



HEAL

The Human & Environment
Alliance League

SEPTEMBER 2022

Dhritiman Mukherjee ©

Our Approach To Conservation

At **HEAL**, we believe in adopting a multi-pronged strategy to solve conservation problems, working together with multiple stakeholders and creating local conservation groups that can fight conservation battles in their own areas.

The three core aspects of our work are **protecting species** which exist alongside humans outside protected areas, **protecting habitats** that are vulnerable to encroachment and **mitigating human-wildlife conflict** to promote peaceful coexistence between humans and wildlife amidst shrinking natural habitats. Here is a summary of our activities in September 2022

The month at a glance

Ritual Hunting PIL - Contempt Petition

Documentary: Catapults to Cameras

Protection of Dankuni Wetlands

Rehabilitation of Bilkarul Beel

Workshop on Snake Awareness &
Snakebite Management

Wildlife rescues

Talks, article publications, and more

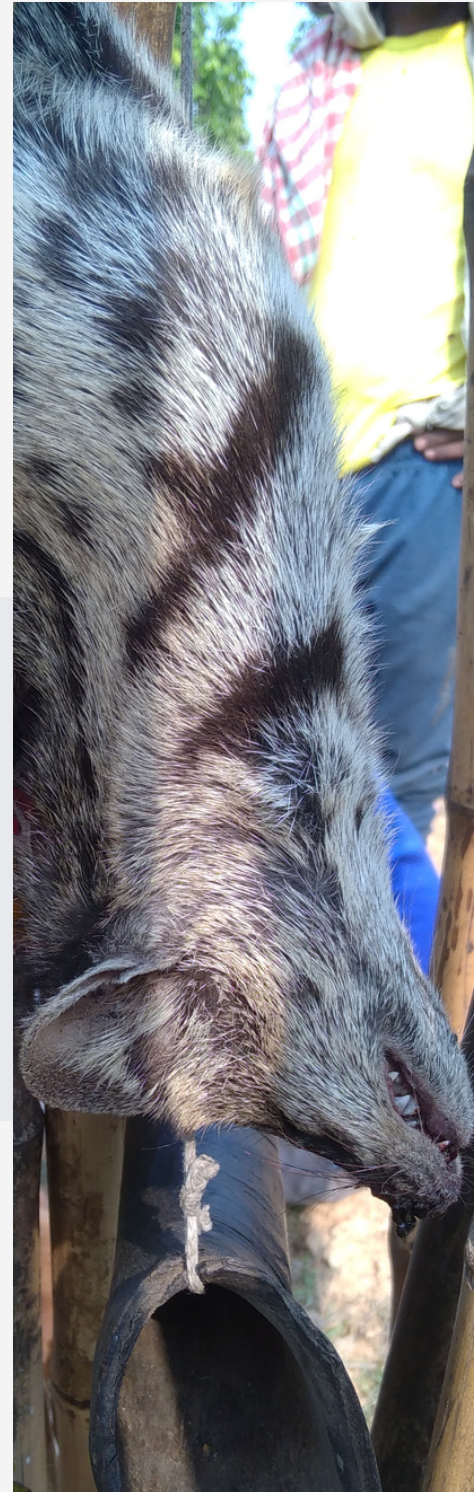
Ritual Hunting PIL - Contempt Petition: An update

Background

- Since inception, one of HEAL's primary focus areas has been mitigation of ritualistic hunting in southern West Bengal. Every year 15-20 thousand wild animals would be killed in these hunting festivals which led HEAL to intervene.
- Two Public Interest Litigations [PILs] were filed by HEAL in the Calcutta High Court seeking to stop this annual massacre of wildlife in the districts of Howrah, East Medinipur, Bankura, Purulia, West Medinipur and Jhargram.
- One of these PILs filed in 2019 resulted in the court passing an order wherein it directed the authorities to take immediate steps against ritualistic hunting.
- Despite the above binding direction, no effective measures were taken to stop hunting festivals during 2021 and 2022. This propelled HEAL to initiate contempt proceedings against the state authorities alleging violation of the Calcutta High Court's order.

