

Present Status of Wintering Geese in the Indian sub-continent

Studies on Wintering Geese in India are meagre and unless the existing data and other available information on Geese; their northern and southern distribution; the number of species actually visiting our country; their foraging methods and time of foraging; diet preference; composition of flocks both feeding and migrating; their behaviour at roosting time; sex ratio and variation in number of young and adult ^{are} ~~is~~ tested, verified and redetermined by conducting large scale surveys and field studies scientifically, no satisfactory assessment or conclusions in respect of any one of the features or aspects referred to herewith can be achieved.

The question whether the cold weather immigrant namely the White fronted goose, Anser albifrons which is a rare visitor to Punjab, Sind and Cutch still winters in these regions ~~has remained~~ ^{yet to be} ~~unsolved~~. Census lists on waterbirds prepared in recent ~~years~~ ^{years} show that it does not occur. ~~x~~ More extensive and ^{systematic} ~~regular~~ surveys only can firmly decide on this issue. Similarly, occurrence of one more rare species of ~~x~~ goose, namely the lesser white-fronted goose, Anser erythropus also called the dwarf goose needs ^{to be} ~~determina-~~ ^{ed.} ~~tion~~. A ~~re~~ ^{to find} survey ~~of~~ the doubtful ~~xxxxx~~ Pinkfooted goose or the other species of the group of Anser segetum with a black tip to the bill is also wanted. As these forms mingle with other water birds like ducks and teals and select remote corners of large rivers and Jheels they escape notice.

The only two species of goose that visit our country in large flocks today are (1) The Barheaded goose, Anser indicus and (2) The Grey lag, Anser anser. Both of them breed in central Asia and winter in the northern parts of India, including Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar ^ppradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, Madhya ^ppradesh but, the Barheaded goose prefers to move further ^{down} ~~to~~ south India and today it occurs in Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Andhra ^ppradesh and ^{but not} ~~and~~ not in Kerala and along the coastal regions. The distribution of this species also needs study. The Grey lag on the other hand is confined to colder parts of Northern India and is not reported so far from the south. This should be reexamined and confirmed. Census programmes recently carried out on the 12th and 13th Jan. 1991 in the districts of Dharwad and Bellary revealed occurrence of one large flock of 800 ^{ee} Barheaded ^{geese} ~~goose~~ roosting in Tungabhadra dam and another flock consisting of 1000 ~~members~~ was observed in a large Jheel near Naregal in Dharwad district. Other adjoining districts in Karnataka are also likely to attract these grainivorous water birds and hence it is ^{judicious} ~~necessary~~ to extend survey work ^{to} these areas also. A rare

association of 50 Brahminy ducks with Barheaded goose in Naregal Tank was quite interesting to observe.

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The status of *A. indicus* in the Indian sub-continent continues to cause concern. Since the beginning of Asian Waterfowl Count, data on a substantial range of the wintering population are now available. The number of sites covered during the count has been increasing since 1987 but the no. of geese counted has yet to exceed 5000. (1987-, 1988-, 1989-)

In the winter of 1990 I got an opportunity to explore wetlands in east India where sizeable flocks were seen in the Brahmaputra valley. It appears that *A. indicus* ^{in winter} concentrates ^{in India} in two regions viz. the lakes of West Rajasthan & in west-central India & the Brahmaputra valley. ^{in the east} It is possible that these two belong to separate groups - one overflying Kashmir & Pakistan & the other flying over the main Himalayan range & crossing Nepal to land in east India.

My estimate is that the wintering population of *A. indicus* in the Indian sub-continent does not exceed ~~8000~~ ⁷⁵⁰⁰. Wintering sites in India, Pakistan & Bangla Desh, known so far, have been shown in the accompanying map.

W = 3000
E = 4500
P = 300
BL = 150

A research project to study the food habits of *A. indicus* in different parts of its wintering range was prepared jointly with Beth Middleton but our efforts to obtain funds for this research have not so far been successful. My efforts are concentrated mainly in the direction of covering all the wintering sites in mid-winter waterproof in the Indian sub-continent.

As very little information is forthcoming from Burma, China & Mongolia about the status of *A. indicus*, I would very much like to develop contacts with scientists & observers in these countries & possibly visit them to secure their cooperation. Funds are being sought for such a venture.

