



# **Wetland\$ New\$ Monitor**

## **July - August 2017**

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## News on Wetland Birds

The migratory birds were spotted on wetlands between Naigaon and Vasai with monsoon setting in. According to Sachin Main, president of Nature and Environment Society of Thane (NEST), the birds have begun arriving since a week before monsoon starts and in two to three weeks it's been expected to see many more migratory birds making Vasai region their home. The Glossy Ibis, a wading bird from Europe and Africa and Asian Openbill Stork were spotted at Suncity in Vasai. Flamingoes have also begun arriving in the region. A mixed flock of Cormorants, sea birds found around the world and Painted Stork, native of the Indian sub-continent have arrived in the wetlands of Naigaon. According to Main, a large number of water birds migrate to Vasai for its enormous avifaunal diversity.

Migratory birds visiting the famed Oussudu Lake, a bird sanctuary co-managed by Puducherry and Tamil Nadu are meeting a fatal end and ending up as food in eateries due to unabated poaching and lack of a stricter vigil on the part of the Forest Department. The inter-State lake covers an area of 800 hectares, of which 390 hectares lies in Puducherry. In 2008, the lake was declared as a sanctuary by the Puducherry government making it the first ever sanctuary in the Union Territory.

In fact, this lake is identified as a wetland of national importance under the National Wetland Conservation Programme of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), and has also been declared one of the 93 significant wetlands in Asia by the Asian Wetland Bureau. Hundreds of migratory birds, especially Spot Billed Pelicans, Painted Stork, Spoon Billed Ducks, Whistling Ducks, Black Headed Ibis, White Ibis and Painted Stork, flock the lake during October to February every year for nesting and breeding and a number of the birds are poached right under the nose of the Forest Department.

The modus operandi of the poachers is to trap the birds by mixing poisonous substance in fish and grains on the sprawling lake. A visit to the periphery of the lake bordering Pathukannu revealed the unabated massacre of birds with carcasses of several Spot Billed Ducks and Pelicans lying on the dry lake bed. An ornithologist said that the sprawling Kaluveli Lake in Villupuram and Odiyur Lake in Kancheepuram had gone bone dry owing to severe drought and only a few lakes such as the Oussudu Lake contained. Though the water level in the lake had dwindled it

had become a favourite haunt for poachers since it had been attracting birds even during the lean season.

Earlier, primitive tribes including those belonging to the Narikorava community were mainly engaged in poaching of the birds. But of late the lake had also been facing several threats including pollution, invasion of wild weeds, illegal fishing and poaching of endangered birds. A couple of years ago, the Coimbatore-based Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) handed over to the Wildlife Department a Comprehensive Management Action Plan for Conservation of the Oussudu Sanctuary that encompassed threat identification, minimisation and control, protection, eco-restoration, research and monitoring, outreach and nature education. However, more than nine years after the Lake was declared a bird sanctuary, the Forest Department has failed to take up any conservation measures.



A bird lover shows the carcass of a Spot Billed Pelican, one of the many migratory birds, found dead on the Oussudu Lake bed near Puducherry

Source: The Hindu Dt.: July 19, 2017



A bird watcher reported that the sanctuary has no watch towers and large expanse of unfenced areas has enabled poachers to make their way into the sanctuary for poaching. There has been a rise in incidents of poaching due to absence of any patrolling inside the sanctuary. A wildlife activist said the sanctuary was already facing lot of human related disturbances and boat operations should be stopped permanently. The islands inside the lake are the nesting site for the birds. However, the Puducherry Tourism Development Corporation which operates the boats ferries tourists close to the islands to enable them take photographs disturbing their habitat.

