

Bangladesh

5 - 30 January 2017

Sonadia Island, Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, Adampur Forest, Kurma
Tea Estate, Asian Waterbird Census, Sundarbans

Lonnie Bregman, Reinier de Vries, Wouter van der Ham



Masked Finfoot, Sundarbans - Wouter van der Ham

Introduction

This trip report describes the first part of our 4.5 month journey through the northern Indian Subcontinent. Bangladesh is not a country often visited by birdwatchers, or other tourists for that matter. There are no endemics. Nonetheless, there are a few star birds here that are really worth the visit. We included it in our itinerary with our minds set on three species: Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Masked Finfoot and Baer's Pochard (which we all found). Also, we knew that this country provided good chances for a few other rare birds like Nordmann's Greenshank and Indian Skimmer. It was our first time to bird in Asia, and since Bangladesh is not visited a lot for birds there were very little known 'target species' to concentrate on besides the ones mentioned above. Because of this, we could bird freely and saw lots of lifers in a very relaxing way. We even ended up seeing some species that would be considered targets at other locations. Unfortunately, Reinier could only join us from the 14th of January.

Before leaving, we had a long email conversation with one of the few local birdwatchers: Samiul Mohsanin. His help was of extraordinary value to us. He helped putting our itinerary together and during our entire stay he was either with us or made sure that we got company of other good birdwatchers he knew. Also, he invited us to stay in his home multiple times and when at the start of our trip we unexpectedly weren't able to travel to the northeast of the country due to riots, he even took a day or two off from work and improvised a trip to Cox's Bazar. Not for a moment we were left on our own. And besides covering the field expenses of the birders who joined us (not even all of it), we didn't have to pay them anything! Bengalis are very hospitable people and Samiul considered it his duty to look after visitors to his country and to help them enjoy the birds. He also would be happy to help more people who want to visit Bangladesh. His email address is **samiul.mohsanin[at]gmail.com**. (On a side note, Samiul told us that, for understandable reasons, he could not guarantee that he would be able to keep doing this kind of stuff for free for future visitors.)

We can understand why not many people visit Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a poor country, and few people speak English. It is not prepared for western tourists outside of the big cities. This makes it difficult to arrange necessities like transportation and accommodation. There are also a few places where you can better not go and recently there have been attacks by terrorist groups like IS. Some of these were even targeted on foreigners (the fact that you constantly seem to be the only tourist in the country does not make you feel better either). This was the main reason why Samiul wouldn't let us be alone. The local people were very protective and Samiul even got strict instructions from the head of the Bangladesh Bird Club. We were not allowed to make our presence in the country known through social media and during the Asian Waterbird Census we were not allowed to go on shore and visit the local markets. To us this seemed a bit excessive, but at least we were in good hands at all times.

For the reasons mentioned above, we would recommend to be accompanied by a local like Samiul when birdwatching in Bangladesh. If not for safety it should be for practicality. And Samiul and his friends are extremely friendly and made our time in Bangladesh a lot more fun! According to us, there is definitely nothing that should hold you back going to this intriguing country. According to Samiul, the government of Bangladesh has taken the terrorism activity with zero tolerance and successfully managed to take control over the political unrest. The number of tourists in Bangladesh is growing again. However, always check an official website for the current situation in the country before leaving.

Weather

In winter the weather in Bangladesh is very pleasant: it was dry and sunny every day and usually about 20-25 degrees Celsius. At night a sleeping bag was required but then sleeping on an open boat was fine. The wind and the waters were usually very calm, although we did encounter rough waves at one location far out on the Bay of Bengal. In different times of the year, however, the Bengal weather can be very inhospitable and extreme events including heat waves, floods and cyclones can occur, causing the natural disasters that Bangladesh is famous for. Thus, definitely plan your visit in the winter months. This is also when the best birds are present.

Logistics

Larger distances were mostly covered by night buses, which was efficient but usually didn't provide good nights of sleep (the insane driving didn't help!). Taxis and auto rickshaws ("baby taxis") were used for getting to the birding areas thereafter, as well as for getting around in cities. To get from Dhaka to the start of the AWC and back we travelled overnight by vessel, which is a common and comfortable mode of transport in the delta area. All of this was arranged by Samiul and his friends.

One note on visa: If you want to cross the border from Bangladesh to India overland, like we did, make sure you got your visa for India already before you leave for Bangladesh. According to our information it will come with a lot of trouble if you try to get it in Bangladesh.

Food & health

The Bengal cuisine is nice, but generally extremely spicy to western standards. In the cities a good variety of food is available, but in the remote places we visited (especially during the AWC) commonly only the country's staple food consisting of rice and dahl (lentil soup) was available, sometimes with some chicken or fish - we were quite fed up with it at a certain moment! As in India, visitors must be aware of the risk of stomach problems and food poisoning. We suffered from this during the AWC. Samiul had brought ORS packs (to be dissolved in 0.5L water, very easy) which were very helpful - make sure you bring these on your travels. Wash your hands before eating and don't buy food that is lying behind a shop window; it could be lying there for days. And of course be advised about things like vaccinations and malaria!

Money

We got our one way tickets from Amsterdam to Dhaka for €408 seven weeks in advance (Lonnie and Wouter) and for €482 three weeks in advance (Reinier). Costs of living are rather cheap in Bangladesh, even for tourists. Since the locals are not used to tourists you can usually pay the regular price as a tourist, instead of obviously higher prices like in India. We usually paid around €10 per person for a hotel room (more in Dhaka). Taxis in Dhaka and night buses were commonly about €10-15 per person as well, depending on distance of course. For only a few euros (if not less) one can get a baby taxi ride or a meal.

Our main expenses, however, were the participation in the AWC and the 4-day Sundarbans trip. The AWC cost €240 per person (for 10 days, including everything, like food and the overnight ferry to the starting point). The Sundarbans trip cost, after bargaining by Samiul,

about €400 per person. This also included everything, e.g. fuel for the long boat traverses and permits. Locally the prices of these trips were respectively 60,000 and 100,000 taka for us in total; by the time the exchange rate was about 85 taka/euro. The total costs for our stay in Bangladesh (excluding flight tickets) were about €1,000 for Lonnie and Wouter and about €700 for Reinier (who didn't join the trips prior to the AWC). It would be hard to make this much cheaper, unless one would skip the Sundarbans trip. But as this hosts both Bangladesh's best bird species and its greatest nature reserve, we wouldn't advise that - rather consider making it one or two days longer instead!

As in India, it is important to know that bargaining is normal. It actually is inevitable if you don't want to be ripped off. You can, and should, bargain over almost everything that hasn't got a sign saying "fixed price". This is however a lot more difficult when you are a foreigner, which could be another reason to get help from a local like Samiul. That being said, these kind of problems are not as big as they can be in some touristic places in India.

Literature

Both for birds and for mammals we believe we have found the best books for the Indian Subcontinent, and for Bangladesh. For birds we used the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp, published by Helm in 2011. For mammals we used Indian Mammals: A Field Guide by Vivek Menon, published in 2014. This one only covers India but should contain all the species occurring in Bangladesh too.

Finally

We got inspiration from the following trip reports (they were the only reports on Cloudbirders at the time) and from the observations reported on observation.org by Rolf de By and Ton Eggenhuizen. We'd also like to thank the two of them for the information they shared with us. Thanks too to Peter van Scheepen, who provided us with a load of bird sounds. This report was written by Lonnie and Reinier, completed with pictures of the birds made by Wouter. All coordinates in this report can just be put into Google Maps for the right location. For taxonomy we used IOC (8.2). If you have any further questions, feel free to contact us via [lonbregman\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:lonbregman[at]gmail.com).

Trip reports:

http://www.surfbirds.com/trip_report.php?id=2306

<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/tripreports/Asia9697.html>

Using the following links you can find all of our observations, including locations, details and photographs:

<https://bangladesh.observation.org/user/view/18483?from=2017-01-05&to=2017-01-30>

(Lonnie)

<https://bangladesh.observation.org/user/view/49386?from=2017-01-05&to=2017-01-30>

(Wouter)

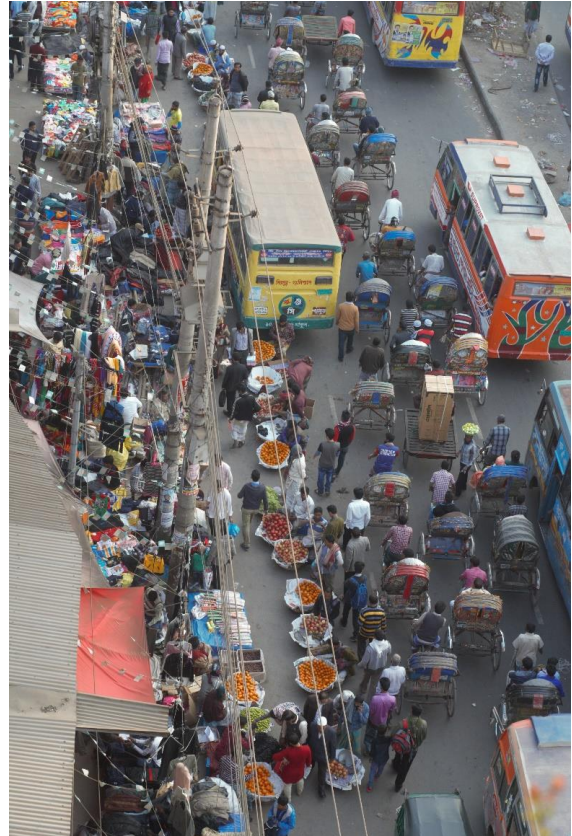
<https://bangladesh.observation.org/user/view/20208?from=2017-01-05&to=2017-01-30>

(Reinier)

5 January - Dhaka

As our plane was landing the first thing we saw of Bangladesh was... nothing, because the city was covered in the thick layer of smog. After landing, we were picked up by the airport shuttle we had ordered: a taxi arranged by the hotel. Immediately we found ourselves in a total chaos as the streets in front of the airport were filled with cars trying to leave. Like we were told beforehand, literally nobody followed any traffic rules. The roads in this part of the world are just complete anarchy.

