



Wetlands News Monitor

March - April 2019

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News brief on Sundarban, Keshopur Wetland, Siswan Wildlife Reserve, Olive Ridley Turtles, Otter, Fishing Cat, Wetland Birds and Wetland Conservation.





News on Sundarban Wetland

The Indian Sundarban was accorded the status of 'Wetland of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention on 30th January 2019. The Sundarbans comprises hundreds of islands and a network of rivers, tributaries and creeks in the delta of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal in India and Bangladesh. Located on the southwestern part of the delta, the Indian Sundarban constitutes over 60% of the country's total mangrove forest area. It is the 27th Ramsar Site in India, and with an area of 4,23,000 hectares is now the largest protected wetland in the country.

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, better known as the Ramsar Convention, is an international agreement promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. Traditionally viewed as a wasteland or breeding ground of disease, wetlands actually provide freshwater and food, and serve as nature's shock absorber. Wetlands, critical for biodiversity, are disappearing rapidly, with recent estimates showing that 64% or more of the world's wetlands have vanished since 1900. Major changes in land use for agriculture and grazing, water diversion for dams and canals and infrastructure development are considered to be some of the main causes of loss and degradation of wetlands.

The Indian Sundarban met four of the nine criteria required for the status of 'Wetland of International Importance', which includes the presence of rare species and threatened ecological communities, biological diversity, significant and representative fish and fish spawning ground and migration path. The Indian Sundarban, also a UNESCO world heritage site, is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger. The Ramsar website points out that the Indian Sundarban is also home to a large number of "rare and globally threatened species, such as the critically endangered northern river terrapin (*Batagur baska*), the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), and the vulnerable fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*)." Two of the world's four horseshoe crab species, and eight of India's 12 species of kingfisher are also found here. Recent studies claim that the Indian Sundarban is home to 2,626 faunal species and 90% of the country's mangrove varieties.





Environmentalists and forest officials say the Ramsar status will help to highlight conservation issues of the Sundarbans at the international level. The part of the Sundarban delta, which lies in Bangladesh, was accorded the status of a Ramsar site in 1992, and with Indian Sundarban getting it too, international cooperation between the two countries for the protection of this unique ecosystem will increase. This could lead to a better conservation strategy for flagship species such as the tiger and the northern river terrapin.

The Indian Sundarban is a biodiverse preserve. The major threat to on this ecosystem is due to the pressure of over four million people living on its northern and northwestern periphery. Concerns have been raised about natural ecosystems being changed for cultivation of shrimp, crab, molluscs and fish. The Ramsar Information Sheet lists fishing and harvesting of aquatic resources as a "high impact" actual threat to the wetland. The other threats are from dredging, oil and gas drilling, logging and wood harvesting, hunting and collecting terrestrial animals. Salinity has been categorised as a medium and tourism as a low impact actual threat in the region. Experts believe that while the Ramsar status may bring international recognition to the Indian Sundarban, the wetland along with anthropogenic pressures is also vulnerable to climate change and requires better management and conservation practices.

Source:

https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/protecting-the-sundarbanwetlands/article26482707.ece

Report on Keshopur Wetland

Keshopur wetland in Gurdaspur is inching closer be the third Ramsar site (wetlands of International importance) in Punjab. The three-day joint inspection visit of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) experts and officials of Punjab forest department prepared a report on this matter. Report is soon going to be tabled before the office of chief wildlife warden and then forwarded to union environment ministry for a final seal on the declaration. There are three Ramsar sites - Harike, Kanjli and Ropar in the state which are significant habitats for waterfowl, fish and





plethora of other endangered and vulnerable species of flora and fauna. The other two wetlands in the state, Ranjit Sagar and Nangal are national wetlands.