A new international study revealed that mineral exploitation, infrastructure development and changes in agricultural practices are severely threatening the survival of the black-necked crane that is endemic to the Tibetan Plateau in the Himalayas. It calls for effective and powerful conservation measures by Chinese authorities to maintain unharmed the habitat of the crane, an Alpine species that breeds in the extensive landscape of high Central Asia, including Ladakh in India, whose global population is estimated at around 10,000. Owing to the Tibetan Plateau's environmental inaccessibility to comprehensive field research, the black-necked crane, revered as a "spiritual bird" in Tibetan Buddhism, remains the world's least-studied crane species. Under China's Western Development Scheme, many critical but unassessed human activities are pervasive in crane's breeding habitat, says the study, published by Springer Nature. However, it says that the deficient knowledge on these threats are widely overlooked, which greatly constrains current research and regional conservation activities.

The study was conducted by a team of researchers led by Xuesong Han of the College of Nature Conservation in Beijing Forestry University. Falk Huettmann of the US Department of Biology and Wildlife in the Institute of Arctic Biology of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, was also associated with the study. Huettmann, a wildlife ecologist specialising in macroecology and global conservation, told IANS on the sidelines of the 28<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2017) in Colombian city reported that the rapid development in the Tibetan Plateau, especially water conservancy projects and mining, is a big threat for the survival of black-necked cranes and other endemic species. He added that the human interference index is quite high in the Tibetan Plateau region.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies the black-necked crane, the flagship species in Tibetan Alpine wetland ecosystems, as "vulnerable" because of its



decreasing global population of 10,070 to 10,970. The northern parts of the Hengduan Mountains and the southeastern Tibet Valley, the northern side of the middle Kunlun Mountains, parts of the Pamir Plateau, the northern Pakistan Highlands and the western Hindu Kush are its main potential breeding areas. The researchers also attribute the decline of the cranes to the change in cropping patterns and rise in population of feral dogs. They observed their breeding habitats are commonly fragmented by fences in Zhaguo in Tibet, which prevent chicks from escaping from predation by the Tibetan foxes or dogs. Highland barley was traditionally planted in the middle and lower reaches of the Brahmaputra river. However, the government changed the land use from crane-edible barley plantations to “crane-unbeneficial” but highly-profitable cash crops such as rapeseed.



Black-necked cranes

Source: The Hindu Dt.: August 05, 2017

The massive Han Chinese migration for constructing tourism and affiliated infrastructure is especially serious. Likewise, the large-scale construction of water conservancy projects — nine large hydro-power projects are scheduled or already constructed on the Brahmaputra and Mekong rivers, the potential breeding area of the cranes. In contrast to the Tibetan nomads, the hunting traditions of the local Uygur people also severely threaten the survival of cranes and other wildlife, says the study. In summer, the crane migrates to the eastern Pamir, which in



recent decades has been affected by frequent military activities, terrorism and a massive Afghan refugee flow into northern Pakistan. The researchers propose that threats and their links to the western development of China must be assessed for the long-term maintenance of the endangered crane species and other wildlife on the fragile Tibetan Plateau.

Hunting has now transformed into a commercial and lucrative livelihood option. A recent study shows that increased hunting of wild waterbirds is decreasing bird numbers as well as drastically altering bird communities in some of the country's wetlands. India's wetlands - natural and manmade – account for nearly 4.7% of the country's total geographic area. They provide numerous ecosystem services, including serving as refugia for nearly one-fifth of the country's biodiversity, such as migratory birds. However, many of these waterbirds are hunted illegally in wetlands. Scientists documented waterbird communities and their habitats in 27 wetlands in Tamil Nadu's Kanchipuram district and interviewed 272 practising hunters to know the species hunted, hunting intensities and motivations for hunting. Of the 53 bird species recorded in these 27 wetlands, 47 are hunted. Hunters usually preferred to poach larger birds, thus altering bird communities by skewing it towards smaller species, as the results published in the journal *Ambio* show. The large waterbirds hunted include black-headed ibis, Asian openbill, Eurasian spoonbill, glossy ibis, great egret, painted stork and spot-billed pelican.

