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## SUCCESS STORY

### Community Conservation Gives Ducks New Homes

#### Co-Management conserves birds



Photo by: Malay Sarker



Photo by: Mazharul Islam



Photo by: Paul Thompson

**USAID funded Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project continues to enable biodiversity conservation in forests and wetlands through a strong co-management system between the government and local communities.**

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When we think of ducks we naturally think of water, but several species of ducks also need trees, and not just any tree - old trees standing over water that have hollows where the birds can nest safely. In Bangladesh most of the natural freshwater trees, known as swamp forest, have been cleared. The Cotton Pygmy-goose *Nettapus coromandelianus* is a small waterfowl species that nests in tree holes and hollows. It is resident in Bangladesh where it is still widespread but declining. One problem it faces is a shortage of nesting sites.

Since 2004 USAID has supported the local community to protect and restore wetland biodiversity in 100 ha (about 250 acres) of Baikka Beel within Hail Haor (a large wetland in north-east Bangladesh). This quickly encouraged wintering wildfowl to return to this haven, safe from hunting and fishing disturbance. In Baikka Beel over 11,000 native swamp forest trees have also been planted to restore this long-lost habitat. The trees are steadily growing, but it will be many years before these trees develop holes and crevices suitable for pygmy-geese.

In North America and Europe many people make nest boxes to be used by hole-nesting birds, but this is an unfamiliar concept in Asia. With USAID support, wooden nest-boxes adapted from the design used for American Wood Duck have been tested in Baikka Beel since 2006. Some of the initial boxes were soon used, and ducklings are known to have hatched from them, with one box also used by Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*. However, the early boxes, made both locally and by students of the American International School, Dhaka, quickly started to rot and become unusable, and the trees were small at that time. In 2011 21 new boxes of different sizes were erected on concrete posts among the now larger trees. So far 12 of these boxes have been used, mostly by the pygmy-geese but also a few by Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra*.

This achievement would not have been possible without the active involvement of the local community who established Baragangina Resource Management Organization to conserve wetland biodiversity in Baikka Beel. It is a co-management organization implemented through USAID's Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project. Advice, support, and physical conservation work have also been provided many people including the local administration in Sreemangal, Department of Fisheries, various volunteer birdwatchers, and successive site coordinators and cluster directors of USAID supported projects.

Providing dry cozy nest sites is the least that can be done for a species whose first step at one day old is to jump ten feet into a vast lake. So far as recorded, this is the only case where nest boxes have been used by Cotton Pygmy-goose in the wild, the hope is it will restore numbers of this attractive and unusual miniature goose while the co-management committees keep working towards biodiversity conservation all over Bangladesh.