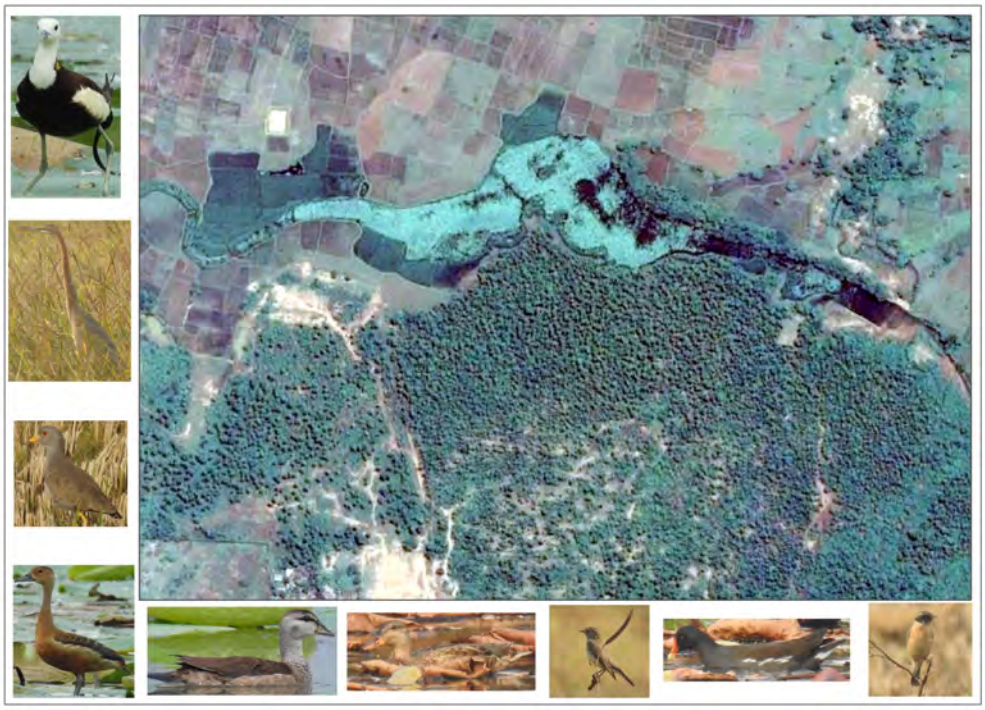
Rajbandh Wetland in Midnapore, West Bengal, India: a potential migration trap



Rajbandh Wetland and adjoining vegetation with few migratory birds.

Food sources and nesting locations are two primary demands for birds. As winter looms and the accessibility of insects and other food drops, the birds move to areas of high or increasing resources (Kasper et al. 2017). Migration is an enthralling study and there is much yet to discover. Some places of their migration route can act as 'migration traps' (Kaiser 1999). Local weather conditions, an abundance of food or the local topography are the two chief criteria for migration traps. These migration traps have become very admired with birders, even earning national and international reputation. India has a number of wintering grounds that attract nearly 25–50% of the world population of these winged visitors (Javed et al. 2000; Hawkes et al. 2013). The Central Asian-Indian Flyway comprises numerous important migration routes of water birds, most of which extend from the northernmost breeding grounds in Siberia to the southernmost non-breeding wintering grounds in India, western Asia, and Maldives.

Rajbandh Wetland (22.576N & 87.338E) is situated in West Midnapore District under the state of West Bengal in India. This place

Table 1. The local birds found in Rajbandh Wetland

	Common name	Scientific name	IUCN Red List (3.1)
1.	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	Least Concern
2.	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	Least Concern
3.	White-throated kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	Least Concern
4.	Stork-billed Kingfisher	*Pelargopsis capensis*	Least Concern
5.	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	Least Concern
6.	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	Least Concern
7.	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	Least Concern
8.	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	Least Concern
9.	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	Least Concern
10.	Common Hawk-cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	Least Concern

is a prime attraction for migratory birds, both waterbirds as well as land birds. Rich food source along with peaceful weather (during the winter season, temperature varies from 10 to 25 degree, little or no rainfall) and situated one km from high road makes the place a suitable one for migratory birds.