For the first night in Dhaka we had booked a hotel in advance via booking.com. The price they asked from us when we arrived was significantly higher than the one given on the website, and since we were not yet aware of the fact that bargaining was so normal we paid way too much (don't ask how much). The hotel did have a nice roof terrace though, with a view over the city. From here which we saw our first birds: Brahminy Kites, Black Kites (probably partly ssp. *lineatus* "Black-eared Kite"), House Crows, Eastern Jungle Crows, Common Mynas, Pied Mynas, Red-vented Bulbuls, Oriental Magpie-Robins, Black Drongos, Indian Pond Herons, White Wagtails ssp. *leucopsis* and a Grey Wagtail. Our second hotel in Dhaka, where we stayed the night prior to the AWC, was much better. The facilities were better (hot shower!) and the price was reasonable. It was arranged by Samiul and was called the Regent Guest House situated in the Banani district. We recommend this one!



Streets of Dhaka - Reinier de Vries

6 January - Jahangirnagar University

We were picked up early by Samiul and drove to the Jahangirnagar University campus to do our first real Asian birding. There were a lot of birds here. Nothing rare, but it was a good place to get introduced in this new ornithological world and some of the species are actually easier to see in this cultivated area than in the more natural places we would be visiting later on. It was exciting for the students too, regarding the countless selfies we were asked to take. Lifers included Black-hooded Oriole, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Taiga Flycatcher, Black-rumped Flameback (or Lesser Goldenback), Jungle Myna, Cinereous Tit (split from Great Tit), Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Purple Sunbird, Bronze-winged Jacana, Asian Openbill, Lesser & Fulvous Whistling Duck, Little Cormorant, Ashy Woodswallow, Grey-breasted Prinia, Red-wattled Lapwing, Coppersmith Barbet and Lineated Barbet. We also saw an Irrawaddy Squirrel.

7 to 8 January - Sonadia Island

Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank

After this we had actually planned to go to the northeastern part of the country, but a big fight had started there between bus drivers and policemen. This had led to a strike and meant we were not able to go. Samiul instantly improvised, took a few days off from work and took us on a night bus to Cox's Bazar, in the southeast. Cox's Bazar is a fishing and tourism city, but offshore lies Sonadia Island: the most reliable spot for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Bangladesh. Originally this place was not part of our itinerary, because we thought we would have sufficient chances for this species during the AWC. However, in hindsight this was not as reliable as we thought and not going to Sonadia Island would have been a huge mistake! We arrived in the morning, slept a bit at the apartment of a very nice friend of Samiul's and did some birding close to the city in the afternoon. We saw Green Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and a colony of Grey-throated Martins (split from Plain Martin) from a small bridge (21.396, 91.999). We also saw our first Rhesus Macaque and we set foot on what Cox's Bazar is famous for: the longest beach in the world.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Sonadia Island - Wouter van der Ham

The next day was "Spoony day"! In the early morning we went to the BFDC Fisheries Ghat where Samiul knew a guy with a speedboat who always takes him to the island. In the harbor we already saw a lot of Brown-headed Gulls. We boarded and on the way saw a group of Greater Crested Terns on a small island (poor views) and a Black-capped Kingfisher. We arrived at the island at the right tide and immediately saw lots of shorebirds. We took off our shoes and walked through the water to the beach. Before I could even properly set up my telescope,

Samiul had already found two Spoonies and not long after that, while we were still watching them, he found a Nordmann's Greenshank! In total we probably saw four Spoon-billed Sandpipers and three or four Nordmann's Greenshanks, both foraging at short distance between the other birds. These consisted of Lesser (the most common bird) and Greater Sand Plovers, Kentish Plovers, Little/Red-necked Stints (we tried but could not distinguish them in their winter plumage), Broad-billed, Curlew, Marsh and Terek Sandpipers, at least one Great Knot and the more common Eurasian shorebirds. Standing there, our feet in the mud, the sun shining upon our caps and watching all those rare shorebirds in a place that felt totally remote from the rest of the world, surely was already one of the greatest birding moments of the whole trip. The coordinates of this spot are (21.557, 91.865).

After the tide had changed, the shorebirds were scattered around the area and the greenshanks and Spoonies were gone, we had time to look at the other birds in the area. In the distance was a group of Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets together with Black-headed Ibises and Grey Herons. Other birds on the beach were Pallas's Gulls, Little Terns, a Gull-billed Tern, a Western Osprey and another Black-capped Kingfisher. In the empty bushes we saw our first Dusky Warbler of the trip. Also fascinating were the hundreds of red crabs that covered the beach.

On the way back we shortly visited a different island called Beleker Dia where we saw 65 Pallas's Gulls, a fly-over Western Osprey and a Sanderling. We also saw a Collared Kingfisher from the boat and at the end of the day we saw a pair of White-throated Fantails and a pair of Ashy Drongos from the apartment. A Pale-billed Flowerpecker flew by.



Crab, Sonadia Island - Wouter van der Ham

10 to 11 January - Hakaluki Haor

Baer's Pochard

Luckily, the situation in the northeast had improved and we were able to go there now. The main reason for visiting this part of the country was that I accidentally discovered, while preparing the northeast India part of our trip, that the so-called haors (“haor” and “beel” are names for the typical wetlands in this part of Bangladesh) in this area used to be an important wintering ground for Baer’s Pochards back when they were more common. A little research learned that the numbers had dropped dramatically (from roughly around 1,000 in the early 90’s to only 17 in 2011). Samiul confirmed that there also were more recent records, including from the previous winter. This put our hopes up to search for this critically endangered duck. There are two main areas that still hold a small Baer’s Pochard wintering population: Tanguar Haor and Hakaluki Haor. Samiul and his friends had chosen the latter for us.

Again, we went by night bus. We were joined by female birder Israt Jebin Jahan and left around midnight from the dark bus station that made us feel slightly uncomfortable. In the morning after a night of hardly any sleep, we arrived at our hotel in Kulaura. As we got out and took our backpacks from the loading space we noticed a penetrating smell in the village. But when we were in our hotel room the smell hadn’t gotten less, and we saw something weird about our backpacks. They were soaked in fuel! The smell stayed in our clothes for weeks. Fortunately, all of this was put in perspective by the smell coming from our mosquito larvae-infested toilet, which was even worse.



Pushing our baby taxi back on the road - Lonnie Bregman

We could convince Israt to allow us another half hour of sleep, after which we were picked up for an hour long baby taxi drive on bumpy roads. We were now also accompanied by Bashir Ahmed for this and the following day. It turned out that Israt and Bashir did not exactly know where to search either. We first searched a small beel, which did not really hold many diving ducks but we saw lots of Richard's and some Rosy Pipits and a female Crested Honey Buzzard flew over. After a few hours of birding and searching for my sound recorder, Wouter discovered a bigger lake in the distance with lots of ducks, so we drove there. This looked like the right place. I searched the first few hundred ducks while Wouter lay down next to me: as it was already past noon the lack of sleep was now taking its toll on him. There were hundreds of Eurasian Coots, Northern Pintails, Tufted Ducks and Common Pochards. After finishing the ducks I walked further to the next group, assuming that Wouter would follow me. In this group there were a lot of Ferruginous Ducks and also some Garganeys, Fulvous Whistling Ducks and Northern Shovelers. After some time my eye fell on a classic male Baer's Pochard, swimming in the front row! I looked around me and realized that Wouter was still laying knock-out in the same spot. Before I could even think about what to do next the bird suddenly took off with a few Ferruginous Ducks and landed hundreds of meters away at the other side of the lake, behind the rest of the group... For the rest of the day we tried to find it again, or a new one, but no luck for Wouter. The searching did produce males of Falcated Duck, Pied Harrier and Eastern Marsh Harrier, which offered a little comfort.

The beel where I saw the Baer's Pochard is called Haor Khal Beel. These are the coordinates from where I saw it: (24.667, 92.043). The next morning we tried again, this time from the other side of the lake (24.689, 92.076). We did see large groups of ducks here too, but less than the day before and at larger distance. The circumstances were by far not as good as the previous day and we didn't find any Baer's either. So we would recommend the spot of the first day. We did see, among others, a singing Striated Grassbird, some Temminck's Stints, Black-headed Ibises and Asian Openbills and Wouter saw a male Red-crested Pochard flying by. One month later, on 3 and 4 February, a waterbird census was held in the whole Hakaluki area (40 different beels, but not with the best optics) which resulted in four Baer's Pochards.

