

Community work to conserve bird



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The news was astonishing [as](#) an [Assamese](#) lady was selected for Whitley [Award](#), also known [as](#) Green Oscar, and invited to London to receive the coveted award. Suddenly Purnima Devi Barman emerged [as](#) an icon across Assam. But the residents of many parts in Kamrup were familiar with the and her mission to conserve Greater Adjutant Stork (popularly known [as](#) Hargila or Dhadang).

Purnima, 37, has been working in the villages since 2009 where once the people [found](#) the bird [as](#) dirty, but today they feel proud of it and virtually own the responsibility to preserve the tall bird's habitats adjacent to their localities. The rural ladies came forward to join hands with Purnima to adopt the birds [as](#) their children. Thus the first hurdle for Purnima to conserve Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) in Dadara, Pacharia and Shingimari areas was [over](#). She cleverly motivated the [community](#) not to cut trees, the natural habitats for the birds, and also used their stories in [community](#) sings and handicrafts.

Recently attending the Meet the Press program of Guwahati Press Club, Purnima narrated her tales to the scribes. Receiving felicitations from the press club members, she urged them to be a part of the movement and help expanding it to other parts of the region.

According to her, Greater Adjutant Stork has a world population of not more than 1200, where nearly 800 individuals are available in Assam. The birds are also [found](#) in Bihar of central [India](#) and in some parts of Cambodia, where [as](#) those were widely [found](#) in various parts of South and South East Asia few decades back.

Soon after her post graduation in Zoology, with special focus on Ecology and [Wildlife](#) Biology, from Gauhati University in 2002, Purnima started working for an Assam based environment [NGO](#) named Aranyak. She [found](#) that the [Wildlife](#) Protection [Act](#), 1972 ([India](#)) has the provision to safeguard the large bird, but it has no jurisdiction towards its habitats.

Purnima, who is married to a senior wildlife conservationist Rathin Barman, believes that she has miles to go before completing the study [over](#) the birds and their habitats. Her immediate work will be a survey of the birds in natural habitats and extend help framing policies to conserve the endangered species.

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BY NAVA THAKURIA

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