



HEAL

The Human & Environment
Alliance League

JUNE 2023



The month at a glance

Battling Plastic Menace in Sundarbans

Guarding Wetlands from Destructive
Aquaculture

Aiding Enforcement to Tackle Illegal
Wildlife Trade

Wildlife Rescues

Scientific Publication on Striped Hyena

Battling Plastic Menace in Sundarbans



Team HEAL collecting plastic waste littered inside mangrove swamp adjoining the roads in Bali Island, Sundarban Tiger Reserve

- Plastic pollution is debilitating the Earth's ecosystems and impairing their life-giving natural processes. The Sundarbans - world's largest mangrove forests and a world heritage site - is no different.
- Plastic littered inside mangrove forests deprives mature trees and young saplings of vital oxygen, compromising their health and resilience. With extreme weather events becoming increasingly common, a magnificent diversity of animal life and West Bengal's densest district population find themselves in a precarious state.



Team HEAL distributing steel utensils, a durable daily-use item among locals who handed over plastic waste to them



The total amount of plastic waste collected by team HEAL during the first cleanup drive on 05 June

- This month HEAL initiated a Participatory Conservation Program to fight plastic pollution in the Sundarbans and protect its mangrove forests. The program's objective is to conduct multiple collaborative cleanup drives and remove a minimum of 1000 kg of plastic waste.
- The first cleanup drive was organised on 05 June 2023, World Environment Day. Through the local community's active cooperation, team HEAL managed to collect 100 kg of plastic waste.
- To encourage their participation, locals were provided with daily-use items made of sustainable materials in exchange of the plastic waste that they handed over to HEAL.
- All the plastic was supplied to Paving+, a company that manufactures sustainable building materials and alternative fuel by recycling plastic.
- This way, the program aims to promote sustainable waste management practices among the communities of the Sundarbans and empower them to preserve the mangrove forests which are so critical to their safety and survival.

Guarding Wetlands from Destructive Aquaculture

- Located in Murshidabad's Bharatpur-I Block, Bilkurul Beel is a vast wetland with no legal safeguard against potential encroachment. Since 2021, HEAL has been working to protect the wetland from ecologically harmful activities like Makhana cultivation. (Details in monthly report of September 2022).
- In early June this year, Field Officer Aditya Pardhan, alerted HEAL about another impending threat looming over this wetland. He reported that some villagers had been excavating land in the periphery of Bilkurul Beel to create aquaculture ponds.
- Following this, HEAL conducted a short investigation to document the activity, determine its scale, and identify those involved.



Bilkurul Beel - a haven for a magnificent diversity of birds and a source of livelihood for small-scale fishermen



Drone image of the aquaculture ponds illegally dug up in the periphery of Bilkurul Beel



A close up aerial image of one such aquaculture pond

- Drone surveys captured a total of 5 aquaculture ponds that had been illegally excavated inside Bilkurul Beel on government-owned land within Bilkurul mouza.
- Interviews conducted with locals residing in the vicinity of this area revealed that the villagers from Pollesri were responsible for creating these ponds. Residents from the neighboring village of Ekdala complained that the ponds would trap large amounts of water, making it difficult for them to irrigate their crops in summer.
- Additionally, the potential unregulated use of antibiotics and other chemicals to support fish cultivation in these farms could lead to heavy metal contamination in Bilkurul Beel. This could cause fish stocks to plummet, water to become unfit for human use and the habitat to become toxic to local biodiversity.
- These combined effects could jeopardise the livelihood of the farmers and fishermen reliant on Bilkurul Beel. Emphasizing these concerns, HEAL has sent a written complaint to the District Magistrate of Murshidabad urging his prompt intervention to halt the creation of illegal aquaculture farms within Bilkurul Beel.

Aiding Enforcement to Tackle Illegal Wildlife Trade

- Illegal trading of native Indian wildlife poses a significant challenge to species conservation. The biggest hurdles to mitigating this threat are poor detection and inadequate enforcement of law.
- To combat such wildlife crime, HEAL leverages its wide informant network to gather intel on perpetrators and reports them to authorities to aid enforcement action against them. This month, HEAL members played a key role in preventing illegal wildlife trade on two occasions.
- On 02 June, a joint operation led by team HEAL, the forest department and the police culminated in the arrest of a major wildlife trader from Baruipur, South 24 Parganas. He was sentenced to seven days in judicial custody.
- Authorities recovered two Hill Mynahs (protected under Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972) from the trader's possession and discovered that he also trafficked snakes, mongoose and other wild animals sourced from Assam.
- In a separate incident on 06 June, Field Officer Samar Chakraborty reported the unauthorized sale of several Rose-ringed Parakeets (protected under Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972) at a temple fair held in Bhogpur, West Medinipur. Taking prompt action, the Forest Department arrived at the spot and confiscated the Parakeets.



The poacher arrested by the Forest Department on 02 June along with the trafficked Hill Mynahs



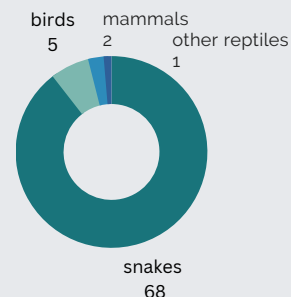
West Medinipur Field Officer Samar Chakraborty (second from left) along with forest officials during the seizure of the trafficked Rose-ringed Parakeets

WILDLIFE RESCUES

This month, HEAL's rescue teams carried out 76 rescues in 7 districts across West Bengal. These rescues were carried out by: Ardhendu Banik and Rahul Dutta in Cooch Behar, Samar Chakraborty in West Medinipur, Santanu Das in South 24 Parganas, Surajit Dhara in Howrah, Joydip Sen and Sushanta Basani in Bankura and Soumyadip Mondal in Murshidabad.

76
RESCUES

7
DISTRICTS



Scientific Publication on Striped Hyena

- In 2021, following a sighting of the rare and elusive striped hyena in the wild, HEAL initiated a project in Purulia district with the aim of 'knowing how it is doing in Purulia' and designing innovative conservation programs to support its persistence in the landscape.
- To do this, we first assessed what the people who share space with striped hyenas think of them - do hyenas evoke hatred, animosity, fear, neutrality, apathy? These sentiments and perceptions would affect their long term persistence in the landscape.



The chance sighting of a striped hyena in the wild by HEAL members that led to the conception of the research study in Purulia.



The elusive striped hyena captured by HEAL during a camera trapping exercise conducted as part of the project in March 2021



Locals in Purulia's Jhalda-I block being interviewed by HEAL's field team during June 2022

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- A research article documenting the findings of the study has been in progress since September 2022. The drafting of the research article was completed this month, and the manuscript has been submitted for publication in the international journal - Human Dimensions of Wildlife.
- This publication would mark the second instance of HEAL sharing its conservation efforts through scholarly articles. HEAL is committed to making contributions to the growing body of literature on conservation knowledge and aims to continue publishing research articles in the future.