

Dear Mr. Cole,

I am happy you are collecting information on wintering bar-headed geese. But I strongly object to your including hunting in persecution. Only pseudo-naturalists use this kind of language. The anti-hunting buffs, who call themselves naturalists, go to only sanctuaries for info. It is the hunter who goes far afield in search of game and in the process, collects valuable data on wildlife with the sweat of his brow. By using these materials second hand many a so-called naturalist has become celebrity. Since I belong to the much maligned tribe, I can assure that we are a dying race. It is we who need conservation measures for collecting data on wildlife. Now your points.

1) Assuming that the Brahmaputra river is ~~their~~ their migratory destination, I can say that the first batches of bar heads reach Goalpara district of Assam in the last week of November. Although the earliest date on which I saw a goose was 18th December, I heard them many times in the last week of November when they passed over my town in course of their nightly migration flights. Besides, I was told by my informants on many occasions of their arrival late in November. In eastern Assam, where the Brahmaputra is closer to the Himalayas, their arrival may be earlier.

The latest I heard *A. indicus* was in the second week of April on their return migration. Since I do not boat in the Brahmaputra beyond the second week of March, I ^{have} had no chance to see them personally in April. But other hunters have told me of their presence in early April.

It is almost impossible to estimate their number as their principal wintering ground, the Brahmaputra, is 500 miles long in Assam. Although I boated down the 40 mile stretch of this river from Chapar to Dhubri (in Goalpara district of Assam) many times, I did not see more than 350 or so of these birds on a single trip. But it will be wrong to arrive at any estimate on the basis of this ~~gx~~ figure and the total length of the Brahmaputra. As far as I have been able to find out this goose, which is mainly a vegetarian, generally concentrates in chur areas (riverine islands) where the immigrant Muslims live. In winter, these people use almost every hectre of the silt rich churs, which remain submerged in summer, for cultivation, mainly of pulses. The bar head does a great deal of damage to these crops. As I migrated to Gauhati in 1969, I have been unable to find out how fare the reduction, in late sixties, of the cultivation of Khesari* pulse, by far the most widely cultivated crop in the immigrant chur areas (say from Kaziranga N.P. to Dhubri) and the barheads' most favourite food, affected their migration pattern. Not that they do not eat anything else. They also eat other cultivations such as paddy seedlings and ~~st~~ sprouts of wheat. They sometimes fly inland to eat scattered

contd...

* Cultivation of this pulse was banned following reports of parasitism among bonded labourers in Bihar who were given this pulse as wage.

paddy seeds among stubbles in harvested fields. I believe the population concentrations of these birds are not consistent throughout the length of the Brahmaputra. Hence the number of wintering bar heads cannot be established with any degree of accuracy on the basis of local sightings alone. As much of the chur areas in eastern part of Sibsagar Dist., and Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur districts are not populated and therefore, not cultivated in Winter, sightings of barheads in those areas are rare. According to the hunters I have ~~made~~^{met}, the greylag is the more common fare in those areas. I believe that Goalpara district invites the largest number of this goose in Assam in winter.

My club is planning a country boat expedition down the Brahmaputra next winter from Sadiya to Dhubri, the whole length of the river in Assam. If the trip comes through, I will be able to collect some data on the number and concentrations of your duck. And the data will be reasonably correct and consistent. You are welcome to accompany us. In that case you will have to accept that hunting is a part of life. Because there will be a lot of shooting for the pot. We do not enjoy the company of a cross-eyed virgin at the cost of having to eat proteinless food on a 3-week expedition.

It appears that the geese no longer feed in the swamps like before. The only time I saw them feeding in such places was in Kaziranga N.P. in last February. These days they forage in cultivated churs and harvested fields. The places where I have seen them are Tezpur, Belsiri 40 miles West, upstream and downstream of Gauhati city and all the way from Goalpara town to Dhubri 60 miles downstream. I have seldom seen them far away from the Brahmaputra.

2) According to an uncle, who hung up his gun 20 years ago after 40 years of duck hunting on the Brahmaputra, the number of bar heads has gone down somewhat, and the number of brahminy ducks has increased enormously. In his days, the average bag contained more bar-heads than *Tadorna ferruginea*. These days it is more brahminy and less, ^{or} almost no, barheads. This does not reflect the population balance anyway, though. This is because foreign made ammo is no longer available and because the geese have become more wary due to increasing number of contacts with the fast increasing number of hunters. So far as I have seen in course of my last 20 years of hunting on the Brahmaputra, their number has remained more or less static.

