

Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

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Goose bumps from the geese!

Preparations for the Uttarakhand Spring Bird Festival at Asan Conservation Reserve from 7 to 9 Feb 2014 are in full swing! Recently, we paid a visit to Asan to assess potential routes for birdwatching. One of the highlights of the bird festival will be guided birdwatching sessions. Two-hour bird watching trails will be conducted daily. The main feature of these guided birdwatching sessions is that we are inviting local guides from all over Uttarakhand and training them to conduct these sessions. Not only does this provide an opportunity for the guides from local communities and villages to see the waterfowl of Asan, it also provides them with a platform to meet and greet a variety of like-minded people during the festival. The Asan visit, hopefully, will also open doors for them to promote bird tourism in their respective destinations.

It was to finalise these birding trails that we were visiting Asan. Waterfowl in hundreds have now arrived in Asan. Many of these species are migratory and have traveled to India from far-flung European destinations. Red-crested Pochard, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Widgeon, Common Teal, Mallard and numerous other waterfowl bobbed their way about in the Asan wetland. Accompanying the migratory ducks was the Indian Spotbilled Duck, a resident duck that does not migrate, which mostly hugged the banks and reedbeds at Asan.



As we wound our way about Asan, exploring the trails the wetland had to offer, we espied a flock of greyish-white large birds. Bar-headed Geese! We squatted on the ground and counted them; there were at least 16 birds that we could see. Sitting on the ground meant that we were less likely to appear threatening to the geese. Crouched on the ground, we watched the geese in the water. Bright, shiny orange beaks and a pair of black stripes on the head-what beautiful creatures they were. The geese were busy feeding as we watched them through our binoculars.

Sitting and relatively hidden from the geese's view, the flock of geese began drifting in the water towards us! Wow-how close would they come? Camera in hand, I watched them drift closer and closer. By the time the geese were really close to where we sat, the direction of the sun's rays made photography difficult. Good natural lighting is so crucial for bird photography. Notwithstanding the poor light, I squeezed off a few pics (liar, many pics, says Anchal, my wife!). The really close-up view of these pretty birds gave me goose-bumps! If you want to enjoy moments such as these, do join us at the bird festival for a weekend of fun and frolic amidst Asan's feathered friends!

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi@gmail.com

Making a difference: Enjoy bird photography? Sign up for the bird photography workshop at the bird festival, being conducted by noted birder and photographer, Sumit Sen, from Kolkata. The workshop is free, but on a first-come, first-served basis. Register at www.facebook.com/uttarakhandbirding and experience goose bumps from the geese yourself!

Photograph caption: Bar-headed Geese giving the author goose bumps!

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