Geetanjali Kanwar, WWF researcher and member of the inspection team reported that Keshopur wetland fulfills criterion to become a Ramsar site. There are around nine such criterion, out of which if any wetland fulfills even one criterion, it can become eligible to be declared to a Ramsar site. She said that team is studying almost all the nine criterion, but Keshopur certainly fulfils two to three criterion which include wetland being used by more than 20,000 migratory and native birds and is habitat of critically endangered/near endangered/vulnerable species. Keshopur has many such birds including Sarus Crane of vulnerable category.

The Keshopur wetland is also known as Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve or 'Chhamb' in local Punjabi dialect. It is one of the Asia's biggest wetlands, located in the middle of the Ravi and Beas rivers. There are experts who believe that the area which earlier must have been a flood plain of the two rivers before barrages and dams were erected over it, is now fed by rain and groundwater. The 850-acre-marsh was declared as country's first notified community reserve following a Punjab Government Notification on June 25 in year 2007. This has now resulted into the joint management of the wetland by forest department and the locals of five villages namely Keshopur, Mattam, Miani, MagharMudhian, and Dala who shares ownership of the site. Keshopur now shows the way to involve locals to protect the natural conservation sites as other three established Ramsar sites Harike, Ropar and Kanjli are facing serious problems of pollution and encroachments. Contrary to that Keshopur has registered drastic increase in the arrival of migratory birds. In year 2011, it witnessed 4500 birds which soared in numbers, recorded over 25000 in 2016. It attracts migratory birds from Central Asia and Siberia in large number each year in the winters.

Kanwar expressed hope that Keshopur wetland had bright chance to make it to the Ramsar site. Kuldeep Singh, who is nodal officer of Wetland affairs in the Punjab state, reported that soon the compiled report to the chief wildlife warden will be sent. He added that he will then forward this report to the union environment ministry for consideration for Ramsar site."



Source:



https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/keshopur-wetland-likely-to-be-thefourth-ramsar-site-in-punjab/articleshow/69074355.cms

Report on Siswan Wildlife Reserve

The Punjab wildlife and forest department while exploring the Siswan wildlife reserve has planned to develop it as a community reserve and an eco-tourism destination. According to Kuldeep Kumar, chief wildlife warden, Punjab, The Punjab Wildlife Department has even prepared a report on the ecological assessment of the Siswan reserve. The report apart from conducting a census of wildlife animals found in the reserve also surveyed the presence of amphibians as well as insects using CCTV camera traps installed at different locations in Siswan Community Reserve.



Source: The Times of India Dt.: 16 April 2019

Kuldeep Kumar said despite it being the first study of its kind in this area and limitation of time, a series of rapid surveys were carried out by a team of the wildlife faculty and researchers from October 2016 to June 2017. Surveys were carried out for generating information about large mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and vegetation. To assess people's perspective concerning the reserve participatory methods like focused group





discussions, social and resource mapping and time-line surveys were undertaken. He said it has been observed that Siswan can be developed as a community reserve and eco-tourism destination. It has a huge potential for tourism also. With abundance of wildlife, Siswan can be a natural habitat and lifeline for the wildlife of the area. Because of these reservoirs, this is a unique habitat blend of forest and wetland ecosystems. He further added that the Wildlife Institute of India received a project from the chief wildlife warden during 2016 for developing this area as an eco-tourism destination.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) was also asked to provide its technical advice on the project and for developing its wildlife habitat. A team of scientists from the WII visited the Siswan reserve in July 2016 and suggested measures for developing this area as a potential wildlife and eco-tourism site. During this brief visit, it was revealed that the area had a good population of sambar and other species, including birds. It was realised that a detailed ecological assessment of the area could throw more light on the wildlife values. In the light of this, a project for ecological assessment of Siswan reserve was submitted to the chief wildlife warden, Punjab.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/punjab-siswan-reserve-to-be-madeeco-tourism-destination/articleshow/68897906.cms

Information on Olive Ridley Turtles

(i) 226 hatchlings of endangered Olive ridley turtle was incubated and released into the sea at Thottappally Coast, Alappuzha by environmentalists and local people overcoming the challenges posed by the August deluge, heatwave and other impediments. The Thottappally Coast is one of the prime locations for egg-laying turtles in the State. According to environmentalists, they stumbled upon only three nests with a total of 342 eggs during the entire season as against 11 nests a year ago. Last year, 1,648 hatchlings were released to the sea.

