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Indiscriminate killing of wildlife in Bangladesh during the corona pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Wildlife killing is a regular event in Bangladesh. This study examines the status of killing wildlife killed in the time of COVID-pandemic lockdown in Bangladesh. As many reports stated that wildlife and environment has been benefited around the world at the time of lockdown. To find the trend of the wildlife killing, the data was gathered from newspapers and social media. Only data of killed mammals and birds are used here for analysis. The paper finds that wildlife killing in the COVID-pandemic restriction was not stopped. Total 561 wildlife had been killing from 1st January to 30th June of 2020. This indicates that the protection of the wildlife does not only rely on human activities rather it has a strong relation with the present world economic system and politics.

INTRODUCTION

During the Covid-pandemic, many places of the world have been shut down. Wildlife and biodiversity, for these reasons have benefitted, as there was less human driven destruction of the environment. Several newspaper reports said wildlife was roaming around many cities in numbers of countries

and pollution rate decreased sharply. Bangladesh was not out of this scenario. People have observed many wildlife near their homes or closer to their communities. In the absence of human disturbances after many years, dolphins, whales and porpoises were spotted in the Bay of Bengal near

Cox's Bazaar during the March-May 2020 period. Newspaper reports said thousands of Red crabs wandered in Kuakata's sea beach, which was unimaginable a few months back (Hossain 2020). However, the killing of the wildlife has not been stopped during the lock down due to the pandemic. This study aims to focus on this issue. It will take a micro snap of the destruction of wildlife in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is rich with biodiversity and wildlife. According to the IUCN, Bangladesh is home to 138 mammals, 566 birds and 167 reptiles, 49 amphibians and 253 freshwater fishes, 141 crustaceans and 305 species of butterflies. This list does not include the vast number of invertebrates and estuarine and marine fishes (IUCN Bangladesh 2015). Severe pollution, pressure from a big population, unplanned development, unchecked industrialization and a profit-making economic system is destroying our rivers, forests, soil, wildlife, and environment at an alarming rate. However, during the critical situation of the pandemic, wildlife thrived. It can be easily assumed that the status of wildlife of Bangladesh is not satisfactory. In the red list of IUCN, it has been stated that 31 species are extinct. These include 11 mammals, 19 birds and one reptile. After assessing 1619 species, the report said that 50% of the assessed species were in least concern, 2% species were regionally extinct, 29% were in the "threatened" category. 56 species were critically endangered, 181 species were endangered, and 153 species were vulnerable (IUCN Bangladesh 2015). If this situation continues, soon most of the wildlife will be extinct from Bangladesh. The killing of wildlife is a common

phenomenon in Bangladesh. There are various reasons behind wildlife killing. This study aims to find out that was there less killing of wildlife at the time of pandemic's shut down in Bangladesh. As it is assumed that wildlife killing was less because there was restriction on people's movements and people were locked down in the houses. This study has collected data of the six months from January 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020. It is true that there is no reliable data source on the wildlife killing. So, the study relies on its own research data. It is true that the wildlife killing is much more than it is documented here. In Bangladesh, wildlife has died in road accidents. There is wildlife trading, consuming of wildlife, and its hunting. Many wildlife killings are not reported in the social media or other media (Kabir 2018; Hossain 2020; WCS 2018).

METHODS

The study relies on secondary data. The study has collected data from social media surveys. It has created a unique opportunity to reach information from a wide range of population. Recently much research has been conducted with the data of social media. This study has only taken that information which is available for public view in different social media of conservation. The study searched every Facebook post of the Bangladesh biodiversity conservation Federation (BBCF), Wildlife Crime Control Unit (WCCU), Save the Nature of Bangladesh, Prani Odhikar Nischit Kore, Voice for Voiceless, Eco Savers Foundation, PRADHIKAR and Wildlife Bangla from January 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020. The

WCCU was established by Bangladesh forest department in 2012 with the aim of reducing wildlife trading and protect wildlife under the law of wildlife animal Act 2012 (WCS 2018). They run a public group with their name. The BBCF is a forest department official backed initiative to engage community to protect wildlife and raise awareness. Rest of the Facebook pages were created voluntarily, which disseminate various environment related news and create awareness with their post. All these are regularly updated with the news of wildlife killing from different parts of the country. One national daily (The Prothom Alo) and one regional daily (The Daily Azadi) and two online news platforms (Bdnews.24.com and Bengal discover) were searched with key words. The key words were: 'fishing cat', 'wildlife killing', 'elephant', 'elephant death', 'elephant killing', 'tiger killing', 'jungle cat', 'birds hunting', 'civet cat', 'fox', 'wildlife', 'hunting', 'monkey', and 'monkey killing'. Only the data of mammals and birds were collected. In some cases, it was not possible to identify name of a species as well as it was not sure what happened to the animal. In that case, it has been identified as unknown or data deficient.