12 January - Baikka Beel

The coming days we would be joined by the excellent birder and researcher Paul Thompson, who is originally British but now lives in Bangladesh. We were going to Sreemangal, from where we would drive by car to areas close by. They had planned for us to stay in a hotel, but apparently the political situation was sensitive and it was mandatory to inform the police if a foreign tourist would stay in a hotel. So, “just to avoid police harassment”, we secretly stayed in a research center outside of town that also provides room for guests. Paul was staying here too. Despite not being first choice, it was a pleasant stay with food being cooked for us and everything. According to Israt, the situation now is normal again.

The first day here we visited Baikka Beel, a large wetland area nicknamed “Warbler’s Paradise” and one of the best known birding spots in the country. It certainly lived up to its nickname, because the place was filled with warblers such as Yellow-browed Warbler, Dusky Warbler, Tickell’s Leaf Warbler and Blyth’s Reed Warbler. A highlight in this family consisted of two Black-browed Reed Warblers. We also saw a Clamorous/Oriental Reed Warbler, but they apparently are indistinguishable in the field. There even are some records of Large-billed Reed Warbler from the park. Just in case, the coordinates of the park entrance are (24.352, 91.706).



Striated Grassbird, Baikka Beel - Wouter van der Ham

In the vegetation on the banks Striated Grassbirds were singing and we saw our first laughingthrushes: Rufous-necked. The wetland itself held high numbers of waterbirds, such as Grey-headed Swampheens, Cotton Pygmy Geese, Lesser Whistling Ducks, Little Cormorants, Glossy Ibises, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas, Grey-headed Lapwings, a few Oriental Darters and lots of the more common ducks, herons and waders. There was also a high watchtower from where you have a nice view over the area. From here we found a few

Oriental Pratincoles foraging in the sky and a critically endangered adult White-rumped Vulture flying over, which apparently are both scarce here. A Yellow Bittern was briefly seen in flight before disappearing in the reed. We also saw quite some eagles but most not well enough to identify. Eventually we could identify one juvenile Greater Spotted Eagle and the hoped-for Pallas's Fish Eagle! Wouter saw an immature hunting from the watchtower and Lonnie found two adults near a nest at (24.355, 91.708) when he was making a walk outside of the park gates.

Just outside of the park gates was a good place for birds anyway, with Plaintive Cuckoos, Citrine Wagtail, Brown Shrike, Striated Babblers and an immature Yellow Bittern at the spot of the fish eagles. Other birds we saw inside the park included Purple Heron, Whiskered Tern, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Wryneck, Siberian Stonechat and Grey-backed Shrike. We were told there was a chance of Siberian Rubythroat as well but unfortunately we had no luck with that one.

13 January - Adampur Forest

Cachar Bulbul, Western Hoolock Gibbon

Today we would get our first taste of what birding was like in a tropical forest. On the way we saw two Red Junglefowl on the road and a group of Ashy Woodswallows perched on a wire. When we stopped for the woodswallows we also heard a calling Asian Barred Owlet. After more than an hour we arrived and started following a trail from a village into the forest at (24.270, 91.901), where we already saw Streaked Spiderhunters and a few Common Hill Mynas flying over. To us the birding here was really overwhelming as almost all the birds were lifers and in a lot of cases even the families were new. Here is a list of the most interesting species we saw along the track: Yellow-browed Warbler, Little Spiderhunter, Crimson Sunbird, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, Van Hasselt's Sunbird (split from Purple-throated Sunbird), Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Little Pied Flycatcher, Pale-chinned Blue Flycatcher, Black-crested Bulbul, White-throated Bulbul, Ashy Bulbul, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Blue-winged Leafbird, Black-naped Monarch, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Pin-striped Tit-Babbler, Grey-throated Babbler, Nepal Fulvetta, Rosy Minivet, Maroon Oriole and Yellow-vented Warbler. On top of that, Wouter had photographed a bird that turned out to be an Olive Bulbul, a rare species. Later however, the subspecies that occurs here was split into "Cachar Bulbul", now an extremely range-limited species only occurring in eastern Bangladesh and the neighboring parts of India.



Cachar Bulbul, a very range-restricted species, Adampur Forest - Wouter van der Ham

Furthermore, Paul told us that Black-backed Forktail occurred here. Wouter and I decided to walk through a stream as if it were a trail which provided us with great views of two of them. Besides birds, Capped Langurs and Western Hoolock Gibbons were seen. Lonnie missed the latter though, because he was too busy documenting a new species to science which later turned out to be the already described Ashy Bulbul... Wouter also saw a Pallas's Squirrel.

When we got back in the village we found a small river where we saw our first Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters. There also were Verditer Flycatchers. On the way back to the research center we saw our first 22 Red Turtle Doves sitting together on a wire.

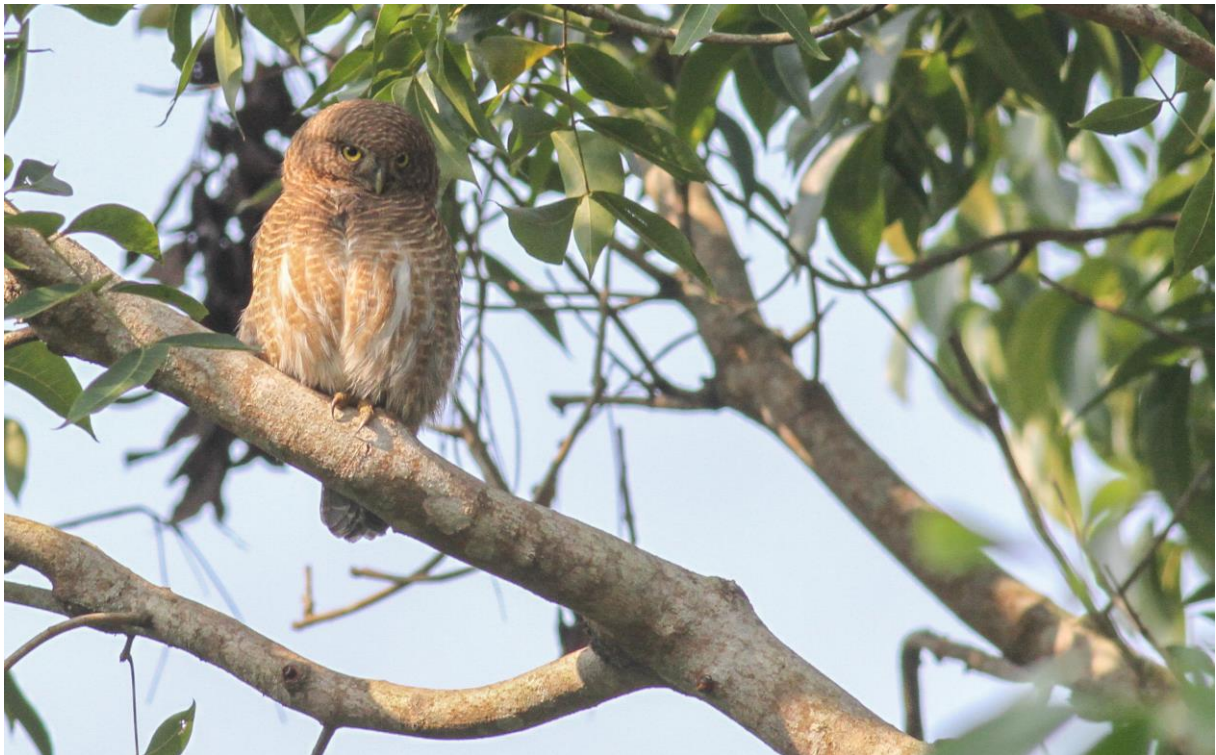


Pin-striped Tit-babbler, Adampur Forest - Wouter van der Ham

14 January - Kurma Tea Estate

Our final birding day with Israt and Paul in the northeast and yet another nice spot they had chosen for us. On the way we again saw a lot of Red Junglefowl on the road in front of the car, and this time also three very nice Common Emerald Doves. The area we were headed to consisted of a field of grass and reed surrounded by tea plantations, close to the Indian border. Again a new type of biotope, and therefore lots of new birds. According to Paul, this was especially a good biotope to see buntings. Also it is a part of the country where birding is not done so often, so it is probably a good place to find new things too. As far as the buntings were concerned, we saw two Chestnut-eared Buntings and a Black-faced Bunting. And we found something rare too: a female-plumaged Jerdon's Bush Chat. According to Paul this was only the 9th record for the country and it's a bird that is considered a target species at other locations (for example northeast India and Myanmar). If you are planning to go here, you should go to (24.201, 91.866) and start walking around from there. We saw the birds mentioned here either in the grass or on the edge in the tea plantations.

Besides this, we saw a bunch of other typical grassland birds too. Pied Bush Chat, Siberian Stonechat, Chestnut Munia, Scaly-breasted Munia, Bengal Bush Lark, Long-tailed Shrike and Red Avadavat were quite common. We also saw winter-plumaged Lesser Coucal and Golden-headed Cisticola, a male Plaintive Cuckoo and a group of Yellow-eyed Babblers. Other birds we found included Eurasian Wryneck, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Crested Serpent Eagle and a cooperating Asian Barred Owlet showing in a tree.