Saji Jayamohan, Secretary, Green Roots Nature Conservation Forum reported that in this season, the first nest with 106 eggs was found just before the floods in August 2018. When the





floodwaters started to submerge the area, they built a small concrete tank with roof and placed the eggs in it for incubation. The entire tank was then covered with plastic to prevent the water from entering it. Although it took more time than usual, 53 eggs have been hatched. Further, two more clutches with 120 and 116 eggs have been found after the turn of the year. Despite the dry condition, of the 116 eggs in the third nest 110 eggs have been hatched.



Source: The Hindu Dt.: 05 April 2019

Mr. Jayamohan said the floods and sea erosion had eroded around seven acres of the coast that used to be the main nesting sites of Olive ridleys. He added that other than the damage caused by the floods, the presence of stray dogs and mineral sand-mining at the Thottappally harbour also prevented turtles from nesting in the area. The environmentalists said lack of a permanent hatchery and rescue centre hampered their conservation efforts. At present, after Olive ridleys lay eggs, the environmentalists and social forestry officials, with the help of local people, relocate eggs to temporary hatcheries from areas with tidal fluctuations. Also, they want to protect it from stray dogs and other dangers. Although a proposal for a permanent hatchery has been submitted to the government, the project is yet to get the nod. The environmentalists warned as other than the mineral sand-mining at the Thottappally harbour, the move to extract mineral sand from the Thottappally estuary will further adversely impact the nesting of turtles.





Source:

https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/greens-come-to-rescue-of-olive-ridleyturtles/article26747320.ece

(ii) A total of 950 Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings were released into the sea at Besant Nagar on 12th April 2019 evening from one of the three hatcheries set up by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department. According to officials, this year more than 50,000 eggs of the endangered Olive Ridley turtles were collected by forest department personnel. C.H. Padma, Wildlife Warden, Chennai stated that this year is the first time the department has got such a high number of eggs and the success rate of hatching is nearly 90%. On an average, nearly 40,000 eggs are collected every year.



The Olive Ridley scampering across the Besant Nagar beach. Photo Credit: K. Pichumani

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 13 April 2019

On 12th April 2019, around 6 p.m., after nearly 45 days of hatching, the 950 hatchlings made a frenzied crawl on the beach sand and headed into the sea, guided by the light from the horizon. A smile lit up the faces of the forest department officials and some volunteers present as the turtles disappeared among the waves. H. Malleshappa, Principal Chief Conservator of





Forests; Sanjay Srivatsava, Chief Wildlife Warden; S.M Abbas, chief project director, TBGP; Yogesh Singh, director, Vandalur Zoo, and other senior forest officials were present.

Mr. V. Mohan, the headquarters ranger stated that they took utmost care of the eggs. This year they collected over 20,000 eggs in Besant Nagar, 21,000 in Kovalam and 10,000 in Pulicat. Five years ago there were only around 300 nests, but this year they have over 500. He added that the staff and volunteers went on frequent walks along the beach to check on the endangered turtles. There were guards on three shifts to ensure that no eggs were damaged by dogs or human beings. Chennai Collector A. Shanmuga Sundaram held a stakeholders meeting in February to discuss the various measures and precautions to be taken during the conservation season. He had warned of strict action against resorts functioning after 11.00 p.m. during the season. The ranger said like every year, instructions were provided to the Chennai Corporation to switch off the lights between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. However this year, it was mostly adhered to.