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Recent Publications :

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Two case studies : Paper presented
to India-Pakistan conference on
Environment, Lahore, Dec. 1989.

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The food habits of Garganey & Bar-headed
Geese in the Keoladeo N. P. India
Wildfowl 38 pp. 93-102

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of Bar-headed Goose Populations
in Tibet - paper published by
Institute of Zoology & Botany
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The Barheaded Goose (Anser indicus) in
Tamilnadu

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Though Tamilnadu is not included in the winter range of the Barheaded Goose (Ripley, 1982), there are ample records - some old and many recent - which prove the ^{at} Barheaded Goose is indeed a fairly regular, though rare winter visitor to the state. Due to time constraints and lack of facilities, I have not been able to do an extensive literature survey on the records of this goose in Tamilnadu and have been constrained to put together whatever I was able to obtain in the short period.

Jerdon (1864) writes that he had once seen a couple of these geese in "the extreme south of India in August, in a small sequestered tank. This pair may have been breeding there, but perhaps they were wounded or sickly birds". Dewar (1905) has included this species in his list of birds of Madras but has not given further details. The Madras museum has a specimen in its collection, procured from 'Madras' (Satyamurti 1970). Baker and Inglis (1930) say "geese probably of this species are reported to frequent the seacoast as far south as Pamban Island". Buxton (1943) has encountered them in the Salem district in December (13 birds) and January (ca. 70 birds).

In his list of birds of Pt. Calimere, Sugathan (1982) states the Barheaded Goose is rare. Krishnan (1987) has also reported his sighting of this bird in Pt. Calimere. He also recalled a record from Tiruchi where it has been shot. He had seen 40 birds at Karungulam in late January 1983 and 50 birds near Kunthakulam in January 1985 (both near Tirunelveli).

At the Kaliveli Tank (South Arcot District), near Pondicherry, it has been recorded by Pieter (1987) and by Perennou and Santharam (1990) who felt that this wetland is a regular stop-over for the birds migrating further south and the Barheaded Goose is seen here from late November to mid-December. In the Guindy National Park, five geese, probably of this species, were noticed in flight in December, 1986. Members of the Madras Naturalists' Society encountered two birds at the Thenneri Tank, some 55 Kms west of Madras in February, 1992.

The counts of this bird from Tamilnadu during the Asian Waterfowl census in the various years are as follows:

1987 - 61

1988 - 0

1989 - 297

1990 - 34

1991 - 260

1992 - 2

1993 - 146

(Courtesy: IWRB/AWB reports)

These figures suggest that the Barheaded Goose is a regular winter visitor but more work has to be done to determine its status and preferred winter sites.

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BAR HEADED GOOSE ANSER INDICUS IN RAJASTHAN
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOUTH EAST RAJASTHAN

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INTRODUCTION - The wetland birds of the genus Anser are represented by eight species, which have been seen in the Indian subcontinent. Pink footed goose (Hume 1926, Maharaja of Bikaner 1946), Snow goose (Mundkar 1991), Tundra bean goose (Baker), Sushkin's goose (Huxell 1947) are extremely rare vagrants and only one sighting each has been reported from Rajputana, Gujrat and Assam. White fronted goose and lesser white fronted goose are rare and sparse winter visitors recorded sporadically ^{from} Sind (Pakistan), Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and Rajasthan (Salim Ali). [Eastern greylag goose Anser anser is distributed over a wider range, which extends from ~~west~~ ^{western} Europe to China. Its two subspecies A. a. anser and A. a. rubirostris have their wintering grounds extended over South Europe to north Africa and central to south and south-east Asia respectively.] The Bar headed goose Anser indicus is restricted to Asia, having its breeding colonies in high elevation lakes in central Asia from the Tien Shan to Kokonor ^{in China}. Few birds are known to breed in Ladakh within Indian territory. The Bar headed goose exclusively winters in the Indian ~~territories~~ subcontinent, having its western range in north Pakistan and straggling to Burma occasionally, in the east. According to Roberts, its present status in Pakistan is suspect and only small numbers are recorded from Desa Gajikhan, Marala barrage (Chenab river), Salt Range lakes (Khabaki lake) and on ^{the} Indus River below Panjnad headworks. It is not found in Sind and Baluchistan.