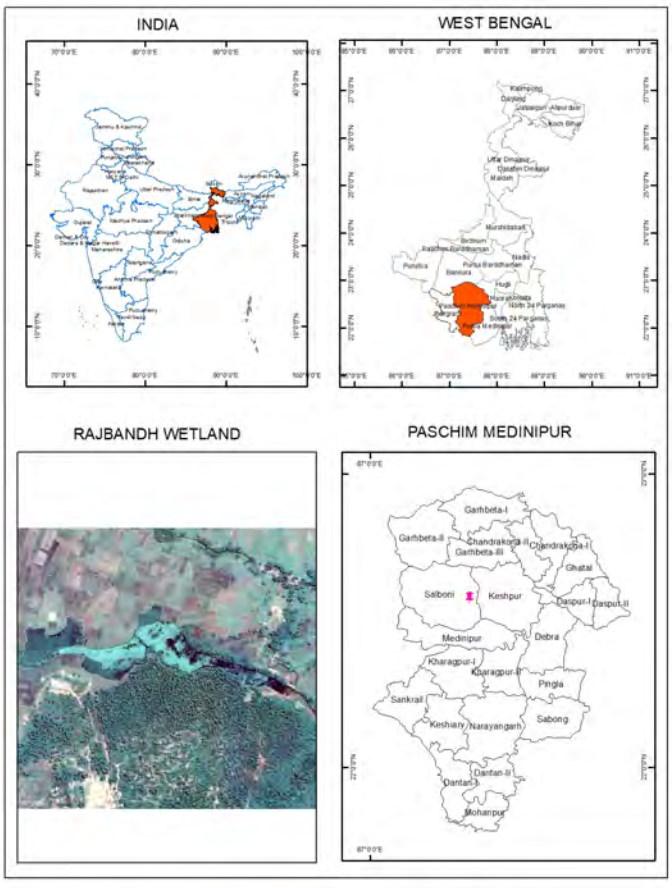
We visited the site every month for the last two years (2017 November to 2019 April) and surveyed (data were collected by walking around the wetland and searching for birds. Observations were carried in the morning) it once a week during the winter season. We spent 3–4 hours on an average to cover the whole area. We used a binocular (Olympus 10×50) along with Canon DSLR and Nikon P900 for photography. We consulted the literature for the proper identification of the birds (Ali 2003; Praveen et al. 2018a; Praveen et al. 2018b).The two-year study documented 14 species of migratory birds (Table 2) from this area along with more than 10 numbers of local birds (Table 1). No previous study was conducted from this part of India about migrant species and hence this report is the first from this region.

In 2015, Asad Rahmani, Director of Bombay Natural History Society informed us there has been a massive decline in migratory birds like small waders (common greenshank and curlew sandpiper) and ducks (Ferruginous Pochard and Red-crested Pochard) in India. Climate change along with destruction of wetlands and extensive hunting can be blamed for this (Rahmani 2015).

The National Action Plan for conservation of migratory birds and their habitats states the national priority and specific actions required to ensure healthy populations of migratory species in India, within their range across the flyway. The Union Environment Ministry in

Table 2. The migratory birds found in Rajbandh Wetland

	Common name	Scientific name	Month of occurrence	Number	IUCN Red List (3.1)
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	Oct–Dec	40±5	Least Concern
2	Cotton Teal	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	Oct–Jan	25±	Least Concern
3	Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	Jan	3±1	Least Concern
4	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	Nov–Feb	6±1	Least Concern
5	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	Mid-Jan	2±1	Least Concern
6	Grey-headed Lapwing	*Vanellus cinereus*	Late Jan	2	Least Concern
7	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	Late Dec	2	Least Concern
8	Taiga Flycatcher	*Ficedula albicilla*	Late Dec–Jan	6±1	Least Concern
9	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*	Jan	4±1	Least Concern
10	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	Jan	2	Least Concern
11	Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla tschutschensis*	Early Jan	2	Least Concern
12	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*	Late Nov–Feb	7±2	Least Concern
13	Common Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*	Mar–Apr	3±1	Least Concern
14	Painted Snipe	*Rostratula* sp.	Late Mar–Apr	2	Least Concern



Rajbandh Wetland situated in Salboni Block, West Midnapur, West Bengal, India.

2018 identified 20 wetlands and nine wetland clusters for conservation as those are congregation sites for several migratory water bird species (MoEF 2018). Small patches of wetlands are equally important for such large-scale conservation of migratory birds. We have already taken a few steps, such as raising public awareness to restore the ecological balance of Rajbandh Wetland (Rajbandh is not a part of government current wetland conservation scheme), to

conserve the birds along with its stopover habitat in this region.

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