Ethical consideration

All the data used here are obtained from social media and news media platforms that are available for public view. The study ensures that it will not disclose identity of wildlife killer or hunter.

RESULTS

The result revealed that 70 mammals and 491 birds (total 561) wildlife mortalities have been recorded (Table 1-5). There were 9 species of mammals and 19 species of birds. Majority of the wildlife were killed in the months of May and June. A total of 375 wildlife was killed, which include 334 were birds and 41 were mammals. 7 elephants died in Banshkhali upazila, 4 in Cox's Bazaar district, 1 in Bandarban district. 6 elephants died in the month of June. Most of the reports stated that the cause of death was either electrocution or poisoning. Five elephants were killed by using electric fences, two elephants by poison, one elephant was shot, and cause of death of the rest was unidentified. The reports assumed that those were also killed. Mammals were lynched, killed by using electric fences and poisoned. Birds had been hunted, poisoned, or died in the fishing net. 35 mammals and 2 birds have been died from the threatened group.

Table 1: List of wildlife that had been killed or died (January-June 2020)

Wildlife	Total killed
Asian elephant	12
Asian palm civet	7
Bengal tiger	1
Slow loris	1
Jungle cat	4
Fishing cat	5
Golden jackal	9

Rhesus macaque	16
Indian spotted deer	11
Small Indian mongoose	4
Birds	491
Total	561

Table 2: Status of killed wildlife according to the IUCN 2015 red list

Categories	Mammals	Birds
Critically Endangered (CR)	14	0
Endangered (EN)	5	0
Vulnerable	16	2
Near Threatened	4	0
Least Concern (LC)	31	489
Total	70	491

Table 3: Status of killed wildlife by division/region

Division/Region	Mammals	Birds
Dhaka	16	58
Mymensingh	1	DD
Barisal	7	19
Chattogram	14	DD
Rajshahi	11	350
Sylhet	11	DD
Khulna	8	50
Rangpur	1	1

(DD: Data deficient)

Table 4: Status of killed bird species

Name of the species	IUCN 2015 red list status
Asian openbill	LC
Brown fish owl	LC
Black-hooded oriole	LC
Blue-throated barbet	LC
Black-rumped flamback	LC
Common starling	LC
Common mayna	LC
Common kingfisher	LC
Fulvous-breasted woodpecker	LC
Grey heron	LC
Indian pond heron	LC
Lesser adjutant	VU
Lineated barbet	LC
Pied starling	LC
Rufous treepie	LC
Purple-rumped Sunbird	LC
Spotted dove	LC

White-breasted Kingfisher	LC
White-breasted Waterhen	LC

Table 5: Status of killed mammals in study areas

Name of the species	IUCN 2015 red list status
Fishing cat	EN
Jungle cat	NT
Golden jackal	LC
Small Indian mongoose	LC
Asian elephant	CR
Indian spotted deer	LC
Asian palm civet	LC
Rhesus monkey	VU
Bengal tiger	CR
Bengal slow loris	EN

DISCUSSION

According to a report of WWF humanity has wiped out 60% of the mammals, reptiles, birds, and fishers since 1970. Wildlife loss is a great threat to humanity (Carrington 2018). Bangladesh is also part of this picture. The data of the study indicates that the killing of the wildlife was rampant during the pandemic lockdown. Many wildlife were killed in villages because wildlife live nearby village grove and at the time of lockdown wildlife came closer to human contact.