Asian Barred Owlet, Kurma Tea Estate - Wouter van der Ham

We left around noon in order to get back to Dhaka the same day. While we were driving dusk fell, and we were amazed by our first Indian Flying Foxes migrating over the car from their roosts to their feeding grounds. These animals really are astonishing. In the evening we were finally joined by Reinier, who had arrived in Dhaka on the 12th and had explored the city in the meantime. We spent the night in the Regent Guest House, which was much better and cheaper than the one where Wouter and Lonnie stayed the first night. We could even take our first hot shower of the trip! The next morning we moved to Samiul's apartment, where we could prepare for the departure of the Asian Waterbird Census that evening.

15 to 25 January - Asian Waterbird Census (AWC)

Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Indian Skimmer, River Tern, Asian Dowitcher

During our email conversation prior to the trip Samiul had invited us to join the annual bird count of the central delta area, part of the international Asian Waterbird Census. This was a 10-day trip with two traditional wooden fisherman's boats, visiting islands and mudflats in a wide area ranging from farmland fringes to some of the country's most remote and natural islands. We were focused on wintering waders, ducks, geese, gulls, terns, herons and others. For us targets were Indian Skimmer, Spoon-billed Sandpiper (for Reinier), Nordmann's Greenshank (for Reinier), Asian Dowitcher and River Tern. We saw all of these except for the greenshank, but not in the large numbers that we had hoped for. Annually 1,000-1,500 Indian Skimmers winter in this area, the largest wintering population in the world. However, when we were there apparently they hadn't arrived yet, and we only saw one(!). Moreover, during the AWC of the year before a new island where Spoonies winter was discovered and nine of them were counted. This year we found two, and only Reinier saw them because Lonnie and Wouter were feeling too ill due to food poisoning to join the search. So the two of us were very lucky that we were forced to improvise a trip to Sonadia Island at the start!

Due to the vastness of the area, bird aggregations were widespread and we regularly had long quiet periods of sailing between spots (up to six hours), but we encountered good numbers of birds at the places we headed for. The rest of the team consisted of a diverse group of Bengal naturalists, about 20 in total. Some were actively counting while others seemed mainly on holiday. The boat crew (sailers, cooks) consisted of about 10 people additionally, who normally used these boats for fishing.

For ticking rare birds this trip is not the most efficient way, although we saw some very good species. Also, hygienic conditions and the food were rather basic. We slept in our sleeping bags on the deck, where at night a shelter was constructed from plastic sheets and bamboo. The toilet was a small box with a hole in the floor. And we have seen it a lot, because we got stomach problems on the third day - maybe the result of the basic hygiene on the boats, maybe of being in Bangladesh anyway. Reinier recovered the next day, but Lonnie and Wouter were quite sick for several days. This didn't sustain our appetite for the local rice and dahl, which we were served three times a day nevertheless. Luckily it was often accompanied by some freshly caught fish or chicken, which were bought on the way, and there were tea, coconuts and cookies too. The first day our breakfast even consisted of tasty buffalo yoghurt with puffed rice and a duck egg, but unfortunately that was all there was of that. Reinier enjoyed the food but after the trip Wouter and Lonnie were very happy to return to the shore's restaurants.



Life on deck - Wouter van der Ham

Despite the basic comfort, this trip was a fantastic way to get a really extensive impression of Bangladesh's fascinating rural landscape and wetland nature, of the harsh life on its remote islands and of the impressive size of its rivers. It took us to places that very few visitors reach. It was also very interesting to get in such extensive contact with local naturalists and to see how they monitor birds in this vast area. The count does a great job in gathering annual data, but can also definitely learn from visiting counters from other countries. It is a challenge to monitor in a more-or-less consequent and standardized way in this area.

So do we recommend this trip to other birdwatchers? That depends on what you're looking for. If your goal is to tick your target birds efficiently, or if you would like to have more comfort, then this is not your best choice. If you want to combine birding with thoroughly exploring the places you visit and like to get in contact with local naturalists and projects, and you have the time, then it is a great experience which we absolutely recommend!

We left Dhaka in the evening from the Sadarghat harbor, which has a reputation for being chaotic. It was indeed a chaos but not really worse than anywhere else in the city center - though it probably can be so on busy days. We were there around dusk and the water was almost as full as the streets with all kinds of boats. We shipped in on a vessel, where we had small and basic, but comfortable cabins. After a night of learning the Bengal edition of belote, we woke up in a totally different world the next morning: a quiet and idyllic countryside, with lush vegetation, water everywhere and many birds. Reinier scored new birds quickly: Jungle Myna, Red-vented Bulbul, Oriental Magpie-Robin, Spotted Dove, White-throated Kingfisher,

Eastern Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Red-wattled Lapwing and Eastern Jungle Crow. We shifted to the two wooden boats that would be our home for the next 10 days. They were small boats, driven by an old diesel engine, equipped with all essentials and nothing more.

16 January

On the first day we were still quite far inland, sailing through a rural landscape with rice fields, palm stands and riverine woods. Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Indian Pond Heron, Grey Heron, Eastern Cattle Egret, Great and Intermediate Egret, Great Cormorant and Little Cormorant were regularly seen on the shores today or the coming days. Raptors were regularly seen today, the first highlight being a group of three Indian Spotted Eagles soaring right above our heads and providing splendid views. Pied Myna, Jungle Myna, Long-tailed Shrike and White-throated Kingfisher were common on the shore, while Green Bee-eater and Asian Palm Swift flew above the riparian woods. Brown-headed Gull and Black-headed Gull were encountered regularly during the count too. We had been told to check them for Slender-billed Gull but we didn't find any.

After a few hours we reached bigger (absolutely huge) river channels. From the boat we saw two Caspian Terns, which were a small surprise, together with 13 Pied Avocets. Then we arrived at our first counting point for waders. There were not many, but some of the more common waders and a group of 67 Grey-headed Lapwings were present. At this spot Samiul found Plain and Graceful Prinias and Wouter flushed an unidentified quail. Other birds seen here were a Brahminy Kite, some Whiskered Terns and Red-wattled Lapwings, a Richard's Pipit was heard and Lonnie saw a nice male Eastern Yellow Wagtail. After we had started sailing again, a large falcon passed overhead. At first we didn't know what it was, but Wouter had made some clear pictures which unmistakably showed a juvenile Laggar Falcon! Being only the third record ever in Bangladesh, it was not only a lifer for us but also for most of the natives! It was followed several minutes later by a Black-winged Kite flying the same route.

In the afternoon we reached a large mudflat which we were going to count as well. It hosted a large aggregation of waders. The most striking was a group of about 600 Black-tailed Godwits, varying so much in size and bill length that most likely it was a mixed group of the *limosa* and *melanuroides* ("Eastern Black-tailed Godwit") subspecies. We searched them for Asian Dowitchers, but in vain. The best birds however were about 25 Small Pratincoles, which would remain the only ones for us on this boat trip and in Bangladesh.

17 January

The next day started with another Caspian Tern. The first stop was a huge mudflat, where large numbers of Lesser Sand Plover and Pacific Golden Plover were seen. Other species included Sand Martin and Whiskered Tern and the first groups of Greylag and Bar-headed Geese were present. Between the more common ducks 10 Garganeys and one male Falcated Duck were found. When we sailed on we saw some Pallas's Gulls and a nice male Eastern Marsh Harrier. Black-crowned Night Heron was heard at our night stay.



Laggar Falcon with prey, only the third record for Bangladesh! - Wouter van der Ham

18 January

In the night towards the third day Reinier and Wouter got stomach problems, quite badly. Nevertheless we sailed through the interesting waters of Nijhum Dweep National Park. The first River Tern and Indian Skimmer flew past, being the first two of our target species here. The skimmer stayed rather distant but we expected to encounter more during the days to come. Many more, as over 1,000 skimmers are counted annually during the AWC. However, it would appear that this year they had not arrived yet, and amazingly this skimmer would stay our only one in Bangladesh.

We passed some nice riparian woodlands, where Collared Kingfisher was present, and we visited a nest site of White-Bellied Sea Eagles where we got splendid views of them. The first Greater Sand Plovers were present together with hundreds of Lesser Sand Plovers at our afternoon mudflat, and we added Terek Sandpiper to the AWC list. We saw our first Chital too. In the evening we checked the edge of an extensive marshy meadow. Reinier had recovered pretty well and found the first Asian Dowitcher of the trip. Great knot was present here as well. Wouter however didn't see any of these birds, he was feeling so sick that he could literally only lift his head to see the skimmer and the sea eagles today!

19 January

Today Reinier was already feeling better again, but Wouter was still ill and now Lonnie had gotten stomach problems too! In fact we were feeling so miserable that Reinier did the majority of the observations today alone. We stayed overnight at a shore where the next morning fishermen and villagers came together and created a busy market where all kinds of sea fruits were traded. The adjacent gardens hosted Taiga Flycatcher, Dusky Warbler and White-throated Fantail. We continued past some islands covered with short grass and water

buffaloes, where Western Yellow Wagtail (ssp. *thunbergi*) and a beautiful juvenile Greater Spotted Eagle were present. We visited several good wader spots today, where - being closer to the sea now - a different set of species was present. We started at a good mudflat where several Asian Dowitchers and about 20 Great Knots were present together with a group of Bar-tailed Godwits. Several River Terns flew around as well. At the next extensive mudflat area, Greater Sand Plovers were present between the Lesser again and Grey Plover, Kentish Plover, Pacific Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone and Terek Sandpiper were recorded. A flock of 37 Gull-billed Terns and a stranded pufferfish were found here too. In the afternoon a long traverse was made to one of the most remote islands in the delta area: Thengar Char ("char" being the name of the floodplain sediment islands in the Ganges Delta). This place was discovered by the counters the year before and was thought to be a haunt of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, because they had counted nine that year! We landed in the last hour of daylight and found a beautiful undisturbed island, with no signs of human activity for the first time in Bangladesh (the next day it turned out that even here people were walking around). The sandy shores hosted large numbers of waders including many Terek Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling. The Spoony was however left for tomorrow...