While scanning through the literature, we found precious little written about Bar headed goose Anser indicus in the journals. The available sight records suggest that it is fairly widely distributed in India. East Rajasthan, Karnataka

Assam and occasionally Orissa (Chilka lake) are its stronghold. Its ~~occurrences~~^{sightings} in Gujrat, Bombay, Hyderabad have been noted with enthusiasm and reported by M.K. Himmat Singhji (1990), L.M. Raol (1988), S. Khachar (1971), K.N. Blundell (1949) and M. Rahimullah (1946) in the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society.

STUDY AREA - The wetlands of the districts of Kota, Bundi, Baren and Jhalawar in south east Rajasthan were observed regularly between October - April for five years. The divisional headquarters, Kota city, is situated on the banks of Chambal River ($25^{\circ}10'N$ latitude, $75^{\circ}52'E$ longitude) east of Aravalli mountain ranges, which bisect Rajasthan into arid/semiarid western Rajasthan and relatively humid eastern Rajasthan.

The arid western Rajasthan comprises of 12 districts covering 61% of the state's ~~area~~^{total land area} whereas remaining 20 districts east of Aravalli have the balance 39% of land. The rainfall ranges from 500mm to 1000mm on an average and is restricted to three monsoon months. This part of Rajasthan is drained by major rivers like Chambal, Banas and their tributaries, which also leave fertile alluvial soil behind. South east Rajasthan is abundant with lakes, village tanks and bunds, large and medium sized dams, canals, seepage marshes and riverine islands; thereby supporting a large variety of waterfowls. The first author has reported 106 species of waterfowls, out of which 50 are migratory. These sites (table I) were visited regularly and their records were maintained. Lakheva and Raypur village tanks, Abhedatank, Alniya and Bardha dams were visited at more frequent intervals (twice a month) and detailed observations were taken.

In the absence of authentic documented information, anecdotal information was collected from the old Shikaris and villagers. To ascertain the exact status of Barheaded Goose, a questionnaire was sent to knowledgeable ornithologists of Udaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaipur and Bharatpur.

DISCUSSION - The greylag goose Anser anser is one of the early arriving migratory waterfowl in South east Rajasthan. A ~~large~~ gaggle of 57-76 individuals is a regular winter visitor to Albeda and Bardha, which are situated close to each other and are conveniently approachable from Kota. Besides these sites greylags have only been sighted on Manjira and Sorsan tanks in Baren district in small numbers. These birds also leave early for their breeding grounds and by the ~~last~~ week of February, they are completely gone. The earliest arrival of Barheaded goose Anser indicus takes place after ^{the} first week of November.

Gaggles of 20-100 individuals move from one waterbody to another in search of food and safe roosting sites. Their numbers gradually swell to 250-300 individuals in the month of February and March. It seems possible that ~~the~~ on return migration more birds utilize this area as a staging site. This is also the time when waterlogged parts of the tanks and dams are exposed and grasses and weeds grow in the slush. A particular weed locally known as "Chana gram" is a favourite food of Barheaded goose, Brahmini duck, Wigeon and Coot. The Barheaded geese are attracted to these patches of weeds in fairly good numbers, but since the rising temperature cause quick evaporation of moisture from the soil, the grasses too disappear quickly and within 3-4 weeks, the party is over and the geese leave for their breeding grounds. Depending upon the water ~~conditions~~ levels in medium sized dams the birds leave depart from South east Rajasthan by second week of April. Only once three Barheaded were seen at Alniga dam on 14th May.