Recent Activities

- In June 2022, the Court directed the Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal [CWLW] to submit an Action Taken Report [ATR] detailing the legal action taken against ritualistic hunters.
- The CWLW filed the ATR in September 2022 - which does not mention anything about the legal actions taken by the authorities. The High Court has given time to HEAL to file a rejoinder to the ATR. The matter is scheduled to be heard next on 15 November 2022.
- During the month of September 2022, multiple conferences were held with the Senior Counsel representing HEAL in this matter, to strategise on the future course of action. A response to the ATR is also being prepared

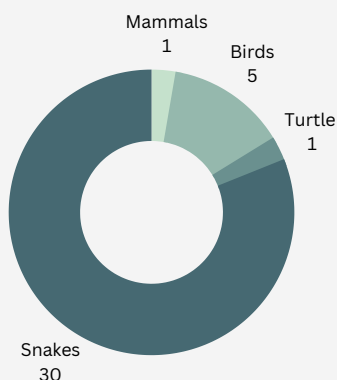


A Small Indian Civet, protected under Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 killed by a hunter at the Pakhibandh hunt on 13 April 2022

WILDLIFE RESCUES

HEAL's rescue teams in various districts across West Bengal regularly receive calls for rescuing wild animals in distress. Our members respond to such calls as promptly as possible. This month 37 rescues were carried out by: Tamal Das in Howrah, Joydeb Majumdar in Nadia, Ardendu Banik (our zonal coordinator in Cooch Behar) along with his teammate Mrinmoy Sarkar in Coochbeher and Alipurduar, Field Officer, HEAL, Santanu Das in South 24, Parganas, North 24 Parganas and Hoogly and Suvrajyoti Chatterjee in Kolkata.

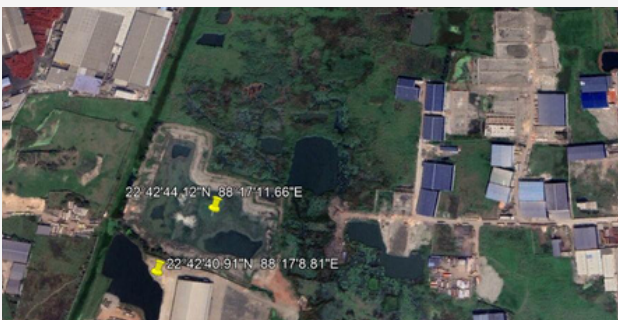
37
RESCUES



08
DISTRICTS

Protection of Dankuni Wetlands: An update

- Dankuni wetlands is a vast wetland complex spanning more than 1000 hectares in the Lower Gangetic Floodplain in Hoogly district. It is home to a rich variety of wetland dependent flora and fauna.
- Between 2013 and 2016, to prevent illegal conversion of this wetland for various industries, HEAL members (along with another Kolkata based NGO called PUBLIC), filed PILs before the Calcutta High Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT). This resulted in interim protection for the next nine years and stalled more than 124 illegal projects, but some encroachment continued illegally and surreptitiously.
- In May 2022 in a landmark judgement, the NGT granted protection to all wetlands in the state over 2.25 hectares and directed the formation of a committee to demarcate, identify and protect all of these wetlands by November 2022. Thus, what started from Dankuni will now have state-wide effect.
- HEAL made multiple visits to Dankuni wetlands in September 2022 to find that illegal reclamation and encroachment is continuing unabated without any intervention from authorities.
- Extensive photo and video documentation of the said illegal reclamation was gathered. HEAL is now in the process of formally informing the state authorities regarding these violations and building appropriate documentary evidence for further legal action, in case the state does not act.



① Encroachments at Panchghara, Dankuni



Encroachments at Joykrishnapur, Dankuni ②

Wetlands of the people and for the people

- Tiasa Adhya, Joint-Secretary, HEAL wrote an article on Wildlife Conservation Trust's [WCT] website about her recently published study on the impact of encroachment of the Dankuni Wetlands on the communities that depend on it.
- Explaining her findings, she stressed how the 18 ecosystem services of the Dankuni Wetlands, help support human communities present near it. The criticality of the wetlands to the communities' wellbeing warrants its formal protection through inclusion in the state wetland inventory and management using a socio ecological approach.