One of the boats - Reinier de Vries

20 January

But before that we had to make it through a sudden night of very strong winds, in which the boats danced on the waves. We slid over the deck from side to side in our sleeping bags, hoping that no bags would fall off. Then the two boats violently hit each other, breaking the bamboo roof construction of one of them. Without hesitation the crew got up and worked in the middle of the night to repair it. Naturally we didn't get much sleep before we headed back

towards the island the next morning. As the tide decreased huge mudflats formed, making the search of waders a tough job. Reinier joined the counters onto the mudflats. Lonnie and Wouter were still too ill for that. They tried, but didn't get further than 100 meters before collapsing in the white sand beneath the heat of the sun. After a few kilometers Reinier spotted a lonely stint flying in the distance, which after a big loop came closer and closer and landed a few dozen meters away: Spoon-billed Sandpiper! There it was! It immediately flew off and disappeared again, but later another one provided longer views. What a great place to see this Holy Grail! This had been the initial reason of our visit to Bangladesh, before we found out that there was much more to be seen. So now all three of us had seen this lovely stint that had brought us here!

Lesser and Greater Sand Plover, Kentish Plover, Grey Plover, Curlew and Terek Sandpiper and Sanderling were present as well, and some River Terns and Pallas's Gulls were foraging at the edge of the mudflats. On the island itself many Western Yellow Wagtails (ssp. *thunbergi* and *beema*) were present, as well as an Eastern Yellow Wagtail. And as on Sonadia Island, the beach was again covered with hundreds of red crabs. Around noon we left the island and the rest of the day was spent on the boats, as we had to make a long journey back towards the west. Pallas's Gulls were around.

21 January

The next day we visited Char Shahjalal, where usually large aggregations of Pallas's Gull occur, but not this year. It was in fact not a very good year for birds in the delta. We had however missed the information about the gulls and didn't join the counters. Instead we birded the woodlands - after all a good choice. We found Ashy Woodswallow, Green Bee-eater, Black Drongo, Dusky Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Oriental White-eye, Oriental Magpie-Robin, White-throated Fantail, Verditer Flycatcher, Eurasian Wryneck, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Common Tailorbird, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker and Crested Serpent Eagle. Furthermore, we had time to take a swim and wash our hair, which had been a while.

In the afternoon we entered a reserve with well-preserved woodlands, where we encountered large aggregations (hundreds) of egrets and some great mammal observations were made: we saw a few Irrawaddy Dolphins and a fishing family of Smooth-coated Otters that gave prolonged views. At dusk several Indian Flying Foxes flew over and at night we heard Golden Jackals calling close to the boats. Chitals were common on the shores today as well.

22 January

The next morning we visited a mangrove reserve at Char Kukri Mukri Wildlife Sanctuary. As we sailed through the creek in the early morning we encountered lots of birds: Black-hooded Oriole, Chestnut-tailed Starling, Jungle Myna, Common Iora, White-throated and Collared Kingfisher, Purple Sunbird, Common Hawk-cuckoo, Black and Bronzed Drongo, Rufous Treepie, Greater Coucal, White-throated Fantail and Crested Serpent Eagle. Samiul and Reinier saw a Black-naped Oriole as well. But best of all was another group of Smooth-coated Otters, this time very close on the bank of the creek. Last year the group had seen a Fishing Cat here. A little while later we flushed a Striated Heron.

After this great morning we visited a sandy island for a break. On the way we saw two Caspian Terns and a few Red-rumped Swallows. At the island we took another swim and played a football match: Bangladesh vs. the Netherlands, which unfortunately was won by the Bengal team. We birded the adjacent woodlands as well, which were not very bird-rich but did host the birds of the day: two Forest Wagtails. What a cool birds and the only ones of our trip. Lonnie also found a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo but Reinier and Wouter didn't see it. It was difficult to maneuver on our bare feet because the floor was littered with thorns. In the afternoon we continued and sailed past another forest, where three Lesser Adjutants were seen both flying over and perched. Indian Flying Foxes flew over again as well.



Smooth-coated Otter, AWC - Wouter van der Ham

23 - 24 January

The last few days of the trip hosted mostly similar species and some long traverses back inland. As we reached freshwater habitats species like Temminck's Stint and Grey-headed Lapwing appeared again. We made a lunch stop in a village on Bhola island, where an aunt of our tour organizer Mohit (a great person who had climbed the Mt. Everest twice) lived. The gardens and plantations around hosted Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbird, Fulvous-breasted and Streak-throated Woodpecker, Cinereous Tit and White-throated Fantail. A pair of Grey-headed Fish Eagles soared overhead, six Black-crowned Night Herons rested in a tree and a Common Kingfisher was present near the boat. It was fascinating to see how these people were living at the very edge of this island which is regularly hit by severe natural forces. The village where Mohit was born had been swept away by the water some 20 years ago and would now have been located five kilometers offshore. In other places islands are growing and emerging equally rapid.

In the afternoon we passed some nice rice fields where Eastern Marsh Harriers were present and a male Pied Harrier was perched in the grass. Long-tailed Shrike and Common Snipe were present too. We reached the vessel to Dhaka again in the evening and arrived there the next morning, where we said goodbye to everyone and went to Samiul's place to rest and prepare for the next and final part of our trip in Bangladesh: a visit to the Sundarbans!



Route of the AWC, recorded by Samiul. Including the most interesting spots: 1. Laggar Falcon; 2. Falcated Duck; 3. Indian Skimmer; 4. four Asian Dowitchers; 5. one or two Spoon-billed Sandpipers; 6. mangrove creek with lots of birds and Smooth-coated Otters; 7. Forest Wagtails; 8. lunch stop at village on Bhola.

26 to 29 January - Sundarbans

Masked Finfoot, Brown-winged Kingfisher, Ganges River Dolphin, Irrawaddy Dolphin

Our final days in this country would be spent in the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world. Home to what is maybe the best bird of Bangladesh: the elusive Masked Finfoot. But apart from that, it is also a very impressive place with a unique habitat and lots of wildlife, where spending a few days is everything but a punishment. On the contrary: this area is a must-see for naturalists visiting Bangladesh!

The finfoot is not an easy bird to find. Only the most remote and dark creeks are where it hides away. Therefore we would need at least four days to get a chance to see it, in order to have enough time to get to the right area, search and get back again. And it was expensive too. We were guided by Zahangir Alom, a biologist and a friend of Samiul's. After some insisting of Samiul he eventually agreed to a total price of 100,000 taka (about €330 per person). The costs are so high because you do not only need a boat, fuel and food, but also a permit for each day you stay in the area and for the boat. Fortunately we were saved the bureaucratic trouble that comes with these kind of things as everything was, again, taken care of for us. The boat itself was extremely comfortable, especially compared to the ones during the AWC, with good beds, a normal toilet and plenty of good-tasting food. Furthermore, Zahangir and his joining friend were very good company. There are also tour operators that offer trips into the Sundarbans which are cheaper, but according to Samiul there is no chance of seeing the finfoot. It has to be a separate and long distance trip.

Samiul took us on a night bus from Dhaka to Khulna and in the early morning dropped us off at the boat, and we started sailing. The crew consisted of Zahangir, a friend of his, two helpers and the three of us. In the afternoon, not long after we had shown our permits at the forest station, the trip started off good, as a few Ganges River Dolphins were jumping out of the river (22.355, 89.639) followed by some Irrawaddy Dolphins a little while later! We sailed on, deeper into the mangrove over a large channel. Crested Serpent Eagle, Black-capped Kingfisher and Oriental Turtle Dove were seen on the way. And then at the end of the day, at 16:30, Wouter called from the deck: he and Zahangir had seen a finfoot swimming in a side creek of the channel! This was a real surprise because it was long before we would get to the area where we were going to search. We stopped the boat and got into a small wooden one that we had dragged along. Very carefully we approached the creek and when we came around the corner... nothing. We went into the creek very slowly and after some time Zahangir found the beautiful male on the mud sitting still behind a tree root, close to the boat. Later we saw the bird two more times before it swam around a corner and disappeared back into the mangrove forever. Other birds we saw in this creek were a Blue-eared Kingfisher, a male Red Junglefowl and Crimson Sunbirds. Its coordinates are (22.182, 89.696). After this great start we sailed on for a couple of hours more to reach the remote southeastern parts of the mangrove forest, where we would continue our search for more finfoots the coming days.