3) If commercial killing means persecution, then it is there, though not in large scale. Shooting for sport or pot is not poaching for the simple reason that no licence is required to hunt on the Brahmaputra and ^{that} barhead is not a protected species. In my home town Dhubri, an average of 30 to 50 of these are shot every year. I have no idea of other places. On my last trip to

Dhubri, I got the shocking news that some chur dwellers had developed a technique to net bar heads. That some 100 birds had been sold in the open market at Rs. 50/- a pair. How many of them were sold elsewhere is anybody's guess. Netting is a fairly common practice in Sibsagar district. I am told that quite a large number of barheads are netted ~~during~~ every winter in a place called Jajimukh a few miles north of Jaji on N.H.37 between Jorhat and Sibsagar, and sold in nearby places.

4) Since the late fifties, when the import of foreign shot gun shells was practically banned, the barheads have been enjoying some sort of respite. But not from those who know how to handload goose ammo. As long as the Govt. maintains this the hunters will not be able to take heavy tolls of this visitor.

As is known no species has a future if its habitat is destroyed or taken over by man. Due to increase in population, people are gradually moving into swampy areas and the remaining churs, for farming and living. A day may come when there will not be enough uninhabited churs and swamp land for this goose, or for that matter, all other ducks. The greylags, mallards, pintails, gadwalls, garganeys, common teals and four spotbills have already become nightfeeders as they cannot visit the swamps in daytime due to the presence of either fishermen or cultivators or hunters. In daytime, these birds just float down and fly up the Brahmaputra where hunters can hardly molest them due to almost total absence of cover. At night, they fly out to the feeding grounds. In lakes, communal flocks of these ducks gather where the water is deep and open. This is an example of adaptation. Unfortunately, the barheads are yet to learn this. At night, they roost on open sand bars and in wadis on sandbars where they can have a clear skyline to show any approaching predator. They fly out at dawn to where they find suitable vegetation. At about 11 am, they fly back to isolated chur beaches or small sandbars where the current is fast, take bath and go to sleep. It is then that they are most vulnerable to hunters in boats as they hate to leave the cool beach and fall to the approaching guns. If undisturbed, the siesta continues upto about 2 p.m. when they fly out again in search of food. This routine is pretty set. I have never seen them break this. To ensure their survival in a particular place, one must provide them with these facilities. But will that be possible in this crowded land of ours? I have heard that their breeding grounds high in the Himalayas are generally free from human interference. But without a safe wintering ground, this safety comes to nought.

You will probably be surprised to know that like the brahminy ducks which do not leave their gunned down mates for quite sometime after the shooting, the barheads also keep circling their injured

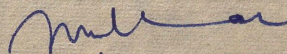
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or winged mates at least for a few minutes. I have seen this very often when the birds hit show some movement. Quick loadres and shooters readily take advantage of this.

The foregoing account ~~ix~~ can at best be called haphazard .But this is the best that I can produce under the circumstances .I will be enormously delighted if you can glean a small bit of useful material out of this junk. Kindly acknowledge receipt.

Gauhati High Court, ~~Gauhati~~
Gauhati- 781001,
Assam,
June 8, 1981.

Yours sincerely,



(M. UMAR)

2/4/82

Mr Prakash Gole

With compliments from

Lt Col J C Sawhney
(Retd)



WWF

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND-INDIA

C/o. Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Pvt. Ltd.
Lalbaug, Parel
Bombay 400 012 Tel: 441361
Grams: PANDAFUND BOMBAY

Gopal Singh (1)
 Horizon Farm
 Police Lines
 Kota

18.2.1982 Rajasthan.

Dear Sir,
 WORLD WILDLIFE FUND-INDIA
 3914
 24 FEB 1982
 INFO ACTION FILE

With reference to your request about the wintering of Bar-headed geese (*Anser indicus*) vide your Newsletter NO 38 I am attempting to give the following information. I have over fifty years of personal experience of the life of these birds in our area. Having widely travelled and hunted in Rajasthan I am not confining my observations to my district of Kota but, keeping in view, your objective shall cover the whole of Rajasthan.

Today the district wise break up of these visitors would be as follows, as in this year 1982.

