

MONTHLY REPORT



HEAL

The Human & Environment
Alliance League

MARCH 2023

(C) Santanu Das



The month at a glance

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West Bengal

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Humane Committees in Action



Humane Committees in session at Jhargram (Top) and in Bankura (Bottom)

- All the five Humane Committees, constituted by the Calcutta High Court's February 2023 verdict, held their first round of meetings as mandated by the Court.
- The Committees were tasked with the implementation of the Court's April 2019 order (passed in an earlier PIL filed by HEAL) and take measures to curb this year's hunting festivals (April-May 2023).
- The meetings were convened by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in Bankura, Purulia, West Medinipur, Jhargram and Murshidabad.
- They were chaired by the District Judge and attended by, among others, District Magistrates, Superintendents of Police, Divisional Forest Officers, authorities from the Railway Protection Force and HEAL's Joint Secretary and conservationist Tiasa Adhya.

- The agenda of these meetings was, inter alia, to draw up a district-specific Plan of Action to prevent killing of wildlife during hunting festivals.
- As a member of the civil society in a committee predominantly comprising officials from various government departments, Tiasa played a vital role in pushing the authorities to adopt stringent result-oriented measures.
- During the meetings, she also advocated a complete crackdown on those engaging in hunting this year instead of sole reliance on lax awareness generation interventions which may prove inadequate in preventing hunting.

WILDLIFE RESCUES

This month, HEAL's rescue teams carried out 12 rescues in 5 districts across West Bengal. These rescues were carried out by: Ardhendu Banik, Atanu Banik and Rahul Dutta in Cooch Behar, Samar Chakraborty in West Medinipur, Santanu Das and Suman Sadhukhan in South 24 Parganas and Kolkata and Soumyadip Mondal in Murshidabad.

12
RESCUES

5
DISTRICTS

birds
7

snakes
5



Mitigating Lark poaching in Central West Bengal



HEAL's Secretary Suvrajyoti Chatterjee releasing the larks rescued from poachers

- During March, bird poaching assumes its highest intensity in Central West Bengal, as migratory larks increase their body mass for the return journey to their breeding grounds.
- In the fourth month of the Rapid Action Project launched by HEAL and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) (details in December 2022 monthly report), efforts were directed towards bringing down the scale of hunting and illegal trading of several species of larks which are locally called Bogari.
- Extensive field surveys were carried out in Malda, Murshidabad and the neighbouring district of Birbhum to detect the presence of bird trapping nets and poachers. Intel was gathered on marketplaces selling bird trapping nets and restaurants offering Lark meat for future enforcement action.
- Over 8000m of nets were taken down and destroyed while close to 500 Bogari were rescued from poachers and released.



Local volunteers destroying bird trapping nets confiscated from poachers



The poacher arrested by the Forest Department on 19 March



The birds captured by the arrested poacher, which include Red-throated Pipit (yellow) and Rosy Pipit (blue) besides Short-toed Larks

- Multiple attempts were made to apprehend bird poachers using the information gathered by HEAL during covert field surveys. On two occasions, Bogari poachers were successfully arrested.
- The first arrest took place on 14 March, wherein a joint raid was conducted by HEAL members, forest officials and the local Police. A Bogari poacher was picked up from his house in Khargram block at 11 pm with 25 birds found in his possession. The poacher was later remanded to judicial custody.
- The second arrest was made by the Forest Department in Berhampore block on 19 March. The Department intercepted the Bogari poacher while he was enroute to Haltanapara ghat from Karnasubarna. He was found with 84 birds which comprised not only Larks but Pipits as well, including the migratory and regionally rare Red-throated Pipit. This poacher was remanded to judicial custody.

Arrest of Jungle Cat Hunters in Murshidabad



(Top) The group of hunters who killed two jungle cats and a small Indian civet. (Bottom) Carcasses of the killed animals recovered from the hunters

- Constant vigilance maintained by HEAL's local team over wetlands and adjoining human-use areas to deter bird poachers enabled other wildlife crimes to be detected as well.
- During a routine survey of Bilkurul Beel in Murshidabad's Bharatpur I block on 12 March, volunteer Kankan Burman noticed a group of nine hunters trying to flee the spot with their booty of hunted animals.
- Kankan, along with team members Santanu Das and Soumyadip Mondal, followed the hunting party to the nearby Tenya railway station and managed to detain them until the police and forest officials arrived at around 10.30 pm.
- Carcasses of two jungle cats and a small Indian civet were found with them which led to their immediate arrest.
- Upon being produced before the court on 13 March, the hunters' bail plea was rejected and they were remanded to judicial custody.

Awareness Rally to Discourage Hunting

- HEAL had organised an awareness rally in West Medinipur on 31 March. Local team member Rabin Mahata along with other volunteers conducted the rally from Cherabuni, Kurkrajuri to Gopegarh.
- This was done to raise awareness and deter villagers from participating in the hunting festival, scheduled to take place in Gopegarh forest on 04 April.
- During the rally, anti-hunting messages were broadcasted over loudspeakers and leaflets were distributed among community members. The leaflets conveyed the importance of conserving wild animals and the legal implications of killing protected wildlife during hunting festivals.



Local team members distributing leaflets and performing miking in villages of West Medinipur, a district affected by ritual hunting

Snakebite Awareness Seminar for Village Doctors



Suvrajyoti Chatterjee addressing the audience during the awareness program

- Inaccessibility to proper hospitals in rural areas can compel villagers to seek assistance from village doctors who often lack adequate resources or knowledge to effectively treat snake bites.
- To address this issue, HEAL, in collaboration with Bharat Serums Private Limited, organised a seminar for around 50 village doctors in Jhargram district's Lalgargh area on 06 March.
- The aim of the program was to empower village doctors with the requisite knowledge and essential skills to manage snake bite cases, which are quite common in rural Jhargram.
- HEAL's Secretary Suvrajyoti Chatterjee, accompanied by team members Jayanta Chakraborty, Bapi Mahato, Bappa Mahato, and Susanjit Saha conducted the seminar.
- While Suvrajyoti educated the participants on the accepted protocols for treating and ensuring complete recovery of snakebite victims, Bharat Serums Private Limited provided them with relevant technical information on anti-venom serums.

HEAL at the Conservation Partners Meet

- As part of its 25th year celebrations, WTI had organised a Conservation Partners Meet inviting all their partner organisations from various parts of the country.
- The three day event, held from 20-22 March, was a celebration of the remarkable conservation achievements of these 'partners' and comprised a host of informative sessions on various topics.
- As the Zonal Coordinator in Murshidabad, Soumyadip Mondal has been central to the successful execution of several of HEAL's conservation initiatives in the district and was thus chosen to represent HEAL at the event.
- The experience gained at the event will enable Soumyadip to bolster HEAL's work in Murshidabad and further the cause of wildlife conservation in West Bengal



Soumyadip Mondal at the Conservation Partners Meet organised by WTI