Sailing through the mangrove forest - Reinier de Vries

The next morning we continued our journey and on the way birded in a few more creeks. Here we saw nice birds such as Greater Yellownape, Greater Flameback, Green-billed Malkoha, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Greater Coucal, Small Minivet and Black-capped, Common, Collared and Brown-winged Kingfishers. Apart from the Sundarbans, some of these species can be found in the Indian Subcontinent almost exclusively in the mountains, or even not at all. Later we also saw Asian Small-clawed Otters, heard Red Junglefowl crowing from the forest and a Lesser Adjutant flew over. Around 13:00 we arrived at our final destination, the place where we would search for more finfoots at the far end of the Sundarbans. Zahangir told us that he and other people had seen Tigers there in the past crossing the river, and we saw some fresh footprints in the mud, going from the water into the forest. The Sundarbans are a well-known area for Tigers, with one of the world's largest single populations in one area (over 100) and sometimes up to a few dozen people being killed per year. We stalled our boat at the jetty and went ashore, just to the place where the Tiger tracks were leading (21.857, 89.782). After about 100 meters there was a watchtower. The view was not great so there was little chance of seeing the Tiger but we did see some Wild Boars, Hair-crested Drongos, Whiskered Bulbuls and Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters. From the path we saw Scarlet Minivet and a fly-over White-bellied Sea Eagle. We couldn't go off the path because there still had to be a Tiger somewhere and we had to carry sticks to keep away the Rhesus Macaques that were onto our stuff (we didn't actually have to hit them, just carrying the sticks was enough to scare them). Mudskippers were abundant on the tidal mud around the boat as well. At around 15:00, at low tide, we started searching for finfoots. In the small wooden boat we slowly paddled away from the jetty further along the creek to the east, which was supposed to be good for the finfoot. We had a great sighting of a family of very cute Asian Small-clawed Otters feeding at short distance along the bank. The birds we saw here included Shikra, Striated Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker, Pin-striped Tit-

babbler, Black-naped Monarch, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, but no finfoot. In the evening we did another try for Tiger from the watchtower. It was in vain, but this time we heard multiple Large-tailed Nightjars calling and after playing tape one was even briefly seen flying close past the tower.

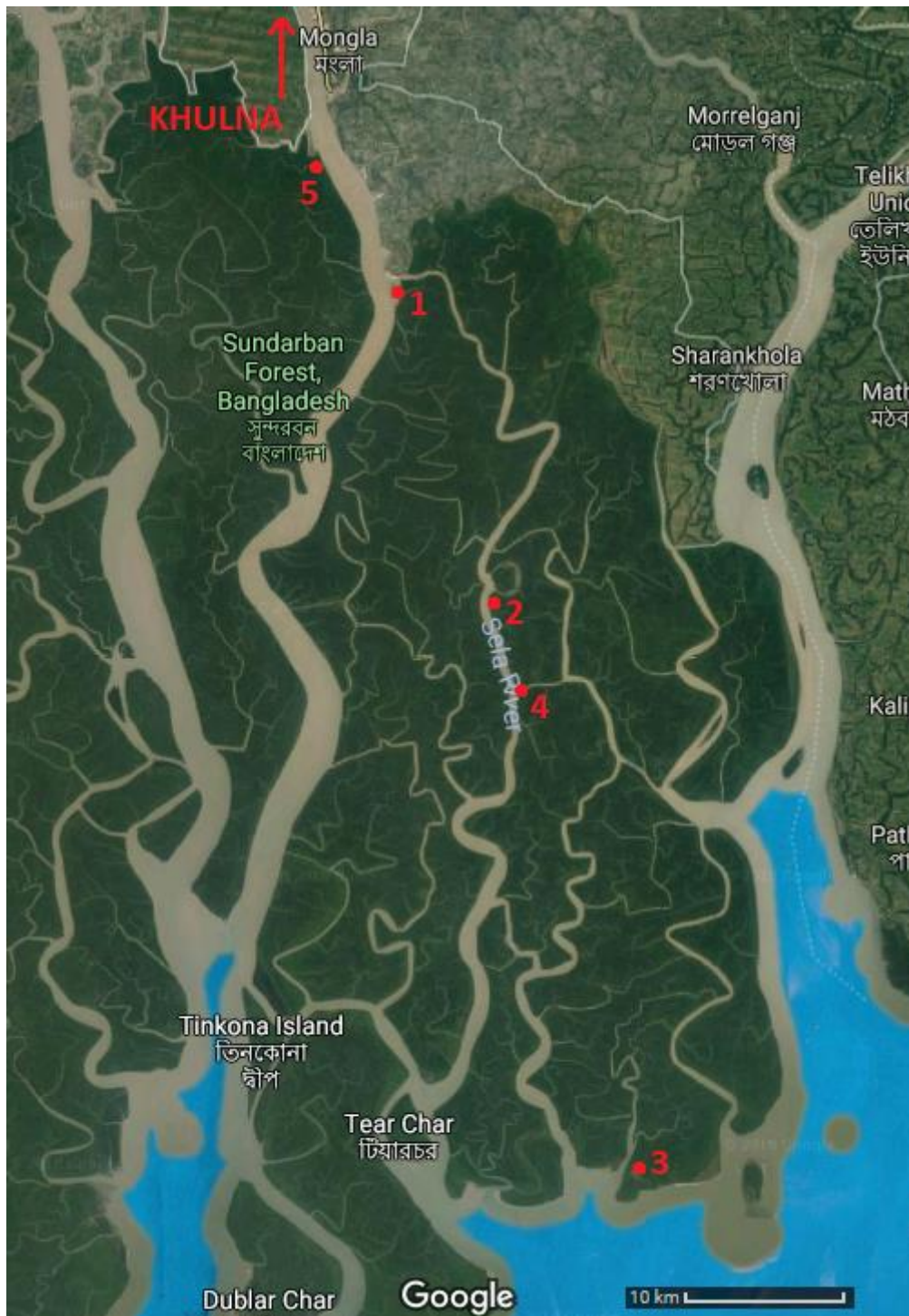
The next day we started to sail back. On the way we tried another creek (21.931, 89.780), but it was a short one and we only saw a Blue-eared Kingfisher. Other notable sightings this morning were a Western Osprey, two Brown-winged Kingfishers, Green-billed Malkoha, Bronzed Drongo, a Wild Boar and two Irrawaddy Dolphins. In the afternoon we saw a Changeable Hawk-eagle and later a large Saltwater Crocodile resting on a beach where apparently it was seen regularly (22.130, 89.712). At 16:40 we were back at the creek where we saw our finfoot, around the same time, and decided to give it another try. But this time we only found two Speckled Piculets, a singing Oriental Turtle Dove and males of Ruby-cheeked Sunbird and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. By now, after all the lack of success we had had at the creeks we searched, we were realizing just how lucky we were that we saw that one male quite 'accidently' our first day in the area. Adding another one or two days might be wise in order to increase your chances of success.



Blue-eared Kingfisher, Sundarbans - Wouter van der Ham

During our final morning in the Sundarbans we birded around the Koromjal Wildlife Rescue Center (KWRC), which is at the edge of the area almost back in civilization (22.428, 89.591). In contrast to the rest of the Sundarbans, in this area one can walk around freely. The cultivated ponds and open area provided good birding with Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Thick-billed Warbler, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Coppersmith Barbet, Asian Koel and Brown Shrike. In the surrounding forest we saw Rufous and Grey-headed Woodpecker, Pale-chinned Blue Flycatcher, Black-naped Monarch and an Indian Nightjar

perched on the ground (after we had flushed it). According to Zahangir Mangrove Pitta should also be present here, but it was not the right time of year to hear or see it. At noon we walked over a footbridge (which started somewhere around 22.426, 89.593) towards a recreation area nearby, which was full of tourists asking for selfies again. Zahangir knew a place for Abbott's Babbler here, which we found (22.423, 89.593). We also saw a Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker. After this our trip was finished and we were dropped off in Khulna again, where we took the train to the Indian border. This was by no surprise a very busy place, but without real trouble we entered India!



Map with the highlights of the Sundarbans: 1. Ganges River Dolphins; 2. the creek with the Masked Finfoot; 3. the jetty with the watchtower; 4. Saltwater Crocodile; 5. Koromjal Wildlife Rescue Center. Khulna, where we started sailing, is way up north.

Observed species

In total we recorded 252 bird species and 13 mammal species:

Birds

Fulvous Whistling Duck	some at Jahangirnagar University and Hakaluki Haor between the Lesser WD's
Lesser Whistling Duck	around 1,000 at Jahangirnagar University and some at Baikka Beel
Bar-headed Goose	a few groups during the AWC
Greylag Goose	a few groups during the AWC
Common Shelduck	Sonadia Island, Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Ruddy Shelduck	Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Cotton Pygmy Goose	common at Baikka Beel
Garganey	Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, AWC
Northern Shoveler	Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Gadwall	common at Hakaluki Haor and Baikka Beel
Falcated Duck	not common; we found single males at Hakaluki Haor where they winter regularly, and 1 during the AWC which was a surprise
Eurasian Wigeon	Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Northern Pintail	Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, AWC
Eurasian Teal	Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, AWC
Red-crested Pochard	male flying by at Hakaluki Haor
Common Pochard	common at Hakaluki Haor
Baer's Pochard	1 male; see discussion at Hakaluki Haor
Ferruginous Duck	common at Hakaluki Haor and a few at Baikka Beel
Tufted Duck	common at Hakaluki Haor
Red Junglefowl	early morning on the road to Adampur Forest and Kurma Tea Estate, and quite common in the Sundarbans
Little Grebe	Jahangirnagar University, Baikka Beel
Great Crested Grebe	a group of 17 on a beel on the way to Hakaluki Haor
Asian Openbill	seen at most of the wetland areas
Lesser Adjutant	not common; 3 at the end of the AWC and 1 flying over in the Sundarbans
Black-headed Ibis	Sonadia Island, Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Glossy Ibis	70 at Baikka Beel
Yellow Bittern	we saw two birds at Baikka Beel: one briefly in flight from the watchtower and a perched young bird outside the park gates
Black-crowned Night Heron	some calling birds in the night and 6 roosting at Bhola island during the AWC