There is an increase of cetacean mortality is also apparent in the WCS cetacean report of July 2020. According to the report a total 24 cetacean mortalities had been recorded till 15 July of 2020. The report also noted that the average increase of cetacean death. From 2007 to 2019 the average cetacean death rate was 1.1 deaths per month which jumped to 3.7 deaths per month in the year of 2020 (WCS 2020). In different parts of the

country, birds are being killed at an alarming rate. Hunters, children, and persons from all walks of life are killing birds mainly for meat and hunting sports. Killing rate of the birds is high in the Rajshahi division. Rajshahi is rich with biodiversity. Many birds died in the fruit orchards in Rajshahi as farmers put fishing nets in their fruit orchards to protect fruits from bats and birds. As a result, many birds and bats died entangled in the fishing net in those orchards. All the cats and foxes were lynched. Villagers view wild cats as a threat to their livestock. Domestic animals are one of the major sources of income for the rural poor farmers. Even, in a village, all the civet cats were killed as the villagers mistakenly identified these as a ‘small tiger’ or jungle cat. It can be noted that most of the animals were killed by people and they uploaded pictures of the killing in social media. Most of the time, the people who killed wildlife felt proud and they had no sign of regret.

Wild animals are victims of many persons' ferocity. Foxes were killed in some places for medicinal use. It is believed that fox's meat can reduce the pain of Gaught. One of the reasons behind elephant killing is the well-known 'Human-elephant' conflict (Hossain 2013; Dublin & Hoare, 2010). This study finds that elephants were killed because earlier either elephants had killed any of the family member/s or destroyed farming land of the community people. Most of the people like elephant. However, the poor farmers cannot bear the loss of the near ones and afford the damages of their harvest. Study finds that because of harvest loss farmers had to take loans and fall in debt trap (Palash & Akash 2018). In many cases, people killed animals just for fun. Even students of different institutions were killing wildlife. For example, a student of law department of a private university and a teacher at a college also killed several birds with their air gun including a vulnerable lesser adjutant. An engineering student beheaded a small kingfisher, destroyed its six eggs, and uploaded the horrible pictures of beheaded kingfisher in his Facebook account where he blamed the tiny kingfisher for eating his pond fish! The growth of the population, extensive farming, vanishing of the village grove, anthropogenic pressure and greedy economic system are threatening the biodiversity and wildlife of Bangladesh. The villages of Bangladesh are losing the village forest and bushes. Therefore, wildlife is often seen in the open area or they are coming in contact of the people. There are other structural reasons like poverty, weak wildlife protection laws and institutions, etc. behind the decline of the wildlife. Lack of

awareness is one of the main reasons for the killing of wildlife in Bangladesh (Rasshan et al. 2012). The study finds that in many cases, common people's perceptions is that wildlife does harm. Moreover, people are less aware of the importance of biodiversity. Bangladesh has 1.4 % protected forest area, which is one of the smallest protected forest areas in the world. Study suggests that Bangladesh has lost or destroyed 90% of its natural forest (Kibria et al. 2011). Every year Bangladesh loses a great amount of money because of environmental pollution. According to a report of Greenpeace Southeast Asia, every year Bangladesh loses around 14 billion dollars due to air pollution (Ali & Siddiqui 2020). Rapid habitat loss and acute environmental pollution is threatening wildlife and biodiversity of Bangladesh. One may see this wildlife killing as some unaware individuals or groups of persons are killing wildlife. However, the case is not this simple. There are many scientific studies where it stated that poor people suffer most if ecology and environment is destroyed (Chowdhury 2011). Wildlife killing during the corona is not a single event. It is part of the bigger environmental crisis and ecological destruction. The most important fact is that the degradation of the environment and biodiversity is linked with the present world economic system and politics (Chowdhury 2013).

CONCLUSION

The year 2020 is unique because for the first time in the history of mankind the world experienced such a massive lockdown. The study shows a sad scenario of the wildlife

killing of the first six months of 2020. Though nature and life benefited in the time of lockdown, but it was not always the same. The life of the common people of Bangladesh is highly connected with nature and environment. Common people directly and indirectly depend on nature. Therefore, the protection of the wildlife and biodiversity is essential for their own interest (Chowdhury 2011). Good news is that an increasing number of commoners are now aware of wildlife and some young have taken initiatives to rescue and protect wildlife from different odd situations. Moreover, many volunteer organizations are working to protect the wildlife. Initiatives like Pradikhare, BBCF and Bird Bangladesh are just a few names of such initiatives. Commoners should organize more initiatives to protect the biodiversity and environment.

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