Wetlands News Monitor

January - February 2019

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News brief on Indigenous Flora, Sunderbans, Ramsar, Fish Count, Wetland Birds, Poaching, Vembanad, Smooth-Coated Otter, Thane Creek, Wetland Events, Wetland Conservation and Pollution.

WNM Compiled by: Dr. B. Hemambika, Ms. A. Julffia Begam, Mr. N. Mohamed Ibrahim and Dr. Goldin Quadros
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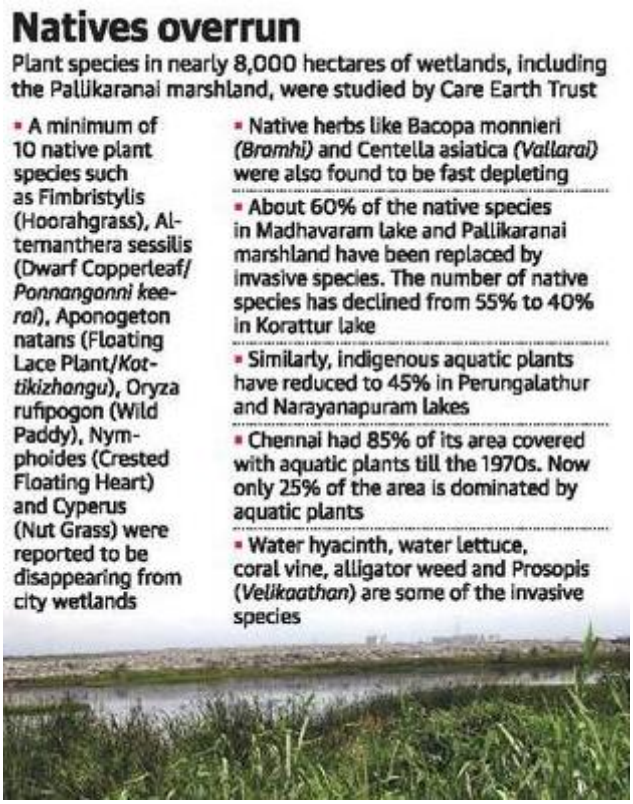
Information on Threat to Indigenous Flora in Chennai wetlands

A study done by the Care Earth Trust, a biodiversity research organisation reveals that nearly half of the native plant species in the Chennai wetlands have been wiped out in recent years, which is an indicative of the degradation of wetlands. Retteri or Madhavaram Lake and Pallikaranai marshland are among the worst affected wetlands in the city. About 60% of the plant species have been overrun by invasive species in the past two years. The study observed the native plant species found in the wetlands of Sembakkam, Ambattur, Perumbakkam, Narayanapuram, Thalambur, Korattur, Madhavaram and Pallikaranai marshland for two years. Mr. N. Muthu Karthick, team leader (research), Care Earth Trust reported that the invasive species have faster growth rate than the natives. Some of the indigenous plants have medicinal value and the once commonly seen native plants have now diminished.



Source: The Hindu Dt.: 19 January 2019

According to the study, the indigenous species are being replaced by invasive and destructive ones. Mr. Karthick cautioned that the rapid depletion in indigenous aquatic plants would prove detrimental to the functions of the wetlands. The decline in indigenous flora would also have indirect implication on food and nutrition security.

Jayshree Vencatesan, Managing Trustee, Care Earth Trust said that the Sembakkam Lake is rich in native aquatic plants and this could be due to its proximity to Nanmangalam reserve forest. She added that there is need to research the role of water bodies and reserve forest in biodiversity conservation. Identifying the invaders and using species-specific methods to remove them periodically could mitigate the depletion of native plant species from the wetlands. The study noted that reintroducing native species in vulnerable habitats could also help.

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Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/indigenous-flora-in-city-wetlands-under-threat/article26039519.ece

News on Sunderbans – 27th Ramsar Site

The Indian side of the Sunderbans has received the prestigious 'Wetlands of International Importance' tag under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, making it the largest protected wetland in the country. It is the home to the Royal Bengal Tiger, this is the second Ramsar site in Bengal after the East Kolkata Wetlands, which got the tag in 2002. The decision was taken at a Ramsar convention in Geneva. The Bangladesh part of the Sunderbans had received the Ramsar tag way back in 1992. Together, both sides of the wetlands spread over an area of over 10,000 sq km rivals the famed Congo River basin and the Amazon estuary as one of the largest transboundary wetlands in the world.

Welcoming the Ramsar tag for the Sunderbans, which was recognised by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1987, environmentalists said it would not only help the world's largest mangrove to feature more prominently in international treaties on bio-diversity and migratory birds, but also help fight climate change and conserve the unique flora and fauna of the region. The recognition comes a year after the West Bengal forest department made a formal bid for the Ramsar recognition following a nod from the state government. The Sunderban Wetland was listed as the 27th site in India on the official Ramsar website on 1st February 2019. The news has been posted on the Ramsar website. This is a big achievement for the state and recognition of sustained efforts by the state government to conserve and protect the wetland and its rich bio-diversity. Ravi Kant Sinha, principal chief conservator of forests, wildlife and chief wildlife warden of West Bengal reported that it also reaffirms the trust of Ramsar Convention and the international community that they will be able to maintain the high standards in protecting and conserving the wetland.