Read the article here: <https://www.wildlifeconservationtrust.org/expert-speak-dankunis-vanishing-wetlands-of-the-people-and-for-the-people/>

Wetlands: Kidneys of our City

- RoundGlass Sustain published an article in September about the four wetlands of Kolkata which act as the city's kidneys; absorbing atmospheric carbon and filtering wastewater, all the while being rampantly encroached. Dankuni wetlands were mentioned as one of them.
- In the article, Meghna Banerjee, CEO & Executive Director, HEAL talked about the endeavours by PUBLIC and HEAL to preserve Dankuni wetlands which culminated in the passing of the order by the NGT in May 2022.

Read the article here: <https://roundglassustain.com/photostories/wetlands-kolkata>



Rehabilitation of Bilkarul Beel: An update

- Illegal cultivation of Makhana [*Euryale ferox*] in Murshidabad's Bilkarul Beel started around mid-2021 and led to catastrophic environmental and socio economic effects.
- Excessive use of agrochemicals for the cultivation and covering of the water surface by the Makhana leaves drastically decreased the fish population, which in turn impacted the livelihood of the local fishing communities.
- The water body became unsuitable for winter migratory birds affecting the avian biodiversity of the region.
- HEAL informed the district administration about this problem which ordered the removal of the Makhana plants from the beel.
- HEAL members along with local fishermen partially cleaned up the beel in October 2021 and February 2022. However as of July 2022, the plants have re-grown.
- If the Makhana plants are allowed to persist, their leaves will once again cover the water surface preventing waterbirds from settling on the water.
- HEAL has documented the re-growth and the water body is being monitored with the aid of local fishing communities.
- Currently, HEAL is engaging once again with the district authorities, seeking prompt action before the winter migration starts.

Connecting Wetland Narratives to Action Plan

- Tiasa Adhya and Meghna Banerjee gave talks at a state level conference about wetlands called 'Connecting Wetland Narratives to Action Plan: A Stakeholders Dialogue' organised at Jadavpur University on 01 September.
- Tiasa spoke about the ecology and biodiversity of the Dankuni Wetlands and how the communities depend on it.
- Meghna elaborated on the conservation litigation experience of protecting the Dankuni Wetlands which culminated in the NGT's order of May 2022

Surface of Bilkarul Beel covered by the leaves of Makhana plant also called Prickly Waterlily.

Workshop on Snake Awareness and Snakebite Management

- HEAL has an ongoing campaign called 'Zero Deaths From Snake Bite' which aims to prevent rampant killing of snakes across West Bengal by mitigating the fear that ensues from instances of and deaths from snakebites.
- Under this campaign, workshops are conducted to increase awareness on identification, behaviour and ecology of snakes; ways to prevent snakebite instances and the correct protocols to manage snakebite victims.
- In September, HEAL conducted Snake Awareness and Snakebite Management workshops on the following dates:



Suvrajyoti Chatterjee conducting the workshop at Sanjeeva Town Bungalows, Rajarhat



Ardhendu Banik conducting the workshop at Cooch Behar Sadar

- 10 and 13 September, Cooch Behar
Conducted by Ardhendu Banik for civic volunteers from Toofanganj and Cooch Behar Sadar subdivisions under the Disaster Management Authority's 'Aapda Mitra' scheme on an invite to HEAL by the district administration.
- 24 September, Sanjeeva Town Bungalows, Rajarhat
Conducted by Suvrajyoti Chatterjee and Arka Sarkar, President, HEAL for the support staff and residents of Sanjeeva Town Bungalows at Rajarhat.

The Lesser Known Stripes of Bengal



Vasudha Mishra giving her talk at SIES College, Mumbai

- Vasudha Mishra, Communication, Outreach and Research Officer, HEAL, was invited as a guest speaker for a session on 'The lesser known stripes of Bengal', at SIES College, Mumbai on 08 September.
- She spoke about her study on the social perceptions towards Striped Hyena which was conducted as part of HEAL's Striped Hyena Project in Purulia.
- The project aims to promote human-hyena coexistence in the landscape and set up appropriate conservation interventions utilising the findings from the study.