Striated Heron	1 flushed by the boat during the AWC and in total 3 birds in the Sundarbans; 2 gave away nice views while feeding at the bank during the search for the finfoot
Indian Pond Heron	common
Eastern Cattle Egret	Jahangirnagar University, Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, AWC
Grey Heron	common
Purple Heron	1 at a haor on the way to Hakaluki Haor and 1 in Baikka Beel
Great Egret	Sonadia Island, Baikka Beel, Sundarbans
Intermediate Egret	seen in most of the wetland areas
Little Egret	common
Little Cormorant	common
Great Cormorant	Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel
Oriental Darter	3 at Baikka Beel
Western Osprey	Sonadia Island, Baikka Beel, Sundarbans
Black-winged Kite	1 flying over the boat at the start of the AWC
Crested Honey Buzzard	A female at Hakaluki Haor and 2 distant birds from the boat at the start of the AWC
White-rumped Vulture	critically endangered; we saw an adult flying over from the watchtower in Baikka Beel, but according to Paul this was not a common sighting
Crested Serpent Eagle	common
Changeable Hawk-Eagle	Reinier and Wouter saw one in the Sundarbans
Indian Spotted Eagle	3 flying above the boat at the start of the AWC
Greater Spotted Eagle	juvenile birds at Baikka Beel and during the AWC
Shikra	1 in Cox's Bazar and 2 with nice views in the creek where we searched for finfoots
Eastern Marsh Harrier	Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, AWC
Pied Harrier	a beautiful adult male flying by at Hakaluki Haor
Black Kite	common; we also saw ssp. <i>lineatus</i> (Black-eared Kite)
Brahminy Kite	common
White-bellied Sea Eagle	2 adults with a nest during the AWC and 2 birds flying over in the Sundarbans
Pallas's Fish Eagle	Wouter saw a hunting immature bird from the watchtower in Baikka Beel; Lonnie saw two adults outside the park gates
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	2 adults flying over the village on Bhola island during the AWC
Masked Finfoot	1 male; see discussion at Sundarbans
White-breasted Waterhen	common
Watercock	Lonnie saw a non-breeding bird in a small flooded field in the city of Kulaura
Grey-headed Swamphen	common at Baikka Beel

Common Moorhen	common
Eurasian Coot	common
Black-winged Stilt	50 at Baikka Beel
Pied Avocet	a group of 13 during the AWC
Grey-headed Lapwing	regularly during the AWC
Red-wattled Lapwing	Jahangirnagar University, AWC
Pacific Golden Plover	groups at Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Grey Plover	Sonadia Island
Little Ringed Plover	Cox's Bazar, Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, AWC
Kentish Plover	Sonadia Island, AWC
Lesser Sand Plover	large groups at Sonadia Island and during the AWC
Greater Sand Plover	Sonadia Island, AWC
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	non-breeding birds at Baikka Beel
Bronze-winged Jacana	Jahangirnagar University, Baikka Beel
Whimbrel	Sonadia Island
Eurasian Curlew	Sonadia Island
Bar-tailed Godwit	Sonadia Island
Black-tailed Godwit	large groups at Baikka Beel and during the AWC; in the latter there were big differences in size and bill length, so probably a mixed group of ssp. <i>limosa</i> and <i>melanuroides</i> (Eastern Black-tailed Godwit)
Ruddy Turnstone	Sonadia Island
Great Knot	at least 1 at Sonadia Island, and 1 during the AWC followed by multiple birds the next day by Reinier
Ruff	1,000 at Baikka Beel
Broad-billed Sandpiper	multiple birds at Sonadia Island, several during the AWC
Curlew Sandpiper	Sonadia Island, AWC
Temminck's Stint	Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	see discussions at Cox's Bazar (4 birds) and AWC (2 birds)
Sanderling	1 on the way back from Sonadia Island, AWC
Asian Dowitcher	in total 5 birds during the AWC; in groups of Black-tailed Godwits
Common Snipe	difficult to distinguish from other snipe species; Wouter identified birds at Hakaluki Haor and Baikka Beel
Terek Sandpiper	Sonadia Island, AWC
Common Sandpiper	Sonadia Island, AWC, Sundarbans
Green Sandpiper	1 at Jahangirnagar University
Common Redshank	Sonadia Island
Marsh Sandpiper	Sonadia Island, Baikka Beel
Wood Sandpiper	Sonadia Island, Baikka Beel
Spotted Redshank	Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel

Common Greenshank	Sonadia Island
Nordmann's Greenshank	at least 3 at Sonadia Island
Oriental Pratincole	a few foraging at Baikka Beel; according to Paul this was not a common sighting
Small Pratincole	a group of 25 during the AWC
Indian Skimmer	only 1 during the AWC, even though 1,000-1,500 winter in the area annually
Brown-headed Gull	Sonadia Island (common), AWC
Black-headed Gull	a few at Hakaluki Haor and during the AWC
Pallas's Gull	common around Sonadia Island; regular during the AWC
Gull-billed Tern	1 at Sonadia Island and a group of 37 during the AWC
Caspian Tern	in total 6 birds during the AWC
Greater Crested Tern	we saw a group sitting on a sand bank from the speedboat to Sonadia Island; poor views
Little Tern	Sonadia Island
River Tern	a few birds during the AWC; one of our targets for this boat trip
Whiskered Tern	Baikka Beel, AWC
Oriental Turtle Dove	Sundarbans; 2 from the boat and 1 heard singing in the creek where we saw the finfoot
Eurasian Collared Dove	a few birds scattered around the trip
Red Turtle Dove	22 birds sitting on an electricity cable on our way back from Adampur Forest
Spotted Dove	common
Common Emerald Dove	3 birds on the road in the early morning on our way to Kurma Tea Estate
Greater Coucal	common bird; we saw it at Jahangirnagar University, AWC, Sundarbans
Lesser Coucal	1 non-breeding at Kurma Tea Estate
Green-billed Malkoha	a few birds in the creeks in the Sundarbans
Chestnut-winged Cuckoo	Lonnie saw 1 during the AWC on an island where we made a stop
Asian Koel	1 female at KWRC
Plaintive Cuckoo	multiple female plumaged birds from the car when we drove up to Baikka Beel just outside the park, a male at Kurma Tea Estate
Common Hawk-Cuckoo	1 from the boat during the AWC
Asian Barred Owlet	1 calling in the morning on our way to Adampur Forest when we stopped for Ashy Woodswallows and 1 well seen at Kurma Tea Estate
Large-tailed Nightjar	singing birds at dusk from the watchtower in the Sundarbans, of which we briefly saw one flying
Indian Nightjar	2 perched on the forest floor at KWRC

Asian Palm Swift	Hakaluki Haor, Adampur Forest, AWC; we also saw a colony of House/Little Swifts in a building in Dhaka, but this is at the meeting point of their ranges so we couldn't identify them
Brown-winged Kingfisher	multiple birds in the Sundarbans
White-throated Kingfisher	very common
Black-capped Kingfisher	multiple birds around Sonadia Island and in the Sundarbans
Collared Kingfisher	Cox's Bazar, AWC, Sundarbans
Blue-eared Kingfisher	2 birds in creeks in the Sundarbans while we were searching for finfoots
Common Kingfisher	common
Pied Kingfisher	3 at a stream near Cox's Bazar, 1 on the way back from Sonadia Island
Green Bee-eater	common
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	Adampur Forest and from the watchtower in the Sundarbans
Eurasian Hoopoe	1 seen flying from the car in Dhaka
Lineated Barbet	1 at Jahangirnagar University
Blue-throated Barbet	2 from our hotel room in Kulaura
Coppersmith Barbet	Jahangirnagar University, KWRC
Eurasian Wryneck	Baikka Beel, Kurma Tea Estate, AWC
Speckled Piculet	2 birds at our second visit to the creek where we saw the finfoot
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	2 in the Sundarbans: a female in the creek that was supposed to be good for finfoot and a male at the KWRC
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	Jahangirnagar University, Baikka Beel, AWC
Greater Yellownape	male from the boat in the Sundarbans
Streak-throated Woodpecker	female on Bhola island during the AWC
Grey-headed Woodpecker	male in the forest at the KWRC
Black-rumped Flameback	also called Lesser Goldenback; obliging birds at Jahangirnagar University
Greater Flameback	a pair from the boat in the Sundarbans
Rufous Woodpecker	male in the forest at the KWRC
Common Kestrel	1 at Hakaluki Haor
Laggar Falcon	an immature flying over the boat at the start of the AWC; only the third record for the country!
Peregrine Falcon	Sonadia Island, Hakaluki Haor, AWC
Rose-ringed Parakeet	2 at the border crossing with India
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	a group of 5 at the KWRC
Ashy Woodswallow	our best sighting was a group of 20 perched on an electricity cable on the way to Adampur Forest, but we also saw birds flying or sitting at Jahangirnagar University, Baikka Beel and during the AWC