The Sunderban Wetland is located within the largest mangrove forest in the world, which protects the mainland from cyclones, tidal surges and intrusion of salt water. It is also home to

many rare and critically endangered species like the northern river terrapin, the Irrawaddy dolphin and fishing cat while attracting a large variety of migratory birds. Unlike the East Kolkata Wetlands which was recognised as a Ramsar site in 2002 for its wise use, Indian Sunderbans has been listed as an ecological marvel. Sinha stated that the conservation of the wetland has always been a priority as it is home to several rare and endangered avian and aquatic species.

Source: The Times of India Dt.: 03 February 2019

Arurag Danda an environmentalist stated that till now, the Sunderbans has been viewed as a mangrove delta. Now that it is considered a wetland of international significance, one must ensure that the water quality and quantity improves. That would mean significant work upstream. Heavy metals discharged in Kolkata and at the Bantala Leather Complex cannot flow into the Sunderbans. Also, around 14 rivers have run dry. At least some of them need to be revived. The state government believes the Ramsar tag will help to promote the Sunderbans as an eco-tourism hotspot. Environmentalists though believe it will ensure better conservation as any threat to the ecosystem or change in character will mean de-recognition and an international embarrassment.

Source: The Times of India Dt.: 03 February 2019

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/ramsar-tag-makes-indian-sunderbans-largest-protected-wetland-in-country/articleshow/67813084.cms

Report on Vembanad Fish Count

The post-flood Vembanad fish count of 2018 was conducted from December 21st to 23rd by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology (ATRE) and the Community Environmental Resource Centre (CERC) to determine whether the floods had caused changes in fish diversity and resources of Vembanad Lake has recorded the presence of 115 fish species. Surveys began in the northern regions of the lake (the High Court, Aroorkutty, Poothotta and Manjali areas) on December 22 and concluded the next day at the Thanneermukkam bund. From these northern areas alone, the team, including those from the State Wetland Authority, ANTRIX Corporation, and the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS), recorded 82 fin fishes and nine species of freshwater fish. On December 23, the southern regions of the lake, including Thanneermukkam, Punnamada, and Kayippuram, were surveyed. The team obtained a total of 46 fin fishes and five freshwater fish from the region. The last fish count (conducted in May 2018) had recorded a total of 110 species in the lake.

Surveyors of the post-flood Vembanad fish count inspect the fish catch of local fishermen.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 03 January 2019

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Mr. Jojo T.D., Project Coordinator, ATRE-CERC reported that the presence of marine fish and exotic fish (such as African catfish and tilapia) caused the increase in fish species. It could also be due to seasonal changes in fish species diversity as well as the heavy current that could have swept away some local fish populations. The survey also consisted of interviews with local fishermen who depend on the fish resources of the Vembanad Lake for livelihood as well as market surveys to determine the composition of fish catch available for sale. The surveys and interviews showed that the availability of fish had come down post-flood. There has also been a decrease in fish species that bring in high income for local fishermen such as pearl spot (*karimeen*) and shrimp. Several fishermen attributed the phenomenon to the increase in exotic species in the lake. Other observations made during the survey included the presence of water hyacinth in the southern areas of the lake which has grown indiscriminately. Similarly, silt deposits brought into the lake bed during the floods affected fish populations. Mr. Jojo added that detailed studies would be required to study the impact of the floods.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/vembanad-fish-count-records-115-species/article25895125.ece

News on Wetland Birds

(i) The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2019 was carried out on 6th January 2019 in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala where 58 per cent increase of waterbirds in the individual count was recorded compared to the previous year. The AWC, which covered 10 different wetlands, found 4,936 birds from 61 species, including 28 migratory compared to the 3,121 birds from 57 species in 2018 and 4,442 birds from 77 species in 2017.

In Punchakkari, the birding hotspot of the city, sighting of rare birds were less this time. Two Painted Storks, 56 Pheasant tailed Jacanas, 3 Pacific golden Plovers, 32 Wood Sandpipers, 26 Glossy Ibis and 107 Garganey Ducks, which are migratory, were counted by the two field teams deputed to the vast and wide wetland. Count of waders like Sandpipers, Plovers, and Stints were very low compared to previous years and the number of migratory birds was about 500

more than that of 2018. Despite all these positive signs, habitat loss and stray incidents of poaching was observed by the team.

Akkulam, once a haven for waterbirds, deteriorated over the years due to unscientific development and heavy pollution, is showing signs of recovery. Many migratory species including 20 Pheasant tailed Jacanas, 32 Garganey Ducks and 32 Glossy Ibis were spotted. A large flock of Barn Swallows, a wetland dependent bird, numbering around 350, was a marked sighting. Presence of Lesser whistling Ducks and Purple Swamphens, which are resident birds, is a good indicator of the recovery of the water quality. Inspite of all negative factors, the count from the Lake stood at 391 birds from 33 species.

Rare visitor: Glossy Ibis spotted in the Asian Waterbird census carried out in Thiruvananthapuram on January 6.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 06 January 2019

Aruvikkara Reservoir, the main source of drinking water for the city, still remains a good habitat for birds. There is a considerable increase in the number of wetlands species from 10 to 22 and marginal increase in the number of birds from 196 to 213 compared to 2018. The extensive paddy fields in Mosque Lane, Kesavadasapuram and the two ponds within the Museum and Zoo showed a decline in the number of birds. The species count went up from 13 in 2018 to 23.