Birds even in protected wetland sites were not spared — hunting was prevalent in one (Karikilli bird sanctuary) of the two protected wetland sites. Nearly 1,750 waterbirds are hunted per wetland each season every year. The hunting is primarily between December and April and at dawn and dusk when birds are more active. A hunter made an average of Rs.12,500 per month with just a few hours' effort daily. More than 70% of hunters said that there was an increase in demand for waterbird meat over the past decade from local eateries — three-quarters of the hunters supplied waterbirds to 426 eateries in the region. However, only eight of the 681 eateries surveyed acknowledged that they serve wild waterbird meat.

Customers often had no knowledge that they were eating illegally-caught wild meat and not the domestic chicken or duck. This hunting is causing drastic declines in waterbird diversity and numbers. The scale of hunting is shocking, says lead author Ramesh Ramachandran who currently works with the Wildlife Trust of India. He added that the law enforcement is crucial. However, it should be targeted at buyers and middlemen. Direct enforcement will not be able to

curb the over-three-lakh such hunters who operate in the state. If consumption of wild meat continues, a zoonotic disease outbreak may also not be far away.



Nearly 1,750 waterbirds are hunted per wetland each season every year

Source: The Hindu Dt.: August 13, 2017

The arrival of at least 12 migratory bird species Since June 2017 in Basai wetlands has raised hopes among birders. Whiskered tern, green sandpiper, plovers, Siberian stonechat, little stint, red shank, black-tailed godwit, Blyth's reed warbler, gargany duck, wood sandpiper, green sandpiper and barn swallow are some of the migratory species spotted in Basai. Besides, summer migrants including blue-cheeked bee-eater, blue -tailed bee eater, lesser whistling teal, bittern (yellow, cinnamon and black) and pheasant-tailed jacana are still being spotted.

Pankaj Gupta of Delhi Bird Foundation reported that as there was plentiful of rain this year, arrival of more species was expected in Basai. However, it depends on a lot of factors. Expressing concern over the proposed construction and demolition (C&D) waste treatment plant in Basai, birders called for offering immediate protection of the wetlands, as it is serving as a habitat for birds throughout the year.



Amina Shervani, a city-based environmentalist stated that generally, migratory birds follow a fixed pattern, flying to a specific country/place every year. Arrival of many winter migratory birds, and existence of many other species throughout the year, is good enough reason for immediately protecting Basai. Setting up a C&D plant can disturb this natural habitat and so the authorities need to take the right steps.

Basai is located about 6 km from Gurgaon city and it hosts nearly 200 species of birds every year. The problem with Basai is that it never got official recognition as a wetland, despite India being a signatory to the international RAMSAR convention on wetlands. In June, a group of Delhi-based birders filed a petition in National Green Tribunal (NGT) against MCG, for proposing the C&D plant over 3.5 acre in Basai.

Popular wetland birding sites for Chennaites are the famous Vedanthangal bird sanctuary, Pallikaranai marsh and Pulicat estuary, all of them far beyond the city limits. Interestingly, the lesser-known Korattur Lake, situated in the heart of the city, is one of the largest water bodies in Chennai spanning over 500 acres. Earlier records point to more than 600 water bodies in Madras but the numbers seem to have declined drastically mainly due to encroachments, dumping of raw sewage, pollutants, invasive plants, silt deposition and the conversion of these spaces into recreational spots.

While most of the city's lakes dry during summer, it is heartening to observe Korattur Lake flowing to its brim and beaming with avian fauna. Waking up to the calls of a host of wetland birds, the whooshing of water and rustle of palm leaves is a blessing not many experience in sizzling Chennai. Sadly, although there are a number of disheartening reports on Korattur Lake – the algal blooms, mosquitos and seasonal flooding, the charm of the lake and its winged visitors are enchanting. Having visited quite a few wetlands worldwide and observed diverse species, it is interesting to note that the lake is a paradise for water birds, and an ornithologist's delight.

At the break of dawn, a pod of bulky grey and Spot-billed pelicans congregate in hundreds, swimming gracefully across the lake, often diving head down for a catch. Little cormorants arrive in equally large numbers and fish along the edges of the lake. The sighting of such incredible numbers of migratory pelicans and cormorants in close quarters is exhilarating.





