

BAIKKA BEEL SANCTUARY HAIL HAOR



a wetland paradise restored

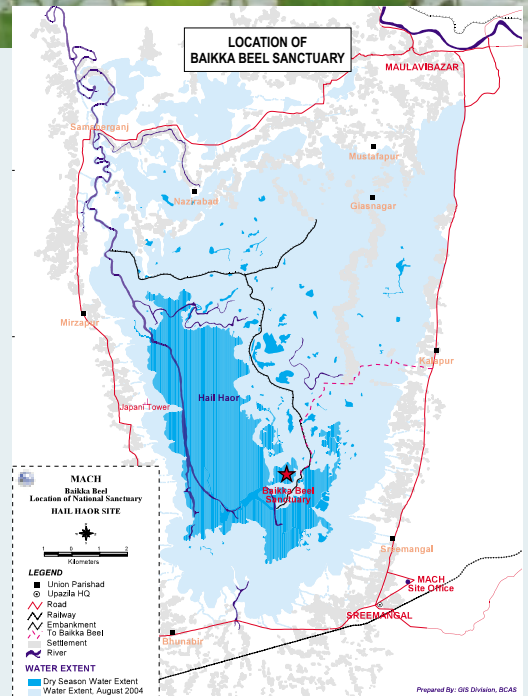
a community and local government initiative supported by USAID

Baikka Beel permanent wetland sanctuary is unique in Bangladesh

a conservation initiative supported by local and central government and managed by a community organization for the benefit of all users of Hail Haor and the nation

What is Baikka Beel

Baikka Beel is about 100 hectares of wetland in the eastern part of **Hail Haor** near Sreemangal, a tea growing town in Moulvibazar District about 200 km northeast of Dhaka. On 1 July 2003, after a detailed planning process, the Ministry of Land decided to reserve it as a permanent sanctuary. It has since been developed as a safe haven for fish. Several species of fish like **Ayre, Koi, Meni, Foli** and **Pabda** breed here and re-populate the haor. Now it is not only good for fish; but an excellent safe habitat for birds and other wild creatures. It is a beautiful marshland where thousands of lilies and lotus bloom. Birdwatchers and nature lovers have begun frequenting it. An observation tower promises the visitors a good view of the beel, its residents and winter visitors.



Koi



Foli



Meni

The Baragangina Resource Management Organization looks after Baikka Beel through agreement with the government. It has the responsibility to protect the sanctuary and educate the wider community on the need for its conservation and sustainable use. The RMO is registered with the Social Welfare Department and has a general body of 47 fishers, farmers, women, and local leaders. Their efforts are supported by the local Union Parishad, the Department of Fisheries and an Upazila level committee chaired by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer.



What to See in Baikka Beel

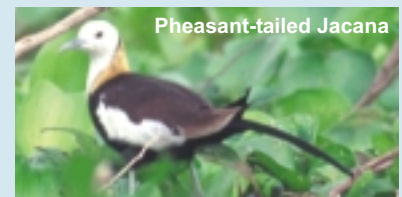
To the local community the most important asset of Baikka Beel is its fish. Fish, however, do not like to be visible to humans and rarely jump out of water to oblige an admiring spectator. But there are many 'lesser' assets of the beel for anyone to watch and enjoy. At its fringe, a crowd of blooming hyacinth, lily and lotus nodding in the wind will usher you to a wealth of aquatic life. The profusion of water plants such as **Pani-shingara** and **Makhna** is a good indication of the pristine nature of the beel.

You may not believe it, but it is a fact that millions of dragons live in the beel. Like the stealthy fish, the dragons prefer to remain submerged in the water for most of their life. When they are adult they emerge out of water fully transformed as flying insects **dragonflies**. From dawn to dusk, there is no end to the pageant of colorful dragonflies and damselflies here. Warm, rain-free days bring another army of flies to the flowers the **butterflies**. Bumble bees and other buzzing insects try indefatigably to modulate the wind whining through the aquatic plants.



Dragonfly

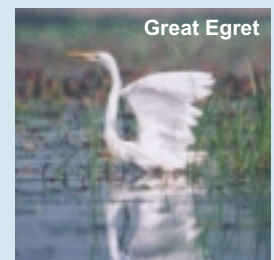
Birds are by far the most visible and beautiful creatures of the sanctuary, especially in winter. Everywhere you will see **Little Cormorant**, **Indian Pond Heron** and flocks of lanky, white egrets, especially **Great Egret** and **Cattle Egret**. You may also see two larger relatives **Grey Heron** and **Purple Heron**. Near the entrance and at the south end of the beel **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** and **Bronze-winged Jacana** walk over the floating leaves on their long toes. On the west side of the beel lurk the cute, croaking **Common Moorhen** and groups of fat, violet-blue **Purple Swamphen**. In winter you could find a party of rare **Black-headed Ibis** feeding in the mud. Many species of shorebirds come to the beel as winter visitors. Easily noticeable ones are **Ruff**, **Grey-headed Lapwing** and **Black-winged Stilt**.