The Museum & Zoo Compound ensures a safe habitat for the endangered Oriental Darter, Asian Openbill and Black crowned Night Herons. Moreover, it is a nesting ground too for Oriental Darters. The Kannammoola Thodu showed a decrease in the bird count with the number of birds dipping to 249 compared to 315 of 2018. Kadinakmulam wetlands had a marked increase in its bird count than last year. There were 830 birds belonging to 34 species, whereas in 2018 it was 363 from 11 species. The team covering Poovar estuary and its shores listed out 743 birds belonging to 24 species including a flock of 102 Black headed Gulls, 16 Common Terns, 120 Common Swallows and 206 Black Kites. The AWC was conducted by WWF-India with the support of Social Forestry Wing of Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department and Department of Museum & Zoos. The teams were led by AWC Coordinator & Senior Education Officer A. K. Sivakumar.

Renjan Mathew Varghese, State Director, WWF-India stated that the WWF is to come up with the 'Punchakkari Protection Forum' a consortium including panchayats, government departments, State Biodiversity Board, NGOs, birders and other concerned citizens to stand and act for the birding hotspot of the capital.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/waterbirds-flock-to-capitals-wetlands/article25955422.ece

(ii) A greater flamingo was spotted in Visakhapatnam by birdwatchers on 19th January 2019, which was last seen in the 1980's making it a unique discovery of the ongoing season. A solitary greater flamingo was found at the NTPC ash pond area by two birdwatchers say, Janardhan Uppada and K. Harsha Vardhan. Mr. Uppada reported that it was a very unusual sight and initially, they mistook the bird for a painted stork. But when they zoomed in the lenses, they were surprised to see a greater flamingo. He added that this species was never sighted earlier in this region in the recent past. The recent discovery has delighted the birdwatchers. According to them, the solitary bird might have strayed out of the flock and lost its way while on the journey to its habitat.

Vikram Penmetsa, a member of Vizag Birdwatchers Society stated that it is a significant development. Generally, the birds are always on the lookout for mudflats for nesting. He added that they were planning to keep a track of the movement of this species and if the trend continues, they can conclude that the greater flamingos may be looking for an alternate food source.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 23 January 2019

The NTPC ash pond and its neighbouring wetlands attract more than 15 avian species, some of which migrate in the winter such as Eurasian curlew, little stint, plovers and redshank. The recent spotting of greater flamingo in the area has brought the place in the limelight and highlighted the need to protect the wetlands and water bodies of Visakhapatnam, as they are important nesting zones for birds. Residents of west and sub-Saharan Africa, Mediterranean regions, south-west and south Asia, greater flamingos reside in mudflats and shallow coastal lagoons or freshwater marshlands. They feed on molluscs, blue-green algae and microscopic organisms. In Andhra Pradesh, Pulicat Lake is one of the biggest habitats for greater flamingos.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Visakhapatnam/greater-flamingo-spotted-for-first-time-in-visakhapatnam/article26064593.ece

(iii) Lesser white-fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*) is listed as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). But, this species of bird was spotted in Dighal wetlands on third week of February 2019. It was the second confirmed sighting in Delhi-NCR of the lesser white-fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*), which was first seen in India in 2013,

in the wetlands of Gujarat. It is a close relative of the white-fronted goose (which is bigger in size), was first seen in the region in 2016, in the same marshes. So, the long-distance migrant that breeds in the northern most reaches of Asia is a rare visitor to the country. It has certainly caught the birding community unawares.

Rakesh Ahlawat, a birder from the area confessed that it was surprising to see the rare bird second time in Dighal. He described the bird as it is identified by its bright orange legs, a yellow ring around its eye, flesh-coloured bill and mouse-coloured upper-wing coverts. These features made it easier to spot the bird. Also, it is generally seen alone, or in a small group among flocks of other species of geese.

Source: The Times of India Dt.: 19 February 2019

Lesser white-fronted geese in the west winter in Iran and Central Asia, flying all the way up to East Asia, while in the cooler season in the east, the species makes its way southwards from Siberia, towards China or Malaysia. Yet, the lesser white-fronted goose count has declined rapidly in many areas, including in Europe and Russia. In 2015, the waterbird was listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Since then, attempts to reverse the trend have, up to a point, helped stabilise its population. Across the world, programs have been initiated in an effort to strengthen the species' numbers, and protect its habitat in countries to which it migrates.

In India, birders have spoken of the urgency to preserve the wetlands in and around the NCR, since every year, in the recent past, many rare species of birds have been spotted in these marshlands. Pankaj Gupta, from the Delhi Bird Foundation, an NGO insisted that as there were three-four rare sightings were recorded this year from wetlands in Dighal, it calls for an immediate need to provide legal shield to the marshes of the region.