Source:

https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/950-turtle-hatchlings-go-back-to-thesea/article26824325.ece

Report on Otter in Haidarpur Wetland

A family of otters has been spotted for the first time in Haidarpur wetland in Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary by forest department officials. The wetland is connected to river Ganga. According to experts, this fresh water predator is crucial to any wetland conservation programme and is an indicator of wetlands' health and stability because of its innate nature to shun polluted waters. The sighting of the otter happened as because the National Green Tribunal pulled up UP government for high level of pollution in the rivers of western UP. The otters' presence indicate that quality of Ganga water is better than before and is conducive for regeneration of aquatic animals including otters.

The Haidarpur wetland spans 70 sq km area in the 2,074 sq km Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary and is known to be habitat for migratory birds which come from many part of the





world during winter. After capturing the picture of one otter, divisional forest official Mr. M. Semmaran said that as he was patrolling the area, he spotted a family of otters, which were big but disappeared in the water. He chased them and finally managed to click a picture of one big otter. He reported that they did not have any record of otter sightings in the area previously and this is the first time he has spotted these mammals in these waters. He added that now, they will keep a record of this vulnerable species. These mammals, listed in schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, are rarely seen due to their extremely shy nature. They feed on fish, bird eggs and small creatures like frogs.

Coordinator of WWF, Hastinapur Sanctuary, Shahnawaz reported that he had spotted otters in 2010 in the old Ganga area in Meerut district. There are three types of otters: smooth, common and small clout. He added that the mammal spotted in Haidarpur was a smooth otter, which is rare and this is the first time when it was sighted in Haidarpur wetland and backwaters of the Ganga. Joel Lyall, a wildlife expert stated that there were plenty of otters in the waters around Ravali village in the 60s. But due to water pollution, agricultural activities and intrusion of human beings in their territories, otters had virtually disappeared from these parts. He said it was possible for otters to thrive again if humans did not disturb them.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/in-a-first-otter-family-spotted-inhaidarpur-wetland/articleshow/68455458.cms

Report on Fishing Cat

Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary in East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh records an increase in fishing cat population. According to a census exercise done as part of a survey conducted by the Forest Department, in association with the EGREE Foundation, the fishing cat population in the sanctuary has gone up to 115 compared to 70 in 2014. After the previous surveys concluded a decrease in the numbers of the animal by 70% in a decade, the fresh one has come as a good news to nature lovers.





Known as 'Neeti Pilli' in local parlance, fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) is a mammal double the size of domestic cat and native to wetlands, swamps and marshy areas. Rapid depletion of wetland is posing a threat to the animal on a global scale. It has been designated 'vulnerable' in the Red List of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). According to the forest officials, the survey was conducted in the sanctuary spreading in 235.7 km and its adjoining area of another 75 sq. km. between June and August last year and the findings were published in early month of April 2019.



A fishing cat caught in camera trap during a survey undertaken in Coringa wildlife

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 13 April 2019

Anant Shankar, DFO (wildlife) reported that they have conducted the data in a scientific manner. In June and July 2018, they have installed 57 camera traps in the sanctuary and the animal population was under surveillance for a month. In August, 37 more cameras were installed in the adjoining areas for 22 days. During the 2,480 camera trapping days, the officials identified six mammals including fishing cat, Indian golden jackal, rhesus macaque, smooth coated otter, jungle cat and mongoose. He stated that among these species, the fishing cat is on the verge of extinction. Their study was aimed at getting the exact number of this species in the sanctuary.





Making the camera trapping exercise a periodic affair, creating awareness among stakeholders about the importance of fishing cat and promoting sustainable aquaculture farming in the fringes of the mangrove areas are the recommendations made by the team that undertook the census.

Source:

https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/coringa-recordsan-increase-in-fishing-cat-population/article26826932.ece

News on Wetland Birds

(i) Eurasian Bittern, a rare migratory bird also known as Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), was recently spotted at the Ezhome wetlands near Pazhayangadi. The bird was spotted and photographed by birdwatcher Jayan Thomas on 24th March 2019.