No.	Name of District	visiting No. of Birds	Description of area. Important sheets / lakes / Dams.
1	Bikaner	500	In Tarhara sheet. None in Gajner
2	Churu	x	Arid desert
3	Jhunjhuna	x	" "
4	Sikar	x	Desert
5	Todhpur	2000	Sardar Samand
6	Bermer	x	Desert
7	Ganganagar	x	Absence of wintering grounds.
8	Pali	2000	Tawai Dam etc
9	Ajmer	2500	Ramsagar, Baghera & other Sarovar sheet.
10	Bhilwara Abargana	5500	Meja Dam, Banera etc. Sarovar
11	Jai pur	8000	Chaparvara, Todisagar etc
12	Tonk	7500	Saukhra, Mohisagar, Shaukhra etc. In birds are wide spread
13	Sawai Madhopur	7500	Gilasagar, Mansarovar, Parichna, Morasagar
14	Alwar	2000	Schoolle, Vyanga jau etc
15	Bharatpur	10000	Ghaus Sanctuary, Boretha Dam
16	Kota	6000	Gopalpur, Piles, Shetta shetti, Bhanwargarh, Akhnesagar, Bed of Chagubel & Kalesnath river
17	Bundi	5500	Barda Dam, Kanaksagar, Hindoli, Bhimlet, Ponja etc. Bai Bala Bura, Gudha
18	Jhalawar	500	Mundliakeri, Jhalapatana.
	Total	60000	

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND-INDIA
 PRODUCTS SECTION
 23 FEB 1982
 INFO ACTION FILE

Kumar
 Binda Dam - ANQAI AWAN BIJOLIA

No	Name of District	No of birds visiting	Important Lake fresh. Dams.
17	Chittorgarh CP	62000 4000	Gaurleri Dam and a large number of medium sized dams.
18	Udaipur	7000	Udaipur, Jaisamand, ^V Rajsamand.
19	Dungarpur	500	
20	Banswara	500	
21	Jalore	500	
22	Gangargarh	x	
	Total	77000	or say roughly 80,000.

The Date of Arrival:

The date of arrival of these birds in Rajasthan is roughly 20th Nov to the 7th of December. However, in the northern parts of Rajasthan like Alwar Bharatpur they are there earlier and exclusively use the Ghana Sanctuary as the hopping off place.

They first arrive at the big sheels and from there forage at night for food. After discovering appropriate places of food and shelter which, of course, depends on the monsoon, they split into smaller skeins and by 15th of December temporarily settle down according to the carrying capacity of the area.

Later there is a constant change of pattern of their population in each particular area depending on the following factors which entirely determine their movement:-

- (1) The varying water levels of the bigger sheels/Dams, as the water gets let out for irrigation. This phenomena acts in a number of ways. It can decrease or increase food in the bed of the sheel as more and more ground gets exposed or becomes available for sowing wheat.
- (2) The sowing time of wheat and gram in a particular locality as they constitute one of the main items of their diet.
- (3) Human disturbance by letting off cattle to graze in the bed of the sheels which puts them under stress.
- (4) Disturbance of the hunters.

Hunting

There is widespread uncontrolled hunting of these birds during the time they are in India. They are mainly hunted at the time of their morning and evening flights as they go and come from their feeding grounds to the bigger sheels.

The birds mostly feed at night when they are known to invade fields of newly sown wheat or gram. They may also get ^{by hunters} shot by lying in ambush in the feeding fields, or small tanks which have palatable food in their beds.

The birds are basically nocturnal feeders and seldom feed during daytime except at such places where receding level of sheels expose juicy palatable grasses etc.

The method employed in shooting them are as follows:

- (1) From boats by gunners who keep ^{them} ~~chasing~~ in the lakes.
 - (2) Hunted with shotguns by waylaying ^{them} in their line of flight either in the morning or evening and using "Newspaper" decoys to fool them. This a deadly method.
 - (3) By making hides in the ground or above it in the bed of sheels.
 - (4) Use of cattle in approaching the birds to get within firing distance.
5. By They are also sometimes successfully caught in

Six feet high ^{nylon} nets raised on the bank of the stream when they come for feeding at dusk. However in Rajasthan I know of one place where it is done. But this is not common.

The authorities were informed ^{this but} by ^{it was} ^{by} ^{the} ^{authorities}

of no avail. In UP snaring is quite common.

While hunting them I have seen them successfully collared by imitating their calls.