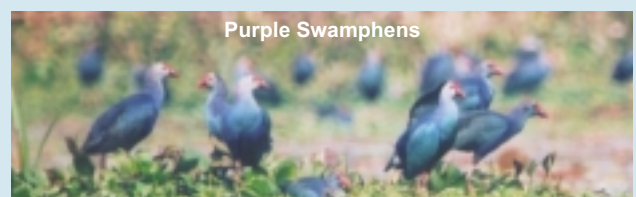
Pheasant-tailed Jacana



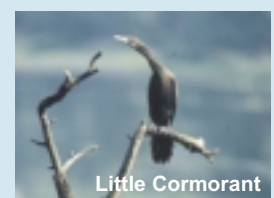
Grey-headed Lapwing



Great Egret

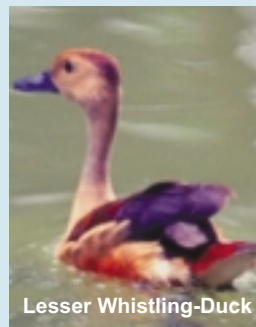


Purple Swamphens

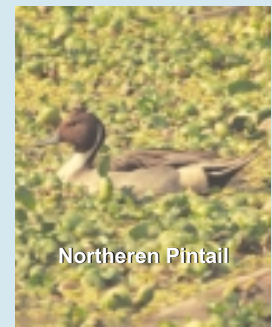


Little Cormorant

For the birdwatchers the ducks are a major attraction of the beel. **Cotton Pygmy-goose** is a resident. In winter they are joined by flocks of local **Lesser Whistling-Duck** and their larger relative **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** which are well known local migrants. They are quickly followed by the more distant migrants **Ferruginous Pochard** from central Asia, **Gargany** and **Northern Pintail** from Siberia.

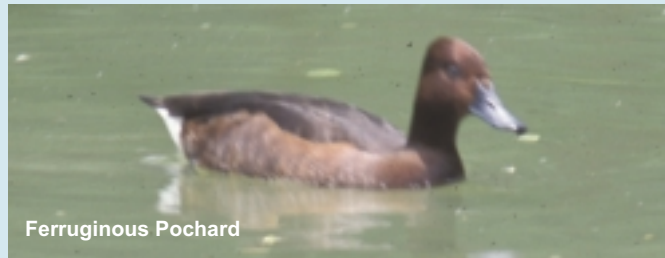


Lesser Whistling-Duck

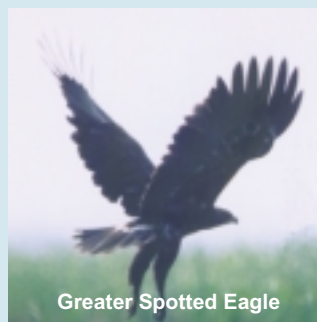


Northern Pintail

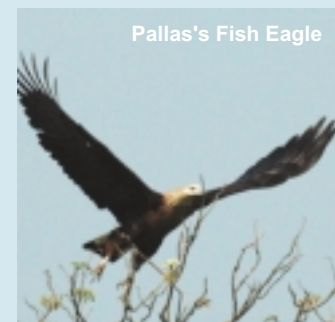
On sunny days many kites and eagles soar over the warm water of the beel. **Brahminy Kite** and **Black Kite** are residents. **Marsh Harrier** is a regular winter visitor patrolling low over the marsh. **Pallas's Fish Eagle** is a globally threatened resident which recently returned to the haor, while **Greater Spotted Eagle** is a winter visitor from central Asia. Four raised platforms have been made as perching / nesting sites for the eagles.