The Eurasian Bittern

Source: The Hindu Dt.: 29 March 2019

WNM Compiled by: Dr. B. Hemambika, Ms. A. Julffia Begam, Mr. N. Mohamed Ibrahim and Dr. Goldin Quadros ENVIS Centre, Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty P.O., Coimbatore – 641108, India





According to Dr. Thomas, eBird, an international platform to record bird sightings, mentions that the only other photograph of this bird in Kerala is from Thiruvananthapuram and this is the third picture from southern India. He says the sighting of this rare bird has been confirmed by ornithologists C. Sashikumar and Praveen J. Mr. Sashikumar said that 10 years ago, there had been total seven sightings of this bird in the State, mainly from the kole wetlands of Thrissur. He added that there was one specimen at the Parassinikadavu Snake Park which died in captivity in December 1997.

Dr. Thomas, an ophthalmologist stated that the Eurasian Bittern was a bird in the bittern subfamily of the heron family. It was larger than a pond heron, golden brown in colour and cryptically patterned with blackish cap and a moustache. It is a secretive bird seldom seen in the open field and prefers to skulk in reed beds and thick vegetation near waterbodies. It feeds on fish, small mammals, baby birds, amphibians, crustaceans and insects. The bird makes a big foghorn-like booming sound which sounds scary in the night. The Eurasian Bittern breeds in areas between Great Britain and Japan and flies to South East Asia during winter. Ezhome wetland is a unique habitat for migratory birds and very special waders such as Swinhoe's snipe and Long-toed stint.

Source:

https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/rare-migratory-birdspotted-at-ezhome-wetlands/article26669578.ece

(ii) Talawe water body behind NRI complex in Nerul, Navi Mumbai necessitates protection as thousands of migratory birds, especially flamingos flapping their wings or sweeping across this water body. Nature lovers from outside Navi Mumbai have also been gathering at the bank of the water body to watch the amazing sight. Many click photos or personal videos of the birds flocking to the site in the morning and during sunset. Shailaja, a resident of NRI phase II, has been taking photographs of the migratory bird almost every day from her balcony. She stated that during October-November, these birds start flying in and by March-April their number swells to thousands till it is time for them to leave before the rain arrives. She added that this sight never fails to tire everyone and each year, everyone will be ready with their cameras and mobiles to





capture the avian visitors. However, residents are now scared that if the water body, like others, is usurped by the local land sharks or even by some development project, the peaceful surrounding along with the yearly visitors will disappear.

Sunil Agarwal, a nature lover and a member of Save Navi Mumbai Environment group said that these wetlands and mangroves are home to several species of plants, animals and marine life. If anyone wants to watch the annual passage of the migratory birds in Talawe, the water bodies and wetlands have to be protected. Any residential or reality project should not be allowed in this place. Wetlands and waterbody should not be reclaimed but preserved for the sake of natural biodiversity.

Deepak Yewale, resident of NRI added that they want to protect the wetland and keep the natural habitat intact. Two years back, a part of the wetland was somehow grabbed by a builder and all fought to protect it. Dharmendra Kar, another nature activist from Kharghar reported that the residents should also change their behaviour towards water body. They should not throw any garbage in the water body and must keep the surrounding area clean to welcome our winged guests.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/navi-mumbai/fight-to-save-wetlands-if-youwant-to-see-flamingos-every-yr/articleshow/68971744.cms

News on Wetland Conservation

(i) Karal wetland in Uran, Navi Mumbai is a bird-rich wetland is facing threat due to the dumping of illegal debris. Local environmentalists stated that have written again to the state mangrove cell and other departments about how illegal debris dumping is taking place at Karal village. Sunil Agarwal, activist reported that this has stopped the tidal waters from reaching one portion of the wetland, where several rare birds such as flamingos, storks and ibis kingfishers, egrets and various types of bee eaters have been spotted in the past. He added that the government must act now, or we will lose yet another priceless wetland to land sharks. He and





other local activists like Vivek Kadu have also clicked onsite photos showing how the tidal waters have been blocked because of debris dumping and urged the state officials to act quickly.

