

## THE EPIC OF SUNDARBANS' KINGFISHERS

“Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird?”

-David Attenborough

Over a decade, the Sundarbans has remained a stunning natural wonder, captivating visitors with its beauty. Sundarbans offers a diverse array of attractions to its visitors, catering to various interests and preferences. Throughout the day, the Sundarbans experiences various lighting conditions, from tranquil winter mornings to scorching summer afternoons, to the damp rays of the monsoon and the dramatic atmosphere of approaching storms. Its landscape features a network of waterways shaped by tides, threading through land and forest. Wildlife, including Royal Bengal Tigers, Spotted Deer, Otters, Wild Boars, Crocodiles, Monitor Lizards, Snakes, and marine creatures, thrives here. The flora, with vibrant *Golpata* and *Gewa* leaves, graceful *Keora* trees, and majestic *Baen* trunks, adds to the allure. This ecosystem displays remarkable adaptations, offering insights into survival strategies in challenging conditions, particularly relevant amid a changing climate.

Birdwatchers are fascinated by the presence of more than 350 bird species within the



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forest, constituting half of all avian species in Bangladesh.

According to me, the most prominent attraction among all else is the presence of kingfishers in the Sundarbans.

We'll begin with the Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*), characterized by its vibrant purple-blue wings, orange breast, and red beak, resembling a dazzling gem. Luckily, during winter, it can be readily spotted along waterways, often perched on branches or poles, eagerly scanning the water for fish to catch.



Source: Black-capped Kingfisher with feather in mouth at Sundarban Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India. Author: Soumyajit Nandy

**Fig 1:** Black-capped Kingfisher

The Brown-winged Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis amauroptera*), though not as visually striking as its Black-capped counterpart, is still remarkable. Approaching the size of a crow, it's relatively approachable. If we spot



it perched on a branch while navigating a stream, it will cautiously observe us before darting to another branch, engaging in a playful game of "catch me if you can."



**Fig 2:** Brown-winged Kingfisher

The turquoise-winged Collared Kingfisher (*Todiramphus chloris*), often found among *Gewa* trees in Kotka and Koromjol, is also seen in Australia's Queensland mangroves, known there as the Mangrove Kingfisher.



**Fig 3:** turquoise-winged Collared Kingfisher

During the monsoon, the Ruddy Kingfisher (*Halcyon coromanda*), with its rust-red body and bright red beak, becomes easier to spot.

Preferring dense undergrowth, it emerges when hunger pushes it to search for food.



**Fig 4:** Ruddy Kingfisher

The Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) is another prevalent kingfisher species in the Sundarbans, characterized by its stunning blue and orange plumage and elongated, pointed beak. Despite its vibrant appearance, it tends to be reserved and elusive. It can be spotted near bodies of water like rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds, preferring habitats with small fish in both freshwater and brackish environments.



**Fig 5:** Common Kingfisher

The Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*) is not commonly sighted in the Sundarbans, but its distinctive large bill makes it easily identifiable when spotted.



**Fig 6:** Stork-billed Kingfisher

The Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) is a striking bird with bold black-and-white markings, sporting a short, tufted crest and a shiny, entirely dark bill. While it may resemble the crested kingfisher at first glance, it's notably smaller, featuring a more defined pattern on its head and breast and a less prominently raised crest. It's often observed resting in pairs or small clusters.



**Fig 7:** Pied Kingfisher

Lastly, the White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), larger than the Common Kingfisher, is more cautious around people, possibly due to ancestral memories of being hunted for its feathers centuries ago.



**Fig 8:** White-throated Kingfisher

In my view, a visitor would be extremely unfortunate if they were unable to observe these marvels of the Sundarbans.

In conclusion, the diverse array of kingfisher species found within the Sundarbans, including the Black-capped, Brown-winged, Collared, Ruddy, Common, Stork-billed, Pied, and White-throated Kingfishers, represents a captivating aspect of the region's rich avian biodiversity. However, alongside their beauty and charm, these birds face numerous threats to their survival, including habitat loss, pollution, and climate change.

Conservation efforts must be prioritized to safeguard these magnificent creatures and their habitats. This includes establishing protected areas, implementing sustainable land management practices, and raising



awareness among local communities and visitors about the importance of preserving the Sundarbans ecosystem. Furthermore, collaboration between governments, conservation organizations, researchers, and local stakeholders is essential to ensure the long-term survival of these kingfisher species and the biodiversity they represent.

By taking action to conserve the Sundarbans and its inhabitants, we can not only protect these iconic birds but also preserve the ecological integrity of one of the world's most valuable natural treasures for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