Among species of geese, the lesser white-fronted kind is especially under threat. It's included in the list of species to which the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) applies. The AEWA is an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Greenland and the Canadian archipelago. Besides, the Lesser White-Fronted Goose International Working Group, a global alliance, is working towards making custodians of the environment aware of the importance of safeguarding the species and its habitats. With its population having fallen considerably in Europe, birders now flock every year to Stabbursnes, in Scandinavia, to spot the goose. Stabbursnes is a nature reserve located in the wetlands at the estuary of the Stabburselvariver, in Norway's far north. Still, the sighting of the lesser white-fronted goose in India provides renewed hope to global efforts to salvage its future.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/in-decline-globally-rare-goose-makes-surprise-visit-to-wetlands/articleshow/68040093.cms

(iv) Pong wetland is one of the largest man made reservoir in the country situated in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. Every year thousands of migratory birds arrive here during winter season as water bodies freeze in their homelands. The state wildlife department witnessed an increase in the number of winged guests as this year 1,15,229 birds of 103 varieties have reached. Last year the bird count was 1,10,203. Covering a distance of thousands of miles, birds arrives Pong wetland from Russia, Siberia, Central Asia and Trans Himalayan region of Tibet in the beginning of December or end of November and return to their homelands in February.

The wildlife department in association with Himachal Birds Club, Wetland International, Dharamshala Bird club and many other wildlife enthusiasts, including officials from forest department, too counted the number of birds. The counting exercise began of January 28 and concluded on January 31. About 110 persons took part in the exercise and the entire area was divided into 26 sections. Dr. Savita, chief wildlife warden of Himachal Pradesh stated that there were 1,04,230 migratory water fowls of 58 species, 10,231 were resident water birds of 29 species and 768 birds of 16 local species.

Dominant species that were noted include Bar headed Geese (29,943), Northern Pintails (17,934), Common Pochards (17,742), Eurasian Coots (16,313), Common Teals (7,918), Great Cormorants (5,600), Eurasian Wigeons (1,481), Greylag Geese (1,249) and Ruddy Shelducks (1,164). The uncommon bird species recorded in the lake are common Shelducks (52), Northern Lapwings (39), Common Mergansers (31), Greater White fronted Geese (24), Water Pipits (22), Pied Avocets (06), Ospreys (05), Black Bellied Terns (02), Sarus Cranes (04), Eurasian Culews (02), White tailed Lapwings (02), Lesser White fronted Goose (01), Common Ringed Plover (01) and Hen Harrier (01). Great Crested Grebes, Red Crested Pochards, Ferruginous Pochards, Mallards, Tufted Ducks, Eurasian Spoonbills, Curlew Sandpipers and many other species of larks and Pipits were also seen at the lake. The experts stated that four species that could not be seen this year were Mew Gull, Water Rail, Ruff and Godwit.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/shimla/more-than-1l-birds-of-100-varieties-reach-pong/articleshow/67781955.cms

Report on Bird Poaching

Migratory birds from Siberia being poached in the Baur and Haripura reservoirs in Gularbhoj area of Udham Singh Nagar district in the state of Uttarakhand despite several anti-poaching measures and warnings issued by the forest department. Sources said that almost every other day, there are reports of birds being killed. On 31st December 2018, police had recovered carcasses of six Siberian birds. Acknowledging that the problem was a grave one, Parag Madhukar Dhakate,

conservator of forests of western circle, Kumaon reported that poaching of migratory birds is a major concern. In order to tackle it effectively, support is required from the locals to keep them informed of such incidents. He added that as their part, they have intensified patrolling and have mobilised their existing resources. Several anti-poaching camps have also been set up in the area.

Every year, migratory birds from Siberia, Malaysia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia travel thousands of miles to reach Gularbhoj in search of food and suitable habitat. The area has always been a favourite destination for migratory birds mainly because of its diverse flora and fauna as well as its wetlands. The birds start arriving in November and stay on till March. Among the major species that visit the area are Openbill Stork, Red-crested Pochard, Sandpiper, Plover and Marsh Harrier as well as numerous others. Over the years though, there has been a great demand for the meat of these migratory birds for which the poachers have been deploying various methods to hunt them. Vijay Thokal, a wildlife activist stated that poachers mainly use air guns to shoot the birds besides nets to trap them. Some of them also use poisoned dough to bait the birds and then kill them.

Birdwatchers say that concrete steps must be taken to safeguard the winged visitors. Pran Chadha, an avid birdwatcher reported that the forest department should work in tandem with police and locals to thwart poachers. It is imperative that substantial steps are taken to safeguard them. Ornithologist SD Burman added that these migratory birds not only enrich the region's bio-diversity by creating a balance in the ecosystem, but also enhance the beauty of the area through their colourful presence.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/migratory-birds-from-siberia-being-poached-in-us-nagar-wetlands/articleshow/67371589.cms

Report on Smooth-Coated Otter

A family of Indian smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), including four pups, was sighted in the Krishna estuary located in Andhra Pradesh, indicating a significant rise in the population. The age of the pups photographed was less than one month and they were being

groomed in swimming by their mother. In 2016, the Wildlife Management Division (Eluru) documented the presence of otter in and around the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary and the estuary. The conservation status is 'vulnerable' according to the International Union of Conservation for Nature (IUCN). Independent researcher and wetland expert who works on the restoration of mangrove in Krishna Mr. A. VenkataAppaRao documented the pups.