The deputy conservator of forests (mangrove cell) Neenu Somaraj reported that they have asked the Raigad district authority to send a report about the issue, following which their office will take action and if necessary, they will lodge an FIR against any accused person. Activist Stalin D stated that he have asked the green crusaders in Karal to deflate the tyres of any dumpers coming to the spot to throw debris, as it is an illegal act and the law enforcers must act on it. Many other wetland spots in Uran are in danger, as reported in the media recently.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/navi-mumbai/save-karal-wetland-before-its-toolate/articleshow/68382475.cms

(ii) A solution to tackling water scarcity in the sun-baked plains could lie high above, in the mountains. A team of researchers from Chennai-based Care Earth Trust is studying waterbodies in elevated areas, one of the first places of water capture in the hydrological cycle, as part of a major effort to conserve them for sustainability in future. Avanthika Bhaskar of the Trust elaborated that the study has been started three years ago in the marshes of Dindigul district's Kodaikanal in the Western Ghats and the location of the study has now moved to the Nilgiris. Preliminary research has reiterated that wetlands in the hills are the key to sustaining biodiversity, especially herbaceous plants, birds and mammals. Bhaskar added that armed with the findings of the study, after it is completed, the state forest department is set to incorporate mountain wetlands in its plans for integrated watershed management and forest conservation, in addition to involving local communities for sustainable use in future. Water stored in swamps and wetlands at top of the hills is important for recycling. Despite the significance, conducting research into these 'water towers' is challenging mostly because of the small size and the subjects often being difficult to map using standard wetland inventory techniques.





In spite of their elevated location, the hydrological characters of the various wetland types are herbaceous wetlands with mineral soils, including marshes, wet meadows and salt flats; peat lands (fens and bogs); and riparian wetlands along streams that change frequently, mainly due to human intervention. For example, in the Nilgiris, when the water runoff from the numerous tea estates dotting the region drains in such wetlands, the chemical residues in the runoff impacts the soil as well as the water quality. One of the major threats to these water sources is conversion from one form to another, resulting in the loss of key hydrological regions.



Source: The Times of India Dt.: 22 March 2019

Global warming is another major threat and with mountain wetlands identified as being among the most sensitive to climate change could affect their very existence. Mountain wetlands are also the key to the survival of wildlife. She said that they serve as critical habitats for a large number of species, many of which are adapted to a particular hydrologic regime and are therefore projected to shift further up the hills under future climate change scenarios.

Bhaskar also sounded an alert for wetlands in the Palani Hills in Dindigul district. Despite being located within a protected area, where the human intervention is limited, they are shrinking due to exotic but invasive tree species such as pine, acacia and adenophora.





High precipitation, humidity and cool temperatures are conducive to formation of wetlands in the Anamalai, Nilgiris and Palani ranges of the Western Ghats whose western slopes receive nearly 5,000 mm of rainfall annually.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/need-to-protect-hill-wetlands-todaytosave-water-for-future/articleshow/68514932.cms

(iii) Environmentalists from Pune City are concerned that fewer wetland areas and rising pollution in the district has had a negative effect on biodiversity in the area. There are 76 inland wetlands in Pune district and environmentalists feel that conservation efforts need a boost. For instance, the ripple effects of not conserving wetlands can be seen at the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary. Meghna Baphna, a volunteer at the Salim Ali Biodiversity Park reported that it is known that the dissolved oxygen levels in the Mula and Mutha rivers is zero for the last many years. The fish are dying and because of this, birds and other animals that prey on the fish are hit.