The lake also plays host to several territorial wading birds such as colourful Painted storks, snow white Spoonbills, Fulvous whistling ducks, Spot-billed ducks, Black-winged stilts, Black-tailed godwits, Glossy ibis, Purple herons, Grey herons, Pond herons, Pied avocets and graceful Flamingos. One can also spot swift River terns hovering over the lake, ready for a plunge.

Paved walkways around the lake facilitate a closer observation of these birds and of some plants as well. The northern side of the lake is colonised by reeds, sedges and hydrophytes such as bulrushes, water hyacinth and water lettuce, making it an ideal ecological niche for purple Swamp hens, Common moorhens, Coots and Egrets. Many wild plants that are gradually vanishing from the urban core — milkweed, morning glory and mesquites also dot the lake. Occasionally, the loud call of the tiny tailor birds, the screeching of parakeets and the cacophony of crows and mynas shatter the silence of the placid lake. For the locals, the lake is also a livelihood. They can be seen casting fishing nets and wading through waist-deep water for shrimps. From the microscopic phytoplanktons to man, the last link in the food chain — the lake is a source of sustenance.

In the past, many water bodies with a high carrying capacity and rich aquatic life have served as navigational channels and fishing outlets. Sadly, many of them do not exist anymore owing to their high biological oxygen demand (BOD), indiscriminate pollution and lack of environmental monitoring. The message from Nature is loud and clear to the citizens, civic authorities and naturalists. The density and diversity of the flora and fauna in these locales are the key indicators of a healthy urban set-up. Wetlands in urban areas offer invaluable ecosystem services. They serve as catchment areas, indicators of drinking water levels and as habitat for diverse aquatic organisms. These water bodies also play a pivotal role in groundwater recharge, flood control and in prevention of salt water intrusion. They also serve as ‘real-time laboratories’ for studies in ecology, limnology, ornithology and field biology.

The graceful palms, green paddy fields and vast water bodies that once adorned old Madras have been steadily and rapidly giving way to sky scrapers, malls, and road and rail networks in modern Chennai. Urban planning and policies are, therefore, crucial during the transition, to ensure that ecosystems are preserved and the woods, forests, parks, rivers and lakes not disturbed.



## Source:

- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/winged-visitors-return-as-rains-make-a-comeback/articleshow/59585672.cms>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/puducherry/at-oussudu-lake-birds-fall-prey-to-poisonous-fish/article19306290.ece>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-in-school/mining-in-tibet-poses-threat-to-black-necked-cranes/article19430906.ece>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-sci-tech-and-agri/increased-hunting-of-waterbirds-leads-to-reduced-diversity/article19483978.ece>
- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/12-migratory-bird-species-spotted-in-basai-wetlands-draw-twitchers/articleshow/60267072.cms>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/close-encounters-of-the-winged-kind/article19579171.ece>

## Information on Endangered Baya Weaver Bird

The baya weaver, a bird native to the subcontinent and known for the intricate nests it weaves, is endangered in the western UP region because its wetland habitat has shrunk. An ornithologist researching on these birds found at least seven colonies of them had sprung up on electricity wires in Hastinapur and Shamli in June 2017, putting the birds in further danger. Four species of weaver bird are found in India – Finn's weaver, baya weaver or Indian baya, streaked weaver and black-breasted weaver. They are excellent natural weavers which are reflected in their suspended pendulous nests built in colonies. These nests are constructed by males with leaves and twigs to attract females. If the female approves of the nest, only then does the male complete the structure, where the female lays eggs. They feed on grains, seeds and insects. Once known for housing swarms of Finn's weaver, western UP, particularly the Terai area and Hastinapur wildlife sanctuary have seen an alarming decline in their number so much so that this particular breed is almost extinct and now the Indian baya is struggling to survive.



Senior Scientist (Ornithology), Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Rajat Bhargava, while researching on these birds in this region found at least seven colonies of them on electric wires in Hastinapur and Shamli. He reported that it is really interesting as well as disturbing to find and study how the baya weavers are now increasingly making their nests on wires due to lack of trees around micro-level habitats. Once a common species across India, the baya weaver is now slowly dwindling in numbers with the increasing loss and modification of grasslands into human-dominated landscapes like farms, orchards, factories, canals and roads.