Presence of healthy and moderately dense mangrove cover and brackish water is serving as suitable habitat for otters.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 12 January 2019

Mr. AppaRao reported that the record of photographs of the otter is being maintained, listing out the places and its breeding grounds in the estuary. He added that a scientific study to estimate the population is the need of the hour. The healthy growth of otter population can be attributed to the abundant availability of prey mostly fish and in its habitat. Presence of healthy and moderately dense mangrove cover and brackish water channels are serving as a suitable habitat for the otters. Winter is the breeding season of the otters. However, they could be sighted in the estuary in all the seasons.

Mr. AppaRao stated that there are a few breeding sites along the river Krishna in the Krishna estuary, in which the visitors can document the otter frequently. Disclosing those details may pose a threat to it. However, putting a regulated system in place to allow the visitors into these breeding sites would also throw light on the diversity of the estuary, apart from drawing attention the attention of the scientific community.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/smooth-coated-otter-population-on-the-rise/article25974571.ece

Report on Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary

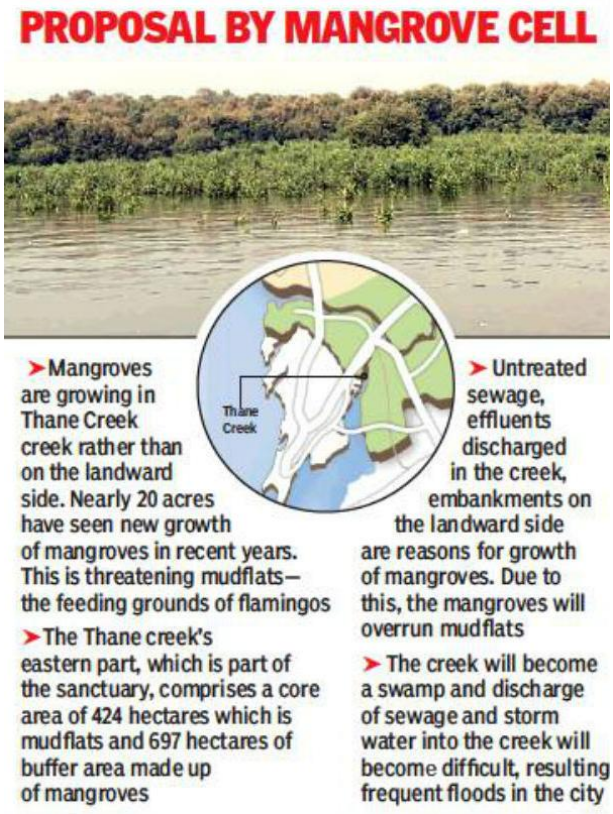
Mr. N. Vasudevan, additional principal chief conservator of forests (mangrove cell) reported that the mangrove conservation cell has proposed cutting of mangroves that have grown in Thane creek and are choking the creek. He informed that they have prepared a draft management plan for Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary.

One of the proposals is to maintain the present mangrove line and all mangroves that grow in the creek beyond this line are to be cut. This is to ensure that mangroves do not overrun mudflats that are feeding grounds for flamingos. He added that the draft management plan is likely to get a nod in a month. Vasudevan also said the problem needs to be seen in a larger context as effluents, untreated sewage are being discharged into the creek which fuels growth of mangroves in the creek.

In the early February 2019, NGO Vanashakti wrote to the state government, warning that nearly 20 acres of Thane creek is already overgrown with mangroves. The letter includes the problem which is unfolding itself is inside the creek which is seeing rapid and excessive siltation. This has narrowed the creek's width and depth. It has created fertile conditions for abundant growth of mangroves inside it. It has warned that if left unchecked, this will lead to the entire creek becoming a swamp and the blockage in the form of mangroves which is growing rapidly will create huge problems for discharge of sewage and storm water from the city. Mr. D. Stalin,

Director, NGO Vanashakti stated that the waterways will become unfit for navigation, nor will it help retain habitat for flamingos, mudflats will be lost and with it the feeding grounds of wetland birds.

In 2015, Bombay Natural History Society in a report on mitigation measures to be adopted for Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link said pollutants in Thane and Mahul-Sewri creeks could be more dangerous than activity of drilling and construction for the bridge. It had recommended that MMRDA and the state government ensure that companies releasing effluents into the creeks set up tertiary treatment plants within five years and see to it that they are functional.



Source: The Times of India Dt.: 17 January 2019

Stalin said the ideal situation would have been if growth of mangroves was on the landward side rather than inside the creek. The NGO has asked the government to clear embankments on the landward side that prevents spread of tide water onto the land. The NGO said that there are ample spaces to allow tide water to spread away from the creek. But these lands have been blocked by manmade bunds to grow grass using the city's sewage. Tourism in the creek will also be severely impacted if the creek becomes unfit for navigation due to shallowness.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/mangroves-choking-thane-creek-to-go-to-save-mudflats/articleshow/67565716.cms

News on Wetland Events

(i) The Coimbatore Bird Race 2018-19 was organised by Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Salim Ali Naturalist Forum (SANF) and Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). During the race, two rare winged visitors namely, Black Stork and White Stork were sighted by team Monarch of the bird watchers of Coimbatore at Pallapalayam Lake. Team Monarch members P.B. Balaji, A. Pavendhan, Sathish Senniappan, N. Sultana and S. Soundarraj spotted the birds. According to SACON, there are no records of these two birds having been spotted earlier in Coimbatore.