The dwindling Pashan Lake

Source: The Times of India Dt.: 26 April 2019

WNM Compiled by: Dr. B. Hemambika, Ms. A. Julffia Begam, Mr. N. Mohamed Ibrahim and Dr. Goldin Quadros ENVIS Centre, Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty P.O., Coimbatore – 641108, India





Dharmaraj Patil, biodiversity expert and a director of NGO Jeevitnadi said that wetlands are important roosting sites for migratory birds. In all, 90% birds that visit India come to the wetland areas. Apart from lakes, even smaller ponds get these birds. For instance, the confluence area of the Mula and Mutha has tremendous biodiversity. Wetlands, like Veer dam near Saswad, are in need of conservation.

Vishwajit Naik, ornithologist stated that the number of migratory birds has reduced in the area. He added that the Demoiselle Crane used to come in large numbers at Veer dam but is hardly seen now. Patil said it's also crucial to conserve wetlands since these areas support groundwater recharge. One of the reasons for the shrinking wetlands in the city is rampant encroachment. Citing the example of Pashan Lake, Patil said that it used to be visible from the Pashan circle in the 1980s but now the lake is too restricted. Nearby wetland areas have been converted into development zones.

The state government set up a wetland authority last year to map and conserve these areas. However, Patil said the process overlooks small inland wetland ecosystems. He reported that when the forest department talks about conservation of forests, it's always about the larger area of forests. Smaller areas are the corridors for conservation of the larger wetlands. One of the ways to do promote conservation was through geotagging. Patil added that they tell civic bodies and other government agencies that they must first geotag the biodiversity-rich areas like wetlands. Without this, they'd never know that there were wetland areas that have disappeared. Over the last ten years, many wetlands have faded away.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/wetland-conservation-key-to-thrivingbiodiversity-experts/articleshow/69049243.cms

(iv) Sindhudurg, Nagpur has become the country's first district to have successfully documented and mapped wetlands, following a judiciary order. Engaging community participation in the eight-month long process, the district is now training bodies of other districts in the state to replicate its documentation model. While hearing a public interest litigation filed





by NGO Vanshakti for preservation of wetlands, the Bombay High Court had directed the state government to carry out wetland mapping in all the districts. In June 2018, the government had informed the court that it was taking up a pilot project in Sindhudurg for mapping wetlands. The district administration approached the team of local organization Syamantak, which suggested engaging community participation in the documentation and mapping process.



A team of experts undergoing training in Sindhudurg

Source: The Times of India Dt.: 26 April 2019

Taxonomist Balkrishan Gawde, an expert member of the committee reported that they advised the collector to rope in botanists, zoologists, environmentalists and other experts to form the Sindhudurg Wetland Brief Documentation Committee. School and college students were also involved as volunteers to facilitate education through sustainable development. Involving citizens had another benefit too. Sachin Desai, who is running Syamantak's study centre for experiential learning in Dhamapur stated that conducting mapping through community is an effective way to save public money. He added that if this model is implemented across the state, the government can save crores.





The committee completed the task of mapping 57 wetlands in the district in about eight months. Yogesh Koli, an assistant professor in zoology and a committee member stated that they became the first district in the state to submit wetland documentation. Following this, the court directed the state to see how many districts can be undertaken simultaneously for wetland mapping. The momentum was such that Syamantak started receiving calls of administrative officials from different districts. After setting-up a unique participatory for the state, the committee is now training other districts on conducting wetland mapping. Desai added that they are currently training officials from different districts of Konkan including Ratnagiri, Raigad, Palghar and also Thane. He added that they are also helping the administrations in identifying local expert members for the committee. Apart from this, the committee has recommended to survey five new wetland sites.