By 15th of February these birds put on fat and the younger birds develop their full plumage. They continue to do ^{so} till the migration flight back about the 15th of March. This period coincides with the ripening of the gram crop and their gullets are ^{often found} fully of ripe green and yellowing gram grain. By that time they also develop a queer ^{goosey} odour.

Departure

For migration back they gather in large numbers at the bigger fields where maximum gaggles can be seen assembling. They probably take for their breeding grounds in Lakshkh and central Asia in flights of 2 to 3000 each.

By 15th of April most birds are gone. I have however, seen a few stragglers as late as 6th May near Kota. They prefer moonlit nights for migration and cover long distances without food.

During the last 20 years I have noticed that the number of birds visiting this area is on the decline. I presume that 5 to 10% of the visiting birds get killed in Rajasthan.

It is however, very difficult to correctly estimate the decline in numbers. In last few years a lot of new dams has come up and they may be more dispersed today. The best way to monitor would be in their breeding grounds. Because once having entered India they fan out so widely that it is difficult to keep a proper track of them. Further, there is also constant local migration which makes estimating their population almost impossible.

If at all an effort at recording their number is to be made in a particular area like the districts of Bharatpur, Tonk or Sawai Madhopur the same can be done by recording their day to day arrival in the biggest fields / Dams of the area early in the season.

The ^{best} place to monitor the arrival of these birds is Kashmir in September in the Hygam and Hokarsar lakes. They arrive there as early as September and I

It has ^{seen} ~~been~~ a gaggles number 15 to 20000 at Hygam Lake. But this was many years back. I do not know the present position. During the rule of Pt. Hanisagar they were well preserved there.

Other
facts

One important change that has come about in Rajasthan that is affecting the lake bed feeding grounds of geese is the large influx of grazing cattle in the beds of these sheets. Pre independence there were a large number of 'BIRs' common village grazing grounds where cattle were daily sent for grazing. Today all the birds have been allotted to landless people irrespective of their fitness for cultivation with the result that the sheets/dams beds are the only places left for them to graze.

This in the first instance has led to tremendous disturbance to these birds when they like to rest during day time and the constant compaction of the ground by the hoofs of cattle has led to a terrible decline in the quality of food produced for geese and ducks. In other words there does not exist any management of wetlands. This factor has also changed the species of duck arriving at a particular sheet over the years. I have noticed that a wide range of duck species coming to a particular lake have declined.

Suggestions

The local Government if unable to control indiscriminate shooting on all sheets ^{at least} ~~at least~~ attempt to control at least, the shooting in a few sheets and also step in to improve the wetlands. In my young days sheets used to have various kinds of tall grasses today that has completely disappeared. In this area some years back a few bridgion and mallards and red necked pochards were seen today they do not come here at all. Thus slowly the overgrazing of sheet beds must be affecting the geese population also.

In our area this increased disturbance during daytime in the sheets has led to more and more birds taking rest during the day in ^{the beds of river sand banks, as they} ~~on this district~~ do in UP. of the Chambal & Kosi basins. Hope you find this information useful. I shall be happy to keep in touch with you

in your efforts to assess the ¹ population of these birds.

It may interest you to know that we also get grey lag geese in our area but they are not so numerous and relatively they are wilder birds. They tend to prefer fields which have little grass and a lot of vegetation in shallow waters.

Kindly acknowledge and let me have your comments and suggestions.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely

Gopal Singh

GOPAL SINGH

HORIZON FARM

POLICE LINES

KOTA

(Rajasthan).
P.S. Using modern devices, the best plan to reckon these visitors would be to use a Helicopter in day time between 10 AM and 4 PM to assess their numbers. One whole district can thus be covered in a day. January is the ideal month for this operation.

अन्तर्देशीय पत्र कार्ड
INLAND LETTER CARD

लेखन-सामग्री मूल्य 15
STATIONERY CHARGE 15



To Prakash Gole (Executive Director)
1/B Abhimanshree Society
off Pashan Road
PUNE पिन PIN 411008

पहला मोड़ FIRST FOLD

तीसरा मोड़ THIRD FOLD

इस पत्र के भीतर कुछ न रखिए NO ENCLOSURES ALLOWED
पते में पिन कोड लिखें WRITE PIN CODE IN ADDRESS
प्रेषक का नाम और पता :— SENDER'S NAME AND ADDRESS :—

Dr. J. C. Wthang
56/1 Mission Compound
Dharwad

पिन PIN 580001

दूसरा मोड़ SECOND FOLD