The black and white stork spotted at Pallapalayam Lake.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 19 January 2019

Team Monarch was one of the 25 teams that took part in the bird race and covered various lakes. This team chose to visit Pallapalayam Lake, said to be the only wetland in the district. The tank had the water level to support both shore birds known as waders, dabbling ducks, diving ducks and deep water birds. Among the other rare birds sighted are Temminnck's Stint, Black tailed godwits, Ruff, Common Greenshank, Marsh sandpiper, Eurasian Widgeon, Northern Shoveler, Garganey, Northern pintail and Common teal. The bird race is a dawn-to-dusk event where a large gathering of experienced and budding birdwatchers spend an entire day

spotting and identifying birds in an effort to record as many species of birds as possible. The India Bird Races have been conceptualised to help look at the avifauna (birdlife) of the urban areas and their surrounding wealth of habitats. Nearly 3000 people take part in the bird race across cities between December and early-March.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Coimbatore/two-rare-visitors-sighted-at-bird-race/article26034485.ece

(ii) The fifth edition of the State-wide Pongal bird count was conducted by members of Salem Ornithological Foundation from January 14 to 17. During the event as many as 185 species belonging to 61 families including several rare, migratory birds and elusive resident birds were recorded. To cover maximum area, 55 members were split into several groups which visited different habitats in the district to record the birds. While a team comprising A. Tamil Selvan, R. Suguna and Kavitha Ramkumar spotted elusive forest birds such as Painted spurfowl, Emerald dove, Black-throated munia and migrants like the Rusty-tailed flycatcher, Blue-capped rock thrush and Western Crowned warbler in the Shevaroy Hills, S. Subramania Siva spotted White naped tit, one of the rarest birds in the State, in the scrub jungles of Tharamangalam. Salem continues to remain as the only district in the State where this species has been recorded till date.

Another team comprising V. Kalaiselvan, S. Venkatesh and HimavatGouresh spotted foreign migratory birds, Bar-headed goose, Northern pintail, European bee-eater, Booted eagle and several other shorebirds at Pannavadi. The team also spotted 52 individuals of Alpine swifts, which was the highest count for the species recorded in the district so far. A team comprising S. Divya, Angeline Mano, A. Vadivukkarasi and S. Pradeepa visited Yercaud foothills and Kannankurichi Lake and recorded Indian pitta, Thick-billed warbler, Blue-throated flycatcher, Yellow bittern and Ruddy-breasted crake. Students of Panchayat Union Middle Schools at Thalavaipatty and Krishnampudur participated in the bird count in large numbers. Led by their teachers P.Rajangam and S.Senthil Kumar, the students visited several wetlands and counted birds in Pethanaickenpalayam and Omalur taluk respectively.

S.V. Ganeshwar of Salem Ornithological Foundation said that all the sightings were submitted as check-lists to eBird, a global database, which helps to map the distribution and abundance of birds. The data would be used for bird conservation in the long run. In terms of birding hours and check-lists submitted (more than 2,000 lists), Salem outnumbered all other districts in the State and was clearly placed on top of the rankings. He added that overall, 185 species were recorded and 43,685 individual birds were counted by the birders during the count.

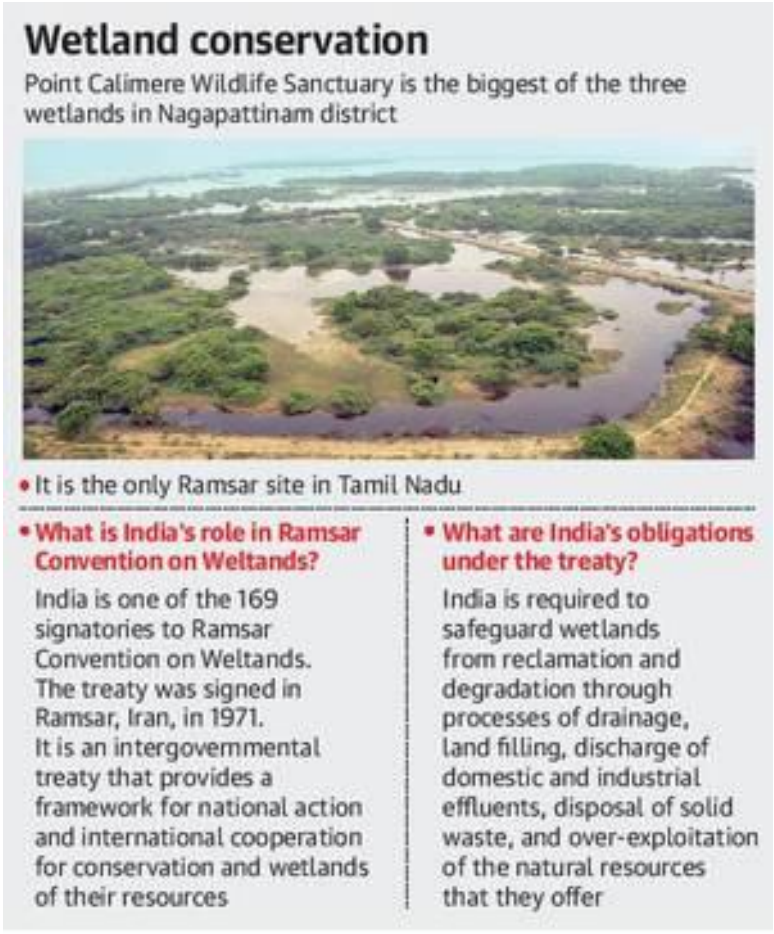
Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/185-species-recorded-during-pongal-bird-count/article26085276.ece