**Source:**

- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/wetlands-shrinking-endangered-baya-weaver-bird-now-makes-nest-on-power-lines/articleshow/59717224.cms>

## Report on Smooth-coated Otter

The Smooth-coated Otter are distributed throughout South Asia and South East Asia which has been observed in large numbers in recent years in and around the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary as well as the riverbed of Krishna in Andhra Pradesh. The increase in the Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) population in Krishna and Guntur districts does not bring cheer to aqua farmers, who are desperately geared up to hunt the wild animal to save their Vannamei production.

A group of Vannamei farmers from Nagayalanka reported that each otter eats up at least four kg of Vannamei in one night. Accompanied by the same family, the otter mostly prefers to raid the aqua ponds during night and spend the day in the estuary, riverbed, swamp and mangrove forest. The local farmers said the sighting of the Smooth-coated Otter has become regular. According to a group of local wetland researchers, at least 30 Smooth-coated Otters were hunted by the aqua farmers in and around Lankevennudibba between 2004 and 2005 in Krishna and Guntur border areas, while the Otters were preying on the Vannamei/Tiger prawn.



Smooth –coated Otters sighted on the Krishna river bed at Oleru in Guntur district

Source: The Hindu Dt.: August 19, 2017

Allaparthi Appa Rao, a wetland researcher reported that they have documented the presence of the Smooth-coated Otter along the riverbed of Krishna in 2016 and since then they have seen the otters moving as a group. Of late, there is a need for a survey to estimate the population of the Smooth-coated Otter and geo-tagging of the areas in which the wild animal is thriving. Divisional Forest Officer (Wildlife) Saibaba said that the action will be taken to prevent hunting of the Smooth-coated Otter, exploring an amicable solution to the man-animal conflict.

**Source:**

- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/smooth-coated-otter-a-new-enemy-of-aqua-farmers/article19522240.ece>

## News on Wetland Restoration

The Kanjia Lake – a wetland of national importance and lifeline for wildlife at the Nandankanan Biological Park (NBP) is now undergoing restoration as workers are clearing the dense thickets that eclipsed the lake’s beauty and choked its water discharge. Thickets over 39 hectares of the 66-hectare lake have already been cleared. The NBP authorities plan to carry on with the clearing work till the lake is fully restored. A barge-mounted heavy duty de-weeding machine has been



deployed to clear the thickets that have been running over the lake for the past 30 years. The situation had grown to such an extent that the thickets had turned into a grazing ground for cattle.

Every year, the NBP authorities carry out minimal de-weeding to facilitate boating as well as supply water to the Nandankanan zoo. NBP director Sisir Acharya stated that the water from Kanjia is vital to the zoo as the water is being supplied from the lake after it is chlorinated. If the water is polluted, it will spell doom for the animals. According to NBP, it is an important wetland lying to the south of the Mahanadi delta head, within the boundary of the Nandankanan Biological Park. The zoological park remains to the south of the lake, whereas the botanical garden is situated to the north. In 2006, the lake was recognised as a wetland of national importance by the Ministry of Environment and Forest. It is home to many local migratory birds. More than 37 species of birds have been spotted in the lake ecosystem. Besides, 20 species of reptiles, 10 species of amphibians, 46 species of fish and three species of prawns have been recorded so far.



The thickets at the lake had been growing for 30 years and had even turned into a grazing ground for cattle.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: August 16, 2017



The floral composition of the lake consists of 10 species of sub-merged macrophytes, 14 of floating macrophytes and 24 of emergent macrophytes. Mr. Acharya stated that the lake is a perennial water body. It is blessed with a good aquifer which allows the groundwater to flow through the rocks. Besides, Kanjia gets surface water from the nearby Chandaka forest, because of which the lake hardly ever dries up. Mr. Acharya said authorities were aware that some unscrupulous elements had blocked the outer channel of Kanjia by ground-filling. He added that a proposal have been moved to clear the encroachments on the lake's outlet.