Sindhudurg will soon be releasing the first volume of magazine 'Sindhudurg — Land of Wetland', the first-of-it-kind in the country. The district planning and development council (DPDC) is giving financial support to the magazine through the forest department. The magazine has detailed information about the findings of documentation process.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/sindhudurg-training-state-bodies-todocument-wetlands/articleshow/69032554.cms

General Wetland News

(i) Grey heron flies over a wetland some 60km from Delhi. It locates the fishes in the waters using its avian instinct. While the long-legged bird tries to take a dip and before it reaches its prey, the heron gets entangled in a large trap net. The nylon nets have been placed all over the wetland without a thought for the health of the birds that flock to these parts. Every time Rakesh Ahlawat, a resident of Dighal, visits the wetland and he finds at least a handful of remains of big birds hanging in the nets, which are used for fish cultivation in the local water bodies. Ahlawat reported that in the last three-four months, they have found carcasses of at least 100 birds and they have been running from pillar to post to get these fishing nets removed from the wetlands.





With the help of the authorities, they managed to get some nets removed from wetlands in Rohtak, but these nets still pose a threat in other areas, including Jhajjar, which too has big wetlands. This correspondent visited the marshes and found carcasses of six birds suspended inside the trap nets, which have been set up in an area encompassing more than 50% of the wetlands in Rohtak and Jhajjar.

Half of the 130 water bodies including village ponds and lakes are covered by the nylon nets; in Dighal, two of the 10 creeks have been overlaid with the same. And it is the larger bird species, among them herons, cormorants, storks and cranes that face more risk from the deadly nets. Worryingly, not only does fish farming require nylon nets, it also entails the clearing of reeds from the lakes, a practice that leads to destruction of the habitat of many birds. But for the locals, pisciculture brings in much-needed money. A labourer hired by a fish-farming agency in Jhajjar stated that these nets protect the water bodies from birds that hunt fish from here, and removing the reeds is essential to make more space for fish farming. Birders, however, maintain that fish farming in wetlands is illegal. Pankaj Gupta of Delhi Bird Foundation warns of ecological damage if "urgent" and "strict" action isn't taken. Gupta pointed out that a lot of birds are dying unnaturally due to illegal fishing nets.

Gupta reminded that as the region is dotted with a good number of decent-sized bodies of water, it is a natural home for many species of birds. Yet, for the birders who gather in these biodiversity-rich spots every year, there might be no more rare species or even common ones to spot if violations continue to go unpunished. The wetlands in Dighal have been identified as one of the 'important bird and biodiversity areas' by the Bombay Natural History Society, and are home to 263 bird species, which include both migrants and residents. Most wetlands in Jhajjar and Rohtak are spread across an area of around six to 10 acres, forming large stretches of water, and the species that live in families here depend on the grass and fish found in the marshland.

Source:

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/how-fish-farming-is-putting-the-livesof-birds-in-serious-danger/articleshow/68247833.cms





(ii) The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Wetlands Authority of Delhi to convene a meeting and take a decision on whether the Tikri Khurd Lake in Narela is a wetland. The authority has been asked to decide on the issue within a month. A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel stated that if any steps are required to be taken for making the Wetland Authority fully functional, such steps may be taken by the Delhi Chief Secretary. Even if it is found that the area in question is not technically a wetland, the lake is required to be preserved as a water body. Adding that the authority can co-opt the Delhi Development Authority as a member under relevant rules, the Bench stated that effective joint decision can be taken to resolve the dispute whether the area falls within the jurisdiction of the DDA or the Delhi government.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has also been directed to ascertain whether the National Wetlands Authority is functioning at the central level across States and Union Territories. The Bench said that if not, their functioning is required to be operational within one month, such authorities may identify wetlands and water bodies and take further steps for their protection. A status report in the matter may be furnished before the next step. The green panel also came down heavily on the DDA after it informed the Bench that the lake does not exist in the records. The green tribunal noted that the stand of the DDA does not show commitment for conserving water body and merely focuses on technicalities and shifting responsibility, which is an attitude not expected from a public body.

Source:

https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/is-tikri-khurd-lake-in-narela-a-wetland-ngtasks-authorities/article26706731.ece