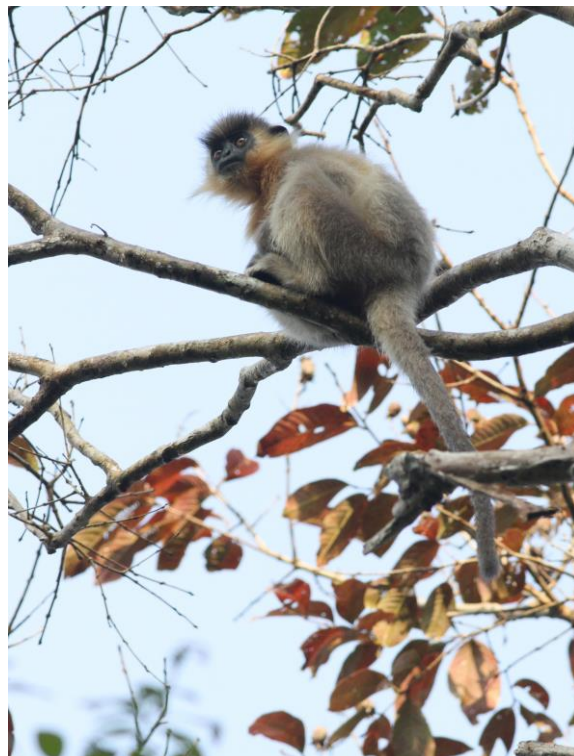
Common Iora	common
Rosy Minivet	a group of about 5 birds at Adampur Forest
Small Minivet	3,2 birds from the boat in the Sundarbans
Scarlet Minivet	beautiful male along the path to the watchtower in the Sundarbans by Lonnie
Brown Shrike	Baikka Beel, Adampur Forest, KWRC
Long-tailed Shrike	very common; ssp. <i>tricolor</i>
Grey-backed Shrike	1 near the entrance of Baikka Beel
Black-naped Oriole	Reinier saw 1 from the boat during the AWC
Black-hooded Oriole	common
Maroon Oriole	Wouter photographed 1 in Adampur Forest
Black Drongo	common, especially at Hakaluki Haor
Ashy Drongo	a pair from the apartment in Cox's Bazar
Bronzed Drongo	a few birds seen from the boat during the AWC and in the Sundarbans
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo	Wouter saw 1 in Adampur Forest
Hair-crested Drongo	<i>D. hottentottus</i> (split from Spangled Drongo); 2 from the watchtower in the Sundarbans
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	3 birds together from the boat in the Sundarbans
White-throated Fantail	from the apartment in Cox's Bazar and on islands during the AWC
Black-naped Monarch	Adampur Forest, Sundarbans
Rufous Treepie	common
House Crow	very common in cultivated areas in the southern part of the country
Eastern Jungle Crow	common
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	1 in Adampur Forest
Cinereous Tit	<i>P. cinereus</i> (split from Great Tit); common
Bengal Bush Lark	singing birds at Kurma Tea Estate
Black-crested Bulbul	Adampur Forest
Red-whiskered Bulbul	Adampur Forest, Kurma Tea Estate, Sundarbans
Red-vented Bulbul	very common
White-throated Bulbul	Adampur Forest
Cachar Bulbul	Wouter saw this bird in Adampur Forest; at first thought of as being an Olive Bulbul, which is already a good species, but it turned out it had been split (<i>I. cacharensis</i>) which turns this into a species with a very restricted range, that consists mostly of Bangladesh!
Ashy Bulbul	Adampur Forest
Grey-throated Martin	<i>P. chinensis</i> (split from Plain Martin); breeding colony at a bridge near Cox's Bazar
Sand Martin	twice during AWC
Barn Swallow	very common
Red-rumped Swallow	one group during AWC
Dusky Warbler	very common

Tickell's Leaf Warbler	multiple birds at Baikka Beel, 1 at Kurma Tea Estate
Yellow-browed Warbler	common
Greenish Warbler	common
Yellow-vented Warbler	Wouter saw 1 of this NE India target in Adampur Forest
Thick-billed Warbler	1 at KWRC
Black-browed Reed Warbler	2 at Baikka Beel
Blyth's Reed Warbler	common
Striated Grassbird	1 singing bird at Hakaluki Haor, common at Baikka Beel
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	1 at KWRC; good views considering its reputation in Europe
Golden-headed Cisticola	non-breeding birds at Kurma Tea Estate
Grey-breasted Prinia	Jahangirnagar University
Graceful Prinia	2 on an island at the first day of the AWC
Plain Prinia	Reinier saw them during the AWC with Samiul
Common Tailorbird	common
Grey-throated Babbler	Adampur Forest
Pin-striped Tit-Babbler	Adampur Forest, Sundarbans
Abbott's Babbler	1 at a known spot near the KWRC
Nepal Fulvetta	Wouter saw 2 in Adampur Forest
Striated Babbler	Lonnie saw 3 outside of Baikka Beel
Rufous-necked Laughingthrush	a group in Baikka Beel, calling a lot but hard to see
Jungle Babbler	common at Jahangirnagar University
Yellow-eyed Babbler	Kurma Tea Estate
Oriental White-eye	Jahangirnagar University, AWC
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	in the Sundarbans in the creek that was supposed to be good for finfoots
Common Hill Myna	5 flying over at Adampur Forest
Jungle Myna	common
Common Myna	common
Pied Myna	common
Chestnut-tailed Starling	Jahangirnagar University, Cox's Bazar, Baikka Beel
Oriental Magpie-Robin	very common; the national bird of Bangladesh although we believe they could have chosen a better one!
Black-backed Forktail	we followed a stream in Adampur Forest for a while and found 2
Siberian Stonechat	Baikka Beel, Kurma Tea Estate
Pied Bush Chat	Kurma Tea Estate
Jerdon's Bush Chat	a female plumaged bird at Kurma Tea Estate; rare species in Bangladesh: as far as Paul could check this was only the 9 th record for this under-birded country

Little Pied Flycatcher	male in Adampur Forest
Pale-chinned Blue Flycatcher	1 in Adampur Forest and 1 in the forest around the KWRC
Verditer Flycatcher	Baikka Beel, Adampur Forest, AWC, Sundarbans
Taiga Flycatcher	common
Blue-winged Leafbird	male in Adampur Forest
Golden-fronted Leafbird	Adampur Forest, KWRC
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	1 at Jahangirnagar University and 1 at our apartment in Cox's Bazar
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	Adampur Forest, Sundarbans
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	Adampur Forest, Sundarbans
Purple-rumped Sunbird	only seen at the village on Bhola island during the AWC
Van Hasselt's Sunbird	<i>L. brasiliensis</i> (split from Purple-throated Sunbird); we saw a lot near flowers in Adampur Forest, which was the only sighting during our entire journey
Purple Sunbird	common
Crimson Sunbird	Adampur Forest, Sundarbans
Little Spiderhunter	Adampur Forest
Streaked Spiderhunter	Adampur Forest
House Sparrow	common
Red Avadavat	Kurma Tea Estate
White-rumped Munia	Lonnie saw 3 in Kulaura
Scaly-breasted Munia	Wouter saw them at Kurma Tea Estate
Chestnut Munia	Kurma Tea Estate
Forest Wagtail	2 birds in a tree on an island in the Bay of Bengal where we stopped during the AWC; great birds with their tails wobbling from side to side (instead of up and down)!
Western Yellow Wagtail	during the AWC we saw a lot of "yellow" wagtails, some of which we could positively identify as Western; also a few at Hakaluki Haor
Eastern Yellow Wagtail	Lonnie and Reinier both also identified an Eastern Yellow Wagtail during the AWC
Citrine Wagtail	Baikka Beel
Grey Wagtail	Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Adampur Forest
White Wagtail	common; we could identify most as <i>ssp. leucopsis</i>
Richard's Pipit	very common on the first day in Hakaluki Haor; also observed at Baikka Beel and during the AWC
Rosy Pipit	some between the Richard's Pipits at Hakaluki Haor; we couldn't get good views
Chestnut-eared Bunting	multiple at Kurma Tea Estate
Black-faced Bunting	Lonnie saw 1 at Kurma Tea Estate

Mammals

Rhesus Macaque	quite common in cultivated areas; we saw it in Cox's Bazar, Adampur Forest and the Sundarbans
Capped Langur	a mom with two babies in Adampur Forest
Western Hoolock Gibbon	a group of three in Adampur Forest
Pallas's Squirrel	one in Adampur Forest
Irrawaddy Squirrel	one at the campus of Jahangirnagar University
Indian Flying Fox	seen the impressive sight of these bats, which are as large as herons, migrating from their roosts to their feeding areas at dusk twice: around 15 individuals on the way from the northeast back to Dhaka and around 5 in one evening during the AWC
Golden Jackal	we heard them calling one night during the AWC, very close to the boat
Asian Small-clawed Otter	two different families feeding in close formation at the banks deep in the Sundarbans on the 27 th
Smooth-coated Otter	two groups during the AWC
Wild Boar	a few from the watchtower in the Sundarbans and one from the boat
Chital	common during the AWC and in the Sundarbans
Irrawaddy Dolphin	two during the AWC (plus a dead one) and quite common during sailing in the Sundarbans!
Ganges River Dolphin	one group of four or five at the start of the Sundarbans



Capped Langur, Adampur Forest - Wouter van der Ham