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Hail Haor

The Hail Haor (wetland ecosystem) is situated in the Sylhet basin, and is located between the Balishara and Satgaoan hills. Haors are bowl shaped basins which allow the water from the Himalayas to drain out into the interconnected river system of Bangladesh, the largest delta in the world. The Hail Haor originates from the surrounding hill streams, and branches off at the Gopla River which then connects to the upper Meghna River by streaming north out of the Haor. The workable area covers 14,000 ha in monsoon but in the dry season this falls to nearly 4,000 ha. It comprises of 130 beels (a Haor is made up of many beels or smaller wetland systems) and individual water bodies such as canals. It is surrounded on three sides by a chain of tea gardens, pineapple fields, groves of rubber trees, and the remnants of natural forest blocks.

Surrounding Communities :

Approximately 9,448 households depend on Hail Haor. These households, with approximately 59,852 individuals are from adjacent villages to the Haor. The communities residing in this aquatic ecosystem rely heavily upon the produce of the Haor as their livelihood and basic sustenance revolves around these resources. Aquaculture is therefore a major profession. Transportation to and from the Haor area is always a challenge especially during monsoon and the communities living in these areas normally lack access to many basic facilities.

Biodiversity :

163 species of wildlife are found and/or dependent on Hail Haor. Among them 15 are amphibians, 21 reptilian, 13 mammals and 98 local fish species as well as 160 bird species. *Foli* (Bronze Featherback), species of catfish like *Ayre*, *Pabda* and *Koi* are some of the local aquatic species. among the waterbirds more than 10 are recorded as being resident such as Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, Cotton Pygmy Goose *Netta pus coromandelianus*, Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* and Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* etc; while Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, globally Near Threatened Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and Vulnerable raptor Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucorhynchus* are migratory. In addition, many species of migratory passerine birds occur in the bushes of Hail Haor. Hail Haor also holds a significant population of the globally Endangered Fishing Cat *Prionailurus viverrinus*. Seven species of snails are found in Hail Haor of which 2 have commercial importance. Further the Hail Haor is one of the 19 internationally Important Bird Areas in Bangladesh, and one of the six existing freshwater ecosystems. The Baikka beel (water reserve) which is found within the Haor area has been a Permanent Fish Sanctuary since 2003. The beel has the largest population of Lotus flowers in northeast Bangladesh, and draws many tourists for its myriad attractions.

Park Threats :

Wetlands and water-bodies in Bangladesh are mostly under threat due to pressure imposed by increasing population and climate change impacts, particularly overflow from a melting process occurring at the Himalayas which causes an increase in water levels. Further threats to Hail Haor are deteriorating fish habitats with non-sustainable extraction, excess harvesting of the natural resources and over flow of water during monsoons. Around 172,000 people are directly and indirectly dependent on Hail Haor for their livelihoods. Collecting diverse varieties of resources like fish, rice, vegetable, aquatic weeds and fuel wood etc. Neighboring communities collect the resources for selling, household consumption, fuel and medicine. Aquatic systems are at a greater challenge for conservation initiatives as demarcating a water-body proves harder than setting the boundaries of a forest area.

Nishorgo Network :

Hail Haor is a valued member of the Nishorgo Network, Bangladesh's growing group of forest and wetland Protected Areas (PAs) that are being conserved through proactive co-management. Co-management aims to bring together community, government and other stakeholders to work together to conserve Bangladesh's rich natural heritage and eco-system services in a manner that contributes to long-term sustainable development, increased food security, integrated climate change adaptation, and mitigation. Nishorgo Network co-management shares roles and responsibilities between communities and government, demonstrating economic benefits of PA conservation to local communities through eco-tourism and sustainable alternative income generation activities, as well as by actively involving them in conservation management of PAs through participation in co-management organizations and joint patrol initiatives. The Nishorgo Network actively engages women, youth and ethnic minorities in co-management, and provides a foundation of good governance.