Ferruginous Pochard



Greater Spotted Eagle



Pallas's Fish Eagle

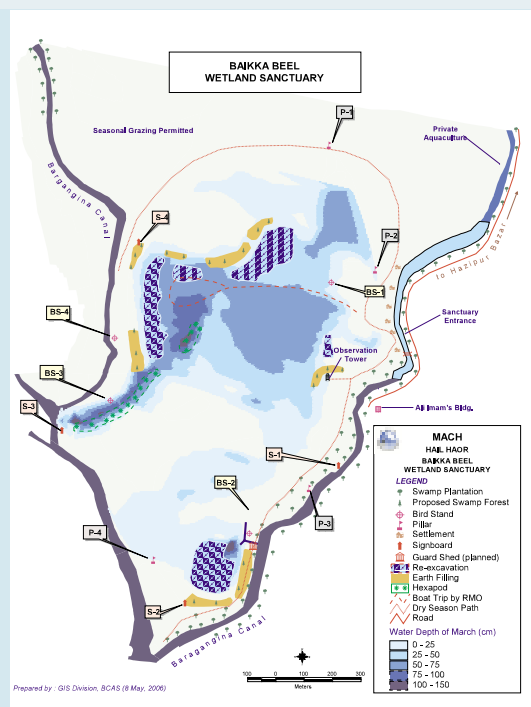
There are other interesting creatures in and around the beel; but they are few and secretive. In any case people do not look forward to seeing them. These reptiles include snakes and freshwater turtles.

How to Move About in Baikka Beel

In the monsoon access to the sanctuary is by boat arranged through the Baragangina RMO. In winter the beel is very different as the water level drops down by about 3 m (10 ft) concentrating life in the remaining water. In November-March access is by foot from the entrance crossing over Baragangina canal on the east side of the sanctuary.

From the entrance signboard walk south along the edge of the slightly raised land that borders the canal. The raised land was overgrown with **Dhol kolmi** *Ipomea fistulosa*, an introduced invasive plant. To restore native swamp forest here the RMO

has planted trees - **Hijal** *Barringtonia aquatangula* and **Koroch** *Pongamia glabra*. In time these will be a good habitat for birds, and in the monsoon when the trees are partially submerged they are a good nursing ground for small fish. A short distance south along the pathway is the watch tower. Access to it is by arrangement with the RMO. While using the pathway and the tower it is best to move quietly, speak only in whispers and avoid alerting the wildlife.



How Baikka Beel Serves Hail Haor

Hail Haor is one of the largest and most important wetlands of Bangladesh. Lying between the Balishara hills on the east and Satgaon hills to the west, the haor has a catchment of 600 km² that includes villages and farmland, pineapple gardens, lush tea estates, and forest lands including Lawacharra National Park. The haor covers about 14,000 ha in the wet season but in the dry season the water area falls to under 4,000 ha in about 130 beels and in numerous canals. Much of the area is cultivated with boro paddy in the dry season.

More than 172,000 people in 30,000 households live in 60 villages surrounding the haor. Over 80% of those households fish in the haor, many as a regular profession. Local people also depend on the haor for grazing and as a wet season source of fodder, building materials, and plants (fruits, etc.) for human food and medicine. Studies have shown that these aquatic resources are more valuable per acre than rice production.

Hail Haor has for long been recognized as an important wetland within Bangladesh. Recently it has been listed as an internationally “Important Bird Area” by BirdLife International. The haor and its surrounding forests are one of the most bio-diverse areas of Bangladesh. The haor itself is home to 98 fish species (recorded by MACH since 1999) and 160 bird species. Another 238 bird species have been seen in surrounding hills and forests since 1977.

For many years the natural productivity and biodiversity of the haor have been in decline because of drainage for agriculture, intense fishing pressure, hunting, and recently conversion of wetlands to brickfields and aquaculture. However, since 1999 the MACH project has taken a comprehensive approach to restoring this part of the nation's natural heritage. The lives of fishers and other wetland users have been improved and once lost fish, birds and plants are returning to the haor.

Managing the haor are eight Resource Management Organizations made up of local people who use the haor. The aim of each organization is to ensure sustainable use and protection of its area of the haor. They also influence resource users to behave responsibly in surrounding areas. They have set up small fish sanctuaries, re-excavated silted up areas, stopped harmful fishing practices such as dewatering, planted swamp forest trees, re-stocked threatened fishes, and observe a fishing ban when fish are spawning. Baikka Beel has received special protection as a permanent wetland sanctuary and is the largest spawning area of the haor. The result is that fish catches throughout the haor have doubled from 170 kg/ha in 1999-2000 to 390 kg/ha in 2004-05.

