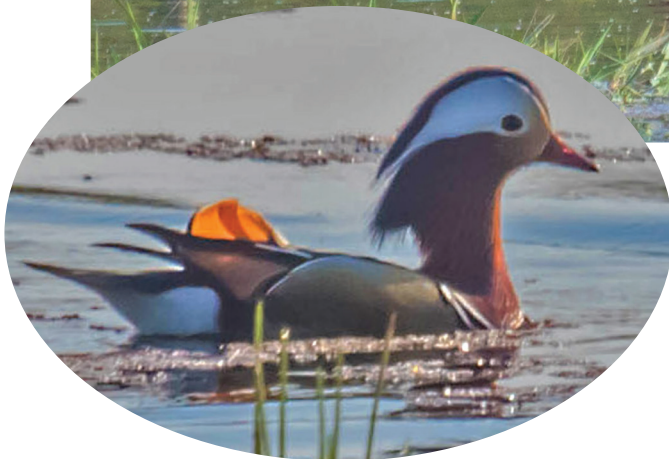


Record of Mandarin Duck and Smew in Maguri-Matapung Beel, Assam

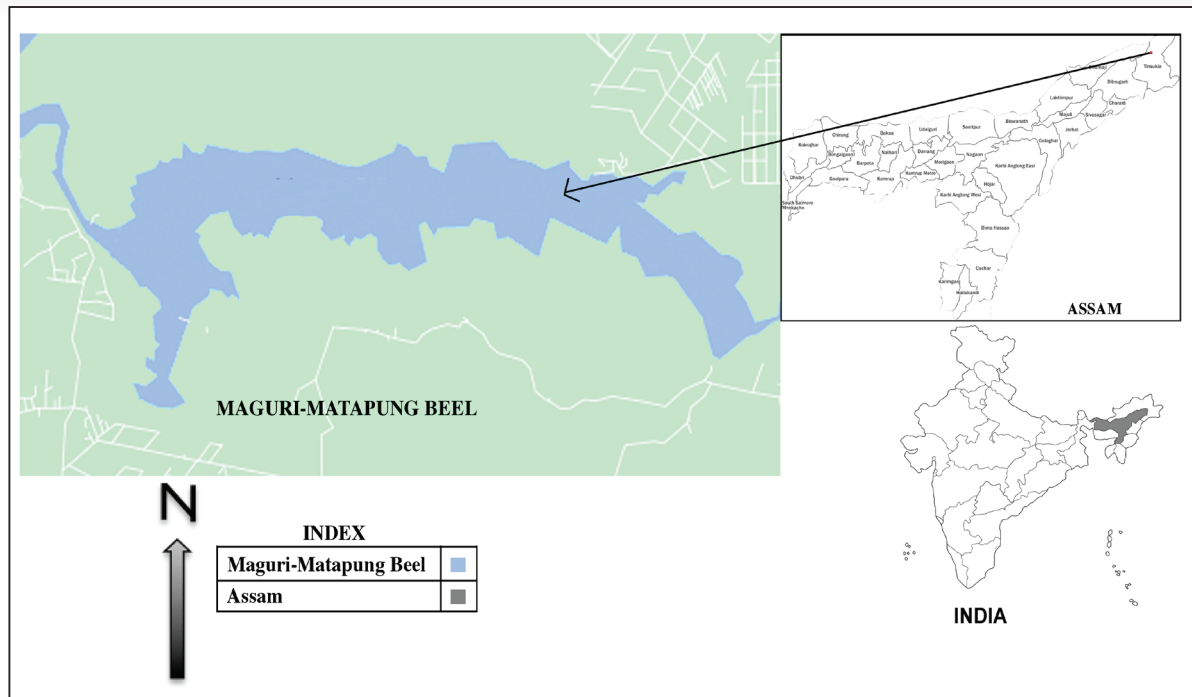


Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* along with the flock of Indian Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* and a pair of Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus* in Maguri-Matapung Beel, Tinsukia, Assam. © Imon Abedin.

