

NGO trip adds plumes to winter's cap

BY TIRNA RAY

Calcutta, Dec. 31: On Saturday, the Jungles, a non-governmental organisation, launched their first eco-tourism excursion, first of its kind in eastern India, comprising of a boat trip around the isles to introduce visitors to a birds' paradise.

While on a bird watching mission long time ago, The Jungles came across the Shankarpur Gangetic Isles Complex, the largest wintering grounds for

migratory waterfowls in Bengal. The grounds are a cluster of riverine isles located along a 10 km stretch on the course of Bhagirathi that flows forming oxbows and bordering the populace of Mayapur on the east and Purbasthali on the west. The place harbours over 20,000 water birds with a variety of 75 species. The Jungles are engaged in heritage conservation since 1986.

A boat trip started from Kashthashali, Telibagan Ghat, the

boat skimmed the water while the afternoon sun sparkled across the ripples of the Ganga. One could make out the different colour shades of the water glistening against the dazzling sun.

The initial excitement had scarcely subsided when Mr Manojit Dasgupta, secretary of Indian Tea Association and a bird lover, exclaimed "Shoveler! Shoveler!" The birds were lowering their webbed feet to settle on the water, with white patches on

their heads and necks stretched out straight.

Mr Dibyendu Ghosh, a teacher and a resident of Purbasthali, exclaimed in wonder at the Swifts stretching against the radiant blue sky. Swifts are known to live an almost aerial existence, adapted for sustained high speed flight with narrow swept-back wings and streamlined bodies. The light gusts of wind carried the smell of water. Through a binocular, Open-

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