

## BAR HEADED GOOSE AT HADINARU WITH A MONGOLIAN 'ADDRESS' AROUND ITS NECK

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

A collared Bar Headed Goose at Hadinaru lake near Mysuru. The bird had been tagged at Arkhangai province in Central Mongolia. Photo: MS Darshan

A banded migratory bird in its non-breeding ground comes with the easy traceability of a postal-letter with a 'from' address scribbled on the back flap.

Deciphering the band, the whereabouts of where the bird 'builds' its 'home' can be established with a degree of accuracy. Unless the bird had been banded at what constitutes just a pit stop on its migratory journey.

April marks the return of migratory bird species visiting India, back to their breeding grounds. The Bar Headed Goose (*Anser Indicus*) winters at Hadinaru lake (which takes its name after a village near Mysuru) usually in numbers so significant that their chorus of clucks can reduce the world's most loquacious classroom to a barely-audible whisper.

After a migratory season marked by greater gregariousness, Bar Headed Geese are checking out of Hadinaru.

An IT professional from Chennai, MS Darshan works remotely from his hometown Mysuru due to the pandemic, a factor that has enabled him to make frequent weekend visits to the freshwater lake during the 2020-21 migratory season, and study its signature migratory-species.

Now, Darshan knows can now predict where a good number of these Bar Headed Geese are headed. At the least, where one bird would likely spend the next four to five months.

On February 27, he photographed a Bar Headed Goose with a colour-coded neck collar at Hadinaru. His efforts to decrypt the band by connecting with Mongolian conservation scientists bore fruit this month, as he heard from Tsevenmyadag N. of Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia.

In the communication to Darshan, Tsevenmyadag wrote:

"This green color band F88 bird was captured and marked Wildlife Conservation and Science Center in Mongolia on 13 July 2019 at the Salt lake near Tsakhir soum in province Arkhangai of the Central Mongolia. Capture location is N48.126314, E99.143451. This bird was identified as an adult male, weighed 2815 g. Also marked aluminum band X000542 in tarsus and Track tag KE1916."

The Bar-Headed Goose's breeding grounds include Central Mongolia and Tibet. There is even documentation of the species breeding in Ladakh, India.

The band now makes it possible to tick a box with some certainty.

From a citizen-science point of view, interest in banded migratory birds, accompanied by an equal keenness to learn what the bands reveal and share the findings, can turn birding into an activity that shores up conservation efforts. Data and observations from the field, obtained

through field glasses and zoom-lenses of citizen-birders, are crucial to assessing the size of bird populations and the status of habitats.

Darshan points out he made 14 visits to Hadinaru lake during this migratory season, with the last one on 27 March, 2021.

At the height of this season, he says, there would have been around a thousand Bar Headed Geese at the lake.

“This year, the highest I counted is 980,” discloses Darshan, adding

The high number was sustained till it was time for the birds to start their return migration.

“There is a specific reason for that. This year water was released to the canals by the first week of March. So, farmers started preparing their paddy fields. The paddy shoots attracted them in more numbers. Usually, we do not see them on ground near Hadinaru. They just come to roost, but because of the paddy, their number also increased and they even started to feed here,” explains Darshan.

“Despite this, the villagers do not disturb the Bar Headed Geese. They are aware the species comes from another country. They are even aware that it makes the return journey after the first rain of summer. They know it is now time for the species’ return journey; and so not much damage to the crops is possible.”

Besides, as Darshan underlines, it is only rarely that the Bar Headed Goose takes to the cultivation fields adjacent to the Hadinaru lake.

“Most of the time, Bar Headed Geese do not visit these farmlands. Because, the crop would have been harvested long before their arrival in large numbers. Only if canal water is released, farmers start preparation for the second crop.”

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