

# BOHAG BIHU BIRD COUNT 2021 BEGINS ON APRIL 14

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

Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker | Photo Credit: [Rejoice Gassah](#)

It's that time of the year in Assam when the Indian cuckoo (*keteki*) and Asian koel (*kuli*) call out across the Brahmaputra plains. And, graceful bursts of pink-spotted white flowers of an exotic orchid streak the skyline. "The blooming of the foxtail orchid, the State flower of Assam, signifies the start of a new Assamese year when we celebrate Rongali or Bohag Bihu," says Jaydev Mandal, a birder based in Assam, over the phone.

Jaydev is part of Assam Bird Monitoring Network which, along with Bird Count India (BCI), will host the Bohag Bihu Bird Count from April 14 to April 17 across districts of Assam. The initiative emphasises the use of eBird.org, a citizen science platform for the birders to register their observations in a systematic manner. "We have three Bihus — Magh, Bohag and Kati — during winter, spring and autumn every year and we plan to document avian diversity across these seasons. All these festivals are closely connected with Nature. We want people to enjoy Nature, encourage birding as a family activity and spare a thought to conservation."

While this is the time for winter migratory birds that took abode in Assam as well as the surrounding regions to start flying back to their homes in the Northern hemisphere, endemic species like the swamp grass babbler, marsh babbler and black-breasted parrot bill come into the spotlight.

In Tamil Nadu, though the big birding counts are the Pongal Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count, birders can now observe courtship displays, and nest building of resident species in and around their homes. "As most winter migrants have started their return flight to their summer breeding grounds, this is the best time to watch resident birds," says PB Balaji, co-author of *Birds of Coimbatore*, a handy guide on over 400 species of birds that can be seen across Tamil Nadu. "Assam gets a lot of passage migrants. Most migrant birds from the Himalayas stop over in the region. I was at Nameri last weekend and spotted some of the rarities including river lapwing, pin-striped tit-babbler and greater adjutant storks."

A *chithirai thirunaal* birding is exciting as resident birds are active now, says birder K Selvaganesh from Valparai, near Coimbatore. "One can look for birds in a neighbouring park, nearby streams and water bodies and also at forest periphery, farmlands or terraces of homes. Asian koels are calling out. Egrets can be seen in breeding plumage. Among water birds, you can see coots, grey-headed swamphens, and bronze-winged jacanas with their chicks enjoying a splash."

There is buzz on social media too. The IndiAves community on Twitter, that encourages people to tweet photographs of wildlife, birds and animals, plans to have #wildTN for the Tamil New Year. Chandrakala Ratnam, a wildlife enthusiast, says, "It's all about new beginnings. The fledglings are out. The ibises, mynas, baya weavers, raptors, and munias are busy bodies collecting nesting material. We want to highlight habitat loss. The #wild TN will be an eye-opener on not just birds, but also endemic mammals like lion-tailed macaques and Nilgiri langurs. Such themes drive engagement among youth and thereby conservation."

While the festival is celebrated as Baisakhi in Punjab, Vishua Sankranti in Odisha, Gudi Padwa in Maharashtra and Ugadi in Karnataka, Arun Kumar Raju Urs of Bengaluru Butterfly Club based

in Mysuru talks of the *roti habba* celebrated by the Soliga tribes of the Biligiri Ranganna Hills adjoining the Satyamangalam ghats. “The tribes offer their first produce to Nature, to the tree-god, mammals and birds in the forest.” Arun says the Ugadi weekend draws families to birding hotspots in Coorg, Bandipur, Nagarhole, and the Biligiri Ranganna Hills. “After the pre-monsoon shower, the forests are lush with greenery. While the *koels* and *bulbuls* enjoy tender *neem* leaves, flower peckers relish on neem fruits.”

Ramesh Iyer of Travancore Natural History Society says that in Kerala, Vishu, observed on the first day of the Malayalam Medam month has a strong connection with the Indian cuckoo, a solitary, shy bird that is found in forests and open woodlands and breeds in the Himalayas. “It is called *Vishu pakshi* (the Vishu bird) as its distinctive call heralds the festival. The festival is also the time when we receive mid-summer showers spreading cheer not just to mankind but also to the flora and fauna. An ideal time to watch birds actively feeding on Nature’s bounty.”

Pay a visit to a nearby woodland or forest patch, you can witness the raucous calls of racket-tailed drongo (*kadu muzhakki*), mimicking calls of hill mynahs, the metallic hammering call of the coppersmith barbet (*chembukottan*) and the melodious calls of Asian fairy bluebird (*Lalita*). The fluting whistles of black-hooded and Indian Golden Orioles, besides the chirping of many leaf warblers makes the forests lively. “Even in towns, the cackle of the rufous treepie, known locally as *olenjali* and the repetitive calls of white-cheeked barbets (*Kutturavan*), and the chirping of mynahs can be heard distinctly at dawn or dusk,” says Ramesh.

One can also see migratory butterflies — the double-branded black crow, common crow, dark blue tiger and blue tiger — on their return migration journey from the Ghats to the plains of southern India, just before the onset of the South-West monsoon.

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