MACH and Conservation Management Activities

To restore and protect the wetland habitat of Baikka Beel Sanctuary, MACH and Baragangina RMO are implementing the following:

- Excavation by dredger to deepen parts of the sanctuary to hold more water for fish in the dry season
- Placing concrete fish shelters in deeper parts of the sanctuary to enhance fish habitat and prevent poaching.
- Planting swamp forest trees to restore habitat for fish and wildlife

Visiting the Sanctuary

Sreemangal is easily reached by road or train. There are several places to stay, all offering air conditioning. The Tea Resort located 4 km from Sreemangal on the Kamalganj road close to Lawacharra Forest has luxury accommodation in bungalows among tea estates with a swimming pool (tel 08626 207; cell: 01712 071502, rooms Tk 1,500-4,000 per night). Alternatives in Sreemangal town include Tea Town Rest House, Razzaque Tower (3rd floor), Habiganj Road (tel: 08626 370, cell: 01712 088567, rooms Tk 150-950 per night); Sandhya Residential Hotel, Natun Bazar (tel: 08626 439, cell: 01711 977076, rooms Tk 80-600 per night); and Viator Bangladesh Ltd., Nirrala



Villa, Moulvibazar Road (behind Aziz Super market)(tel: 08626 88309, cell: 0189 279787, rooms USD 9-18 per night).

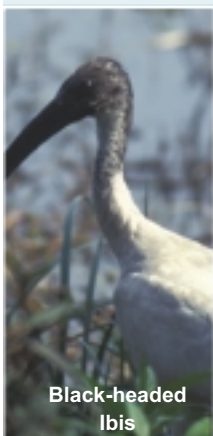
Before visiting the sanctuary it is best to contact the Barangangina RMO (see back page) to arrange a guide, a boat (if visiting in the wet season), and access to the visitor tower. From Sreemangal town the sanctuary is reached as follows:

In the dry season: drive north on the Moulvi Bazar road. 9 km north of Sreemangal town center turn left onto a small road where there are signs to the sanctuary and Baruna Madrasa. After a further 3 km turn left at a T-junction, after 0.5 km you will reach Hazipur Bazar, the RMO may be contacted here through Mr. Minnat Ali or Dr. Khalek Mia (Member and Proprietor: Sheba pharmacy). At the end of the bazar after a small bridge turn right onto a dirt track, follow this for 5.7 km through fields and wetland areas, past fish farms until you reach the entrance to the sanctuary.

In the monsoon: arrange through Barangangina RMO for a boat to pick you up from "Paschim Varaura ghat". The ghat is close to Sreemangal town. Take a rickshaw or drive north on the Moulvi Bazar road, 200 m north of Sreemangal town center turn left onto Ramkrishna Mission street (keeping Sreemangal Police Station on your right). After a further 400 m turn right at a T-junction and go 3 km along a pucca road to reach the ghat. The sanctuary is about 45 minutes by boat.

Points to remember:

- There are modest fees for the entry, guide and boat; all payable to the Barangangina RMO guide or sanctuary guard (the income is used for protecting the sanctuary).
- At least half a day should be allowed for your visit, longer in winter. Bring comfortable footwear for walking, a hat and binoculars if you have them. No food or water is sold at the sanctuary, please bring your own.
- Please, please remove your trash when you leave.



Black-headed
Ibis



Little Egret



Brahminy
Kite



Bronze-winged
Jacanna



Purple
Swampphen



Common
Moorhen



Cattle
Egret

In the interests of wetland conservation please follow these simple rules of the approved Management Plan for Baikka Beel Sanctuary:

- No fishing
- No hunting or disturbance of birds and wildlife
- No collection of plants
- No grazing
- No entry except in designated areas
- No discharge of chemicals or pollution
- No loud noises or fires
- No littering

If you see anyone breaking these rules please report this to the sanctuary guards, Barangina RMO, and the Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sreemangal.

- Do observe and photograph birds and other wildlife
- Do walk along the eastern edge of the sanctuary
- Do take a boat trip during the wet season
- Do visit the observation tower

We hope that you enjoy your visit.

For more information please contact:

Barangina RMO

Mr. Sobhan Chowdhury - Mobile: 0189 566979 (Bangla only)
Mr. Minnat Ali - Mobile: 01712 082872 (Bangla only)
Mr. Lutfor Rahman - Mobile: 01718 321108 (Bangla only)
Mr. Toyabul Islam - Mobile: 01715 278673 (Bangla only)
Mr. Piar Ali - Mobile: 01716 521130 (Bangla only)

Senior Upazila Fisheries Officer

Sreemangal, Phone: 08626 480, Mobile: 01712 782160

Upazila Nirbahi Officer

Sreemangal, Phone: 08626 220, Mobile: 0152 469195

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Uttara R/A, Varaura Road
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