News on Wetland Conservation

(i) A District Level Wetland Management Committee has been constituted in Nagapattinam, much to the relief of bird conservators. At the first meeting of the committee chaired by Collector S. Suresh Kumar, Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Keeran Lake and Perunthottam Lake were announced as wetlands on the recommendation of SACON (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History). The committee consisting of District Forest Officer Naga Satish Gidijala as member-secretary and top officials of line departments as members discussed the way forward for coordinated action to safeguard wetlands from encroachments.

The focus was on preventing urbanisation of the surrounding areas of the water bodies and safeguarding the wetlands from environmental pollution through creating awareness by involving all line departments: Revenue, Rural Development, Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board, Public Works, Town Panchayat, Agricultural Engineering and Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board. The committee is expected to prepare a document prioritising wetlands and delineating zones of influence. For this, the committee has to formulate an inventory team to collect data of the zones of influence of enlisted wetlands to enable field validation.



Source: The Hindu Dt.: 31 January 2019

As per the norms of Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority, the document will be prepared by the team after detailed assessment of data collected through scientific sampling, stakeholder consultations and indigenous traditional knowledge. The District Level Wetland Management Committee is responsible for management and conservation of Wetland in the district and is accountable to Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority. As an advisory body, the committee has to refer any activity related to development and management of any wetland within its Jurisdiction to Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority for approval.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/now-three-waterbodies-are-wetlands-in-nagapattinam/article26134312.ece

(ii) In an effort to replenish rapidly depleting groundwater in Uttar Pradesh, the State Wetland Authority (SWA) has identified 1.23 lakh wetlands across the state for conservation and protection. Of the 1.23 lakh wetlands, as many as 26,000 water bodies are spread over 2.5 hectares each and 97,000 are smaller than that. The order to preserve and protect wetlands was issued by principal secretary, forest, Kalpana Awasthi and SWA chief executive officer Vibhash Ranjan during a video conferencing with senior forest officials.

The government has, meanwhile, entrusted forest officials with the task to file a 25-point comprehensive field report on the status of the identified wetlands and their supporting features for further action. Ranjan reported that after receiving field reports, the state government will notify the wetlands. The move will bring encroachments or any threats, such as discharge of polluted water and unauthorised exploitation of water resource, etc, posed to wetlands under the ambit of stringent law of the Wildlife Protection Act.

Ranjan, who is also chief conservator of forest of Gorakhpur forest zone, said the plan was primarily aimed at increasing the fast depleting groundwater in almost every part of UP. He added that since countless water bodies disappeared due to illegal possession and construction, the existing wetlands urgently needed protection under stringent law. He also stated that in the first phase, SWA will focus primarily on wetlands stretched over 2.5 hectares. And they have given precedence to 10 districts, six in the Ganga basin and four in eastern UP, which have maximum number of wetlands lined up for conservation.

According to Ranjan, at present, Ramgarh Tal in Gorkahpur is spread over 749 hectares, which is the only notified wetland in the country. Field director, Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, Mr. H. Rajamohan reported that SWA has identified a total of 303 wetlands spread over 2.5 hectares or above in Pilibhit district through satellite imagining and remote sensing. Rajamohan discussed about the field report on wetlands and said it included the status of silt, presence of aquatic animals like turtles, fish, otters and crocodiles, cropping patterns in surrounding agricultural area and encroachments. He added that the action plan also includes awareness programmes for local communities, in addition to educating them about the importance of wetlands for the future of vegetation, humans and animals.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bareilly/up-to-preserve-1-23-lakh-wetlands-to-replenish-fast-depleting-groundwater/articleshow/67999107.cms

(iii) The Punjab chief minister approves to declare Kanjli wetland as Kali Bein Conservation Reserve, which will pave way for conservation of area which functions as water sponge by recharging ground water and meeting the water requirement for drinking and irrigation purpose for local people. The new status will help for protection of many flora and fauna species which are facing survival battle in this habitat.

Kanjli is upstream of Harike wetland located in the Beas river basin. It is said that the erstwhile Maharaja of Kapurthala, Raja Randhir Singh, built the head regulator on the river Kali Bein, a tributary of Beas River to provide irrigation facility to local people, in year 1870. The headwork's resulted into creation of Kanjli wetland, which also subsumes the Kanjli Lake.

Kali Bein feeds the Kanjli wetland which once used to be the habitat of gharial, critically endangered species. Since the state government has already introduced gharial in Harike water system which is ecologically quite similar to Kanjli. Thus the wildlife department is now considering Kanjli wetland as alternative site for reintroduction of gharial in near future.