As the ^{water of the} village tanks and ^{reservoirs} dams is used for irrigation, the water levels fluctuate drastically with the water requirement of the crops growing in the command area. Normally the village tanks dry off between 15th January and 15th February. The dams also follow the same trend

and become small stretches of water. In certain good monsoon years Alniya dam ^{reservoir} retains enough water for summer, when Greater flamingo, Spoonbill, Storks and Sakus crane utilise this waterbody in good numbers. Among the crop fields, the Barheaded goose have a preference for Gram, Wheat and Coriander. As ~~most of the crop fields~~ the farmers choice has shifted to oilseeds like Mustard, there is little attraction ~~for~~ for the Goose in this part of Rajasthan. We have seen a declining trend in their ~~numbers~~ annual arrivals as may be seen from the records of five representative waterbodies near Kota (Table 2). Lakhawa, Ranpur and Alniya are 15, 19 and 24 kms south of Kota city. The birds were counted on the same day, twice a month during the migratory season (Oct-Apr) every year. Abhedha and Bardha are also situated close to each other and thus were counted likewise. The average number of Geese on these wetlands during a month show a decline over six years period except Feb-Mar 1985, when a large gaggle of about 300 birds was moving between Ranpur and Alniya. The big and noisy gaggles moving back and forth from roosting sites to foraging sites have become a thing of ^{the} past. The roosting parties of Barheaded geese have also disappeared from riverine islands, where they congregated in great number about two decades back.

REST OF RAJASTHAN: The reports received from western parts of Rajasthan are not very encouraging. Dr. Ishwar Prakash (Pers. comm.) informed that he has not been finding Barheaded goose around Jodhpur for past few years. Dr. Asad Rahmani in his recently released book "Wildlife in the Thar" states that Barheaded geese are common in some localities like Tal Chhapar, Sambhar lake and Kolia (near Didwana). He cites the Rajasthan forest department census figures for Tal Chhapar.

as 52 for 90-91 and 125 for 92-93.

According to Dr Satish Sharma and Reja Teasia, it is a common winter migrant on the wetlands of South Rajasthan. Their observations suggest a decline of approximately 70% in the numbers of BHG over the last two decades. They attribute it to heavy hunting pressure and pesticide poisoning due to increased and indiscriminate use of pesticides in the crop fields.

Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur in east Rajasthan remains a stronghold of Barheaded and Greylag geese, which congregate in great numbers in the park. The Asian Waterfowl census figures are indicative of the fact. In the years 1989, 90, 91 and 93; 1035, 4072, 1790 and 1297 BHG were counted in Rajasthan including Bharatpur but in the year 1992 when Bharatpur census was not taken; a meagre 306 BHG were counted from the rest of Rajasthan. These 306 were also from Kota area only. Rajasthan plays host to about 15-20% of Barheaded goose wintering in India. In 1990, 29% BHG were reported from Rajasthan.

The districts of Dausa, Bhilwara and Rajmand have a good potential of harbouring this magnificent bird, but it needs to be looked into.

THREATS - Hunting is the biggest threat to the existence of Barheaded goose. It is known as 'Bhatya' throughout Rajasthan and hunted with impunity in all the parts. In spite of its growing scarcity, hunting is rampant. As they move in flocks their gaggles move in a predictable manner between waterbodies and crop fields, they become an easy meat for the guns of the hunters. The farmers are also not tolerant and use weapons or poison against the wandering gaggles.

CONSERVATION - The declining trend in the numbers of Barheaded goose needs to be arrested through conservation activities. The government and non governmental agencies must come together and create awareness about endangered status of this bird. It should be immediately put on the schedule 1 of the wild life protection act 1972. The carrying of firearms must be banned within 100 metres of the selected wetlands during october and April every year. The conservation of Barheaded goose is possible through conservation education, awareness programmes, legal measures and good wetland management practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS - We are thankful to Dr. Ishwar Prakash, Satish Sharma, Reza Teksia for their timely and ^{praise} worthy response and the concern shown by them about depleting numbers of BHS in Rajasthan. We are also thankful to Dr. Asad Rahmani for his suggestions and information on the status of BHS in western Rajasthan. Mr. Hari Singh furnished information on its status in Baran district and Shergarh. Mr. A.H. Zaidi, Anil Nair, Himmet Singh were helpful companions during the surveys and their help is gratefully acknowledged.

Table - I - Important wetlands of Kota, Bundi, Baran and Jhalawan districts. * shows the presence of BHG.

