

Seminars, Panel Discussions and more

Gathering Intelligence on Hunting Festivals of Purulia

- In August 2023, HEAL initiated a Rapid Action Project, in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India, with the goal of gathering intelligence on the dates and locations of hunting festivals in Purulia, Bankura and Birbhum districts.
- This month, team members Santanu Das, Aditya Banerjee, Vasudha Mishra and Rabin Mahato conducted interviews in 47 tribal-dominated villages across 15 Blocks of Purulia district.
- According to the information gathered, there are 10 hunting dates and 12 different hunting locations of which the most significant is the hunting festival of Ajodhya hills in Baghmundi.



Field Coordinator Santanu Das interviewing a local in Purulia



Field Officer Rabin Mahato interacting with an elderly person to gather data

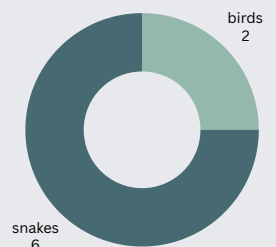
- Held during the Buddha Purnima in late May, this is one of the biggest hunting events across the entire state of West Bengal, with a footfall of over 20,000 people from all over Purulia, as well as other districts in the state, and neighbouring Jharkhand.
- The insights gained from these interviews have significantly enhanced HEAL's understanding of the number and scale of ritual hunting festivals organized in Purulia. This will play a crucial role in informing HEAL's strategy to prevent these festivals during the next hunting season.

WILDLIFE RESCUES

This month, HEAL's rescue teams carried out 08 rescues in 04 districts across West Bengal. These rescues were carried out by: Jayanta Chakraborty in Malda, Ardhendu Banik in Cooch Behar, Suman Sadhukhan and Santanu Das in South 24 Parganas and Samar Chakraborty in West Medinipur.

08
RESCUES

04
DISTRICTS



Field Updates: Wetland Surveys to Safeguard Migratory Birds



- Districts in Central West Bengal, such as Murshidabad, serve as crucial wintering sites for thousands of migratory birds. However, their stay in these districts is fraught with dangers, given that most of their habitats are in human-use areas and lack formal protection.
- HEAL's volunteer network/ field team in Murshidabad maintains constant anti-poaching surveillance in these habitats throughout the winter migratory season to aid detection and mitigation of threats, ensuring the safety of migratory birds.
- This month, the scope of our surveillance was extended to eight new wetlands in an effort to gather information on potential poaching activity. Except for one wetland, no others showed the presence of bird trapping nets, which were eventually taken down.

A picture of one of the many Bar-headed Geese that had descended this year in Murshidabad's Bilkurul Beel. Credits: Soumyadip Mondal

- The abundance of birds varied across the wetlands, with some showing a higher bird presence than others. Remarkably, the presence of Bar-headed Geese, the highest flying migratory bird, was documented at Bilkurul Beel.
- Since 2021, HEAL has worked extensively to end illegal Makhana cultivation in this wetland, which had caused severe damage to Bilkurul Beel's water quality and ecology. The presence of Bar Headed Geese in Bilkurul Beel underscores the positive impact of HEAL's conservation efforts on the wetland's overall health.

Panel Discussion on Birding and Anti-Poaching Activities

- HEAL and Birdwatchers' Society (BWS) jointly organised an informative panel discussion titled, 'Birding and Anti-poaching Activities' on 03 December 2023 at Pollesri village in Murshidabad district.
- At the event, BWS members, Sujan Chatterjee and Kanad Baidya, initiated a discussion on citizen involvement in avian conservation through the use of eBird. This online repository gathers extensive bird sighting data from bird enthusiasts across the globe, supporting bird conservation and research.
- Later, HEAL members Suvrajyoti Chatterjee, Meghna Banerjee, and Santanu Das expanded on HEAL's ongoing efforts since 2022 to combat extensive commercial poaching of migratory birds in central West Bengal.
- Local team members Aditya Pardhan, Kankan Barman, and Mintu Sarkar shared gripping accounts of how they covertly acquired intelligence on bird poachers and orchestrated raids to support enforcement actions.
- The event concluded with BWS donating a spotting scope for strengthening HEAL's on ground efforts to monitor bird populations and hunting activities. Team HEAL is ever so grateful to BWS for this thoughtful gesture.



Kanad Baidya, member, BWS discussing the utility of eBird in avian conservation. (Below) Sujan Chatterjee, Secretary, BWS handing over a spotting scope to team HEAL.





Enabling the Urban Youth to Coexist with Snakes at SRFTI

- The Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute's (SRFTI) campus is a green island in the grey city of Kolkata. It supports rich urban biodiversity, including numerous snakes, the frequent sightings of which have stirred unease among students and faculty members.
- Consequently, a seminar on Snake Identification, Behaviour and Snakebite Prevention, was organised at the institute on 04 December 2023 where HEAL was invited to share its expertise on the matter.
- Team members Suvrajyoti Chatterjee, Vasudha Mishra, Santanu Das, Durba Mitra and Ritu Halder led the seminar, where the urban audience was introduced to various species of venomous and non-venomous snakes that they share their campus with.
- This was followed by a discussion on practices that help reduce the entry of snakes within the premises and prevent snakebite accidents. Participants were also acquainted with the first aid techniques for various kinds of snakebites for ensuring healthy recovery of unfortunate victims, especially those that are bitten by venomous snakes.

Team HEAL conducting the seminar for film and television students of a postgrad program at SRFTI

The Joy of Giving

- In Murshidabad district, our on-ground efforts are fortified by the incredible Pollesri Unnayan Samiti – a dedicated team of local fishermen from Pollesri village in Bharatpur I block.
- From restoring degraded wetlands and protecting migratory birds, to gathering crucial intel on wildlife criminals and saving freshwater turtles from illegal trade, HEAL's teammates from Pollesri have shown immense dedication and commitment to on-ground conservation action.
- As a gesture of gratitude to the local community, HEAL gifted winter clothing to the children of Pollesri village on 25 December 2023. The aim in doing so was not to merely provide material comfort, but to share the warmth of community, solidarity, and the genuine spirit of togetherness.
- Teammate Sumanta Pramanick played a key role in conceptualising and organising this event while the Kandi Range Forest Office provided their active cooperation in ensuring the distribution went smoothly.