New born Cotton Pygmy Goose



The vast expanse of the Haor





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Co-Management and Hail Haor:

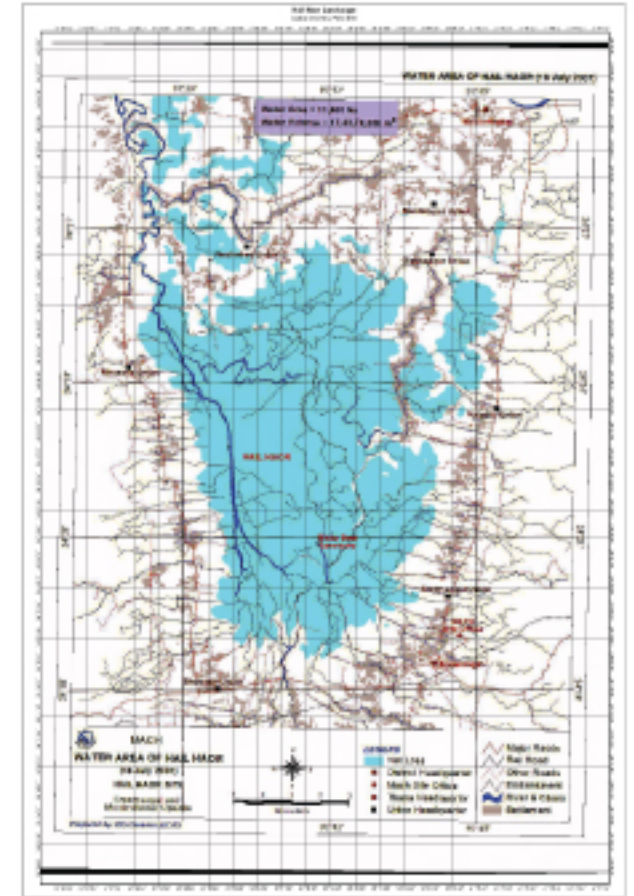
Hail Haor is a leader of co-management for effective conservation, with support from USAID's Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) project implemented in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh's Ministry of Environment and Forests and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. Co-management highlights in Hail Haor include the following:

- Formation and re-election of a co-management platform including community based Resource Management Organizations (RMOs) managing 21 water bodies and 14 fish sanctuaries, Federation of Resource Users Groups (FRUG) and Village Conservation Committees (VCC).
- Development of eco-tourism support for Hail Haor, including training a cadre of 4 eco-guides from local communities.
- Entrance Fee Revenue collection and sharing mechanism in place, ensuring 100% of tourism fees accrue to the RMOs.
- Alternative Livelihoods Development training and support for Haor-dependent communities, including sustainable value chain support and MoUs between local communities and national buyers in both fisheries and handicrafts.
- Training and capacity building as well as leveraging additional financial support to sustain effective co-management of Hail Haor conservation into the future

USAID's Integrated Protected Area Co-management (IPAC) Project in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MOEF) and Ministry of Fisheries & Livestock (MOFL) has taken significant steps to conserve Hail Haor including:

The Nishorgo Network through Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project has initiated and identified several interventions to reverse the trends that are degrading the biodiversity of the Haor. Some of which include

- Formation of 8 community based Resource Management Organizations (RMOs) and 5 Federation of Resource Users Groups (FRUG) to look after the water bodies including the popular tourist destination of Baikka Beel Sanctuary and the surrounding 107-member VCCs.
- Encouragement of responsible tourism in the area. Four community members have been trained to become Eco-guides to help visitors enjoy the site responsibly.
- Boating facilities set on an hourly basis.
- Maintenance of a Watch Tower run by the RMO at Baikka Beel that allows visitors to have a panoramic view of the Lotus filled water-body; bird watching is also actively promoted.
- Building artificial nests out of available material to encourage birds to lay their eggs, as an initiative to combat depleting habitats.
 - The Cotton Pygmy Goose laid its eggs to successfully rear young ducklings.
- Awareness raising campaigns regarding over extraction and illegal extraction of wetland resources organized at strategic times for the monsoon and dry season fishing.
- Introduction of Entry Fees to the site to benefit local community members.
- Improved Cooking Stoves (ICS) to reduce natural resource use in some of the households in collaboration with GIZ.
- Aqua culture where jatka or fry catch is prohibited and fishing with the appropriate gear is encouraged.



AIG Activities such as Aquaculture are Promoted

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