- Reservoirs
Medium sized Dams.
1. ALNIYA (KOTA) *
 2. BARDHA (BUNDI) *
 3. GUDA (BUNDI) *
 4. SANAN-SHADON (KOTA) *
 5. RAM SAGAR (KOTA) *
 6. BHIM SAGAR (JHALAWAR)

VILLAGE TANKS

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. RANPUR * | 21. Niyana |
| 2. Lakha * * | 22. Maupura * |
| 3. Abhada * | 23. Sosan |
| 4. Borewas * | 24. Rail Basera |
| 5. Ummedganj | |
| 6. Udphura | |
| 7. Nimoda | |
| 8. Dayara | |
| 9. Palai | |
| 10. Karadia * | |
| 11. Simalga | |
| 12. Ayana | |
| 13. Jhalawan | |
| 14. Jhalre Patan * | |
| 15. Atru | |
| 16. Chhikabarod | |
| 17. Char Chuma * | |
| 18. Talwas | |
| 19. Kanak Sagar * | |
| 20. Kalaypura | |

CANAL

1. RIGHT MAIN CANAL & SEEPAGE MARSHES (1 to 66 kms), *
2. LEFT MAIN CANAL (BUNDI DISTRICT).

Table - 2 - Average number of BHG on wetland complexes

YEAR & MONTHS		LAKHAWA-RANPUR - ALNITA	BARDHA-ABHEDA
1989	OCT	—	—
	NOV	56	—
	DEC	65	3
1990	JAN	99	—
	FEB	33	—
	MAR	—	—
	APR	—	—
	OCT	—	—
	NOV	2	—
	DEC.	65	40
1991	JAN	88	6
	FEB	70	—
	MAR	20	—
	APR	2	—
	OCT	—	—
	NOV	2	—
	DEC	27	17
1992	JAN	71	14
	FEB	36	—
	MAR	8	—
	APR	—	—
	OCT	—	—
	NOV	—	—
	DEC	8	23

CONTINUED

Table 2

YEAR & MONTH	LAKHAWA - RAIPUR - ALNIYA	ARMEDA - BARDMA
1993 JAN	30	16
1993 FEB	58	3
MAR	—	—
APR	—	—
OCT	—	—
NOV	2	3
DEC.	12	18
1994 JAN	42	1
FEB	28	—
MAR	19	—
APR	—	—
1994 OCT.	—	—
NOV	6	2
DEC.	31	23
1995 JAN	42	6
FEB.	84	—
MAR	111	—
APR	—	—
OCT.	—	—
NOV	7	—
DEC	20	1

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BAREHEADED GEESE (*Anser Indicus*) IN VIDARBHA REGION

Location of the Region

Vidarbha is the eastern most part of the Maharashtra state. Geographically this region is a part of the South Central ecosystem of India. During the North South winter migration waterfowls in general and Bareheaded geese in particular pass through this region in great numbers. Some of them disperse in Vidarbha and stay around the traditional water bodies till the arrival of summer.

Regional Migration Passages

The east west spread of the Satpuda mountain ranges in the northern Vidarbha separates Peninsular India from Northern India, ecosystem. This influences migration pattern of the region. The drainage system on the Southern slopes of the Satpuda mountain determines migration pattern of Bareheaded Geese of Vidarbha region. The drainage system in Vidarbha can be grouped under two major river systems. The Tapi river (and the major tributary, Purna river) basin dominates western region while the eastern region of Vidarbha is dominated by the Wainganga River System. Tapi River is an entry point for Vidarbha at the west Indian Coastal migration route. And the major North South migration route of Central India passes through the Wainganga Basin. This may perhaps explain the recent widespread sightings of Bareheaded Geese in the Vidarbha region.

Record of Bareheaded Geese in Vidarbha

D'Abreu (Curator of Central Museum Nagpur) has recorded sighting of Bareheaded Geese at Umred tank (Nagpur district) south east of Nagpur City in the check list of Central India (1923). During nineties following sightings of Bar headed geese were recorded by amateur bird watchers

Sr No.	Name of the Lake	Year of Sighting	No. of Birds	Reference City
Shri Gopal Thosar (Nagpur)				
1.	Paradgaon	1996	23	Nagpur
2.	Telhra	1996	1	Nagpur
3.	Tadoba	1995	20	Chandrapur
Shri Narayan Dada Patil (Dhabe-Pavni)				
4.	Bodra	1996	12	Bhandara
5.	Itiyadoh	1996	40	Bhandara
6.	Gavrada	1996	10	Bhandara
7.	Kelwad	1996	20	Bhandara
Shri Rajkamal Job (Bhandara)				
8.	Chorkhamara	1996	8	Bhandara
Shri Ramesh Ladkhedkar (Nagpur)				
9.	Ghodazari	1993	30	Nagpur
10.	Chargaon/Chandai	1993	50	Chandrapur
Shri Ajay Dolke (Nagpur)				
11.	Irai	1994	50	Chandrapur

BARHEADED GOOSE IN THE BAGHNADI RESERVOIR, RAJNANDGAON.