**Source:**

- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/kanjia-lake-undergoing-restoration/article19500511.ece>

## Report on Wetlands Events

Kerala Legislative Assembly celebrated district-level golden jubilee and organised an environment seminar at the Catholicate College auditorium. CPI leader and former Forest Minister Binoy Viswam inaugurated the seminar and he has called for stern and effective steps to protect wetlands, especially at a time when Kerala, the land of rivers, too has started witnessing acute water scarcity.

The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act was a landmark legislation passed by the Kerala Legislature in 2008. However, there were attempts to weaken the Act from several quarters subsequently. The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 was the most effective Act aimed at environment conservation. He stated that it was a golden chapter in the independent India's history of legislations and the political will shown by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in enacting the law was praiseworthy. The former Minister said the United States' decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change would be a big blow to the global efforts for environment conservation.

Addressing the seminar, John Fernandez, MLA, recalled that Pathanamthitta could add a new chapter in environment conservation through the historic popular agitation against the

controversial Aranmula airport project that would have required conversion of a vast expanse of wetlands and paddy fields. He also stressed the grave need to check indiscriminate razing of hills and granite quarrying.



Former Forest Minister Binoy Viswam inaugurating an environment seminar in Pathanamthitta

Source: The Hindu Dt.: July 13, 2017

**Source:**

- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/need-to- conserve-wetlands-stressed/article19268295.ece>

## News on Wetland Pollution

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Harsh Vardhan on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 said that steps were being taken to check pollution on the wetlands of Ennore creek. In reply to MP Kanimozhi's question in Parliament, Mr. Vardhan said the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control



Board (TNPCB) had issued directions to Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) Limited to take immediate action to remove the ash slurry deposited in the Buckingham canal and Kosasthalayar River area and in the vicinity of Seppakkam village area adjacent to the ash pond. The board had also asked TANGEDCO to furnish a time-bound action plan for the removal of ash slurry.

Ms. Kanimozhi had sought to know whether the government was aware of the large-scale pollution and dumping of flyash and construction debris on the wetlands of Ennore creek. She also wanted details about the measures taken by the government to protect the wetland from pollution and encroachments. The Minister also said that the TNPCB had received complaints with regard to dumping of flyash on the wetlands of Ennore creek and an application had also been filed before the National Green Tribunal (South Zone), Chennai. He also detailed the measures being taken by the Centre to protect wetlands.

**Source:**

- <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/steps-being-taken-to-check-pollution-on-ennore-creek-wetlands/article19404726.ece>

## General News on Wetlands

The Kerala government has issued a notification permitting citizens to apply afresh for corrections in the databank prepared under the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 after repeated attempts to rectify the errors in the document came to nought. Issued as an extraordinary gazette notification on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017, the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland (Amendment) Rules, 2017 permit citizens to apply to the Local Level Monitoring Committee (LLMC), with the agricultural officer as convener, for correction of mistakes in the databank within 90 days from June 1, 2017. It is the latest in a series of procedures and rules formulated by successive governments to correct the document, all of which were either replaced or repealed without redressing the grievances.





After initial attempts to make corrections by the Revenue Department got bogged down, the High Court intervened and took over the responsibility but later relegated the function to the LLMC. In 2015, the UDF government introduced the controversial amendment (Section 3A), according to which paddy wetland reclaimed till 2008 could be regularized by paying 25% of the fair value of the land. A year later, the LDF government repealed the section after the High Court warned that it would be struck down as unconstitutional. The court later called for a report on satellite images available with the Kerala State Remote Sensing and Environment Centre to correct the databank.

The latest notification empowers the LLMC to receive petitions from the public and re-examine the classification of land after site inspection and with the help of satellite images before and after 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008 when the original legislation was enacted. The databank would be revised and published after making the required correction based on reports from the agriculture officer and village officer.

**Source:**

- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/chance-to-correct-wetland-databank/article19375443.ece>