There is 26 hectare of forest area created along the Kali Bein which provides an excellent habitat for both flora and fauna. This includes variety of plant communities Obligate Hydrophytic to Obligate Xerophytic found in the area. Incidentally, it is the only wetland in the Punjab which supports population of unique insectivore's plant known as *Utricularia australis* or Yellow Bladderworts. The Conservation reserve will ensure survival of many such unique species. This includes those who are not directly dependent on wetland. Like bat colonies roosting on peripheries are common sight in the wetland. Flying Fox, one of the bat species, which has been slotted in the category of Near Threatened by International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN), will benefit from the new enhanced status.

Over the years, two more satellite wetlands have been formed around Kanjli wetland, which provide good habitat to the migratory as well as non-migratory birds. A number of unique

birds belonging to species like waders and ducks can be seen frolicking in and out of water. These include Eurasian Curlew (Near threatened by IUCN) and Common Pochard (Vulnerable by IUCN). The protection and conservation measures will automatically be extended to this satellite wetland though they are not under any jurisdiction at present.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/punjab-cm-approves-kanjli-wetland-as-kali-bein-conservation-reserve/articleshow/68037235.cms

News on Wetland Pollution

Researchers, scientists, citizens brainstorm about ways of rejuvenating and saving Bengaluru's lakes. At a day-long workshop on 'Urban Lakes: Water Security and People's Livelihood', organised by the Karnataka Environment Research Foundation, the Energy and Wetlands Research Group - Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) - Indian Institute of Science (IISc.), and the Institution of Engineers, discussions centered around the importance of lakes to the regional hydrological cycle.

Lakes support large biological diversity, and provide ecosystem services such as food, fibre, waste assimilation, water purification, flood mitigation, erosion control, groundwater recharge, apart from enhancing the aesthetics of the landscape. However, T.V. Ramachandra from the CES said Bengaluru is a dying city, with froth and fire coming out of it, referring to the 900-acre Bellandur Lake. Recalling the rejuvenation blueprint readied for Bellandur and Varthur lakes, he said apart from identifying an 'owner' for the lakes, which neither the Bangalore Development Authority or the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is willing to own up, residents welfare associations should act as pressure groups and keep vigil on the progress of rejuvenation work.

At the workshop, citizens who are part of rejuvenation efforts recounted challenges encountered in the process and post-rejuvenation. For instance, representatives from the Devarabisanahalli Lake Improvement Trust said the lake, for which the first phase of

rejuvenation was completed in December 2018, has no 'breathing space' outside the fence as the catchment area on the buffer zone has been concretised. The lack of regulations for groundwater use and the urgent need for it was also emphasised.

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 21 February 2019

Mr. K. Elangovan, Member of Whitefield Rising stated that though recycled water is supposed to be used for construction and by industries, this is not the case. He added that the groundwater regulations are zero and there is also no third party audit of water quality. Former ISRO scientist C.J. Jagadeesha said it is necessary to treat groundwater as a common property resource and not an individual resource.

Almitra Patel, Member, Supreme Court Committee for Solid Waste Management, suggested a policy to get companies to indicate the phosphorous levels in detergents, which would help consumers, make an informed choice. Taking forward a point put forth by Sridhar Pabbisetty, Chief Enabler, Centre for Inclusive Governance, on decentralisation of water management, she said citizens should switch to options other than strong phenyl and bleaches, which are microbe killers, in their bathrooms. She also called for better management of construction debris, which is often being dumped on lakebeds.

Source:

- https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/phosphorous-content-in-detergents-a-threat-to-lakes/article26332356.ece

General Wetland News

Two wetlands in Gujarat, India's the only Ramsar site, Nalsarovar, and Khijadia, have found a place in the national project, "India's National Action Plan for Conservation of Migratory Birds and their Habitats along Central Asian Flyway". The Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change has prepared a draft proposal for the action plan whose long-term goal is to arrest population decline and secure the habitats of migratory birds.

The action plan states that the Central Asian Flyway (CAF), one among the nine flyways in the world, encompasses overlapping migration routes over 30 countries for various waterbirds, linking their northern-most breeding grounds in Russia (Siberia). India has a strategic role in the flyway, as it provides critical stopover sites to 90% of bird species using this route. The National Action Plan (NAP) for conservation of migratory birds and their habitats aims to halt the decline in the number of migratory birds; improve data and decision-support systems to underpin science-based conservation of species and management of habitats; sensitize stakeholders to take collaborative actions on securing habitats and species; and to support trans-boundary co-operation in range countries.

According to the NAP, at least 370 species of migratory birds from three flyways visit the Indian subcontinent, of which 310 use wetlands as habitats. The NAP says data shows that CAF migratory landbirds are declining rapidly. Species that breed on pastures and farmland areas, which have to cross the Himalayas, the Thar Desert and the Rann of Kutch to winter in the Indian sub-continent are most affected. The NAP states that the major stresses on migratory bird populations are habitat loss and degradation, pollution, illegal shooting and poisoning, collisions with aerial structures such as wind turbines, electrocution by power lines and increasing night light. The first phase will cover several sites in Gujarat (Nalsarovar and Khijadia), Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu among others.

Source:

- https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/two-gujarat-wetlands-figure-in-national-action-plan/articleshow/67811920.cms