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Barheaded Goose Anser indicus winters throughout northern India and Assam but rare in central India (Ali. S. 1979). On 12th March 2k we observed flocks of Barheaded Goose and latter on in the afternoon 65 of them were found resting at the edge of the reservoir on the river Baghnadi 21° North longitude and 80°30' East latituded in the Rajnandgaon district at the inter state border of ^{Chhattis Gadh} Madhya Pradesh and Maharastra. A pair of Ruddy shelduck Tadorna ferruginea were seen among them. Other significant observation were near threatened species of 10 Asian Openbill Anastomus oscitans, 2 Blackheaded ibis Threskiornis melonocephalus and 3 Rednaped ibis Pseudibis pappilosa (Collor, N.J. etl 1994)

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A Short Report on the Status of *Anser indicus*

In my last report presented to the IWRB meeting in Groningen, Netherlands, results of a survey carried out on some important wetlands of Rajasthan and Saurashtra in western India were described. It was estimated that the number of *Anser indicus* wintering in this area was about 10,000. As the goose is now protected by law in this region, hunting may not pose a grave threat to these numbers. At that time it was not possible to carry out a survey of wetlands from east-central part of India and the eastern sea-board from where a substantial number of these geese is reported. However, recently it became possible to contact knowledgeable persons from these areas who were requested to send information about the numbers of *Anser indicus* wintering in this region. Information was also received from Dr. Reza Khan, Professor of Zoology, Dhaka University, Bangla Desh about the situation prevailing in that country.

From personal communications received from about a dozen individuals, it appears that the number of these geese visiting wetlands in this region is less than 10,000 and should be around six to seven thousand only. They are to be found along the Brahmaputra river in Assam, on the Ganges in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, on the Chilka Lake on Orissa coast, while a few reach as far south as Hyderabad and Lake Pulicat on Tamilnadu coast. Formerly they used to reach Karnataka in the

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south. But there are no recent sightings from that State. On the other hand they are now being regularly sighted from areas in central India e.g. on some wetlands around Nagpur.

Prof. Reza Khan reports from Bangla Desh, "*Anser indicus* used to be a very common visitor to the islands of the Padma, Jamuna and Meghna river systems, in the wetland areas and on the newly accreted islands from the Sunderbans in the west to Cox's Bazaar in the east." However, he is of the opinion that uncontrolled shooting, trapping and commercial exploitation have reduced their numbers to such an extent as to render the species "an uncommon winter visitor". They are now mostly restricted to the southern part of Bangla Desh, i.e. on the coastal islands. The goose is not a protected species in his country but he has recommended to the Govt. that it should be included in Schedule 3 of the Bangla Desh Wildlife Preservation Act which is under revision. Inclusion in this schedule means that *Anser indicus* can neither be hunted nor captured.

From the available information it appears that there are two major populations of this goose that migrate to India in winter from their northern breeding grounds. One probably moves south through the Vale of Kashmir and descends on the wetlands and rivers of the Punjab, the region around Delhi and Rajasthan. The other crosses the main Himalayan range and flies south probably through the gorges of rivers in Nepal such as the Karnali and the Kali Gandaki where they have been sighted. This population spreads along the Brahma-

-putra in Assam, and on rivers and wetlands of Bangla Desh and Assam, and Bihar and Orissa. The total number of Anser indicus wintering in India appears to be less than twenty thousand. A small number may be wintering in Burma also. The goose is not protected in India, Baagla Desh and Burma. The danger therefore, is that the population may suffer further decline. Already the population is hardly viable. As such urgent protective measures are required in territories where Anser indicus winters.

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