Assam is the land of some unique flora and fauna, which makes it a paradise for nature and wildlife lovers. The state boasts a rich biodiversity as the geographical location of the state is marked with great natural resources (Abedin 2021). Maguri-Matapung Beel, a small fresh water body (27.5767° N & 95.3953° E) located at Natun Rungagora Gaon of Tinsukia District, Assam. It is an Important Bird Area IBA site under Dibru-Saikhowa Complex which also covers the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Poba Reserve Forest, Kobo Chapori (River Island), Amarpur

Chapori and the adjacent riverine tract of the Brahmaputra and Lohit Rivers (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

The Maguri-Matapung Beel is a community preserved lake - conserved and maintained by the people in the fringe areas. The waterbody is surrounded by villages, tea gardens and agricultural land on one side while on the other side by grassland. It is a crescent shaped waterbody that receives water from the Dibru River. The beel is mostly used for fishing and tourism



Map illustrating the sighting location of Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* & Smew *Mergellus albellus* in Maguri-Matapung Beel, Tinsukia District, Assam.

purpose. It is a hotspot for birds as well as fishes (Dwivedi 2009). During the regular bird observations, two rare species of ducks Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* and Smew *Mergellus albellus* were sighted in the waterbody. Both the birds were observed using 8 x 40 binocular and documented using a 400 mm lens without disturbing the birds.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* (Linnaeus) (Aves: Anseriformes: Anatidae)

On 8 February 2021, during a bright afternoon in Maguri-Matapung Beel, an unfamiliar duck was spotted with a flock of Indian Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha*. We went to the site next morning and sighted the unusual duck and confirmed it as a male Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* (Linnaeus). The identification was

done with the help of a field guide (Grimmett et al. 2011). The lone male Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* was with a flock of Indian Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha* and a pair of Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*. We observed the bird for around 30 minutes at a distance of around 100 m. The characters for identification are – brilliantly coloured duck with a greenish-black forehead and a purple crest near the back of the head. The sides of the head are creamy white with a chestnut patch below eyes. The side of the neck and the cheeks have longer brown feathers. The upper breast is maroon and the lower breast and belly is white in colour.

The Mandarin Duck is a perching duck species. It prefers wooded ponds, shallow



Smew *Mergellus albellus* with a Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* and a Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* in Maguri-Matapung Beel, Tinsukia, Assam. © Imon Abedin.



lakes, marshes and fast flowing rocky streams to swim, wade, and feed in. This species was once widespread in eastern Asia, but due to the destruction of forests and its habitat have reduced populations drastically in eastern Russia, China, and Japan, however, is thought to still hold some 5,000 pairs. This species migrates to Asia during winters in lowland eastern China and southern Japan (Madge & Burn 1987). In India, this species is considered vagrant as there are very few records of this species. In northeastern India, it was recorded from a tea garden near Rungagora in Dibru-Saikhowa Complex (Stevens 1915) and Baker (1902) sighted six individuals in Subansiri River, Lakhimpur District in Assam. Two pairs were also sighted in Manipur (Gimson 1934).

In the recent records, a single individual was recorded in Chandel District, Manipur (Choudhury 2009; CCNCS 2013) and a female duck reported from Baksa District (Das et al. 2015) and Maguri Beel, Tinsukia, Assam and Sikhe Lake, Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh (Ahmed & Rajpoot 2021).

Smew *Mergellus albellus* (Linnaeus) (Aves: Anseriformes: Anatidae)

On 29 January 2018, a female of Smew *Mergellus albellus* (Linnaeus) was sighted along with a flock of Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* (5) and Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (3). We were able to observe the bird for about an hour from a distance of around 60–70 m. A few identification characters that helped us identify the species – the hooked

tip and serrated edges of bill, overall grey coloured body and reddish-brown head and white cheek. In flight, it showed black and white wings. The Smew is the only living species of the genus *Mergellus*. This species is known to breed in the northern Taiga of Europe and the Palearctic. It needs trees for breeding. It lives in fish-rich lakes, reservoirs and slow rivers. This is a migrant species, it leaves its breeding areas and winters on sheltered coasts or inland lakes of the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, northern Germany and the low countries, with a small number reaching Great Britain mostly at regular sites (www.luontoportti.com). In India, there are a very few records from northern India. In Assam, this species was reported from the far north-eastern part of the Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve (Choudhury 2006).

The present note is the sighting report of Mandarin Duck (Male) in Matapung Beel. In the case of Smew, it was the first record from Maguri-Matapung Beel, Tinsukia, Assam.

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