



Editor's Note

The Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) brings out the third issue of **SAROVAR SAURABH**, an ENVIS Newsletter on wetland ecosystems, sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India. We begin with this issue two modes of publication of newsletter. While in the first mode, we bring out thematic issues such as state of wetlands in the country (both hard and soft copy), the second mode comprises compilation and collation of wetland related coverage's in the print media distributed exclusively online. It is primarily done to reduce the cost of publication on hardcopy. This issues focuses on news items like wetlands and the people, rare dolphins and ecologically unique birds on the verge of extinction, biodiversity loss and water-bodies development for waterfowl.

We do hope that the coverage reported on wetlands would be of interest to various users like wetland community of professionals, managers, environmentalists and other stakeholders To make this effort worthwhile, the team of **SAROVAR SAURABH** seeks active participation of its readers in terms of providing information, news, views, photographs and articles on issues of wetland conservation.

We welcome your feedback on the Newsletter and its contents.

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Wetlands Problems and Issues - Magazine

Wetlands turn into dumping grounds

The Hindu, 20th Jan 2005

Whoever says that Dakshina Kannada has a vibrant and energetic environmental movement, should take a look at the vandalism on wetlands in Mangalore. Just along the National Highway No. 17 from Kukur to Kottara lay large patches of wetlands. But dumping of debris is destroying this nature's bounty. About a

year ago, this stretch was green and used to hold water throughout the year. It was home to a number of migratory birds. Many old timers say that the highway used to be inundated with clean water.

But indiscriminate construction activity has ruined the ecology of the area. The late Murari Ballal, who started a movement in Dakshina Kannada to save wetlands, had opposed the development of this area and wanted it to be left alone. At

a seminar in 1999, he had stated that the wetland fed aquifers of Mangalore and if these are choked, the city may face acute water shortage, according to N.A. Madhyastha and S.A. Hussain, ornithologists. The environmentalists of Mangalore and Dakshina Kannada who pass through this highway everyday are yet to react to this.

When The Hindu brought it to the notice of the Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways, K.H. Muniyappa, he said that these areas are out of the purview of his ministry

Drinking water, sanitation, still a widespread rural problem

The Financial Express, 14th Feb 2005

Over two lakh rural habitations in the country still face the problem of contaminated drinking water. An estimated 5557 of these have no access to drinking water and 60,884 habitations are partially covered by the government's drinking water schemes. Only 70% of rural schools have drinking water supply. On rural sanitation, the picture is also not rosy. Only 22% of rural households have toilet facilities, according to the 2001 Census. By all recent accounts, 85% of the rural population still defecates in the open. Rural people extract groundwater, or use water from tanks or rivers to meet household needs, including that for drinking. The central government's National Common Minimum Programme says 'Providing drinking water to all sections in urban and rural areas and augmenting availability of drinking water sources is an issue of the topmost priority. Harvesting rain water, desilting existing ponds and other innovative mechanisms will be adopted.' It also said special problems of habitations in hilly terrains will be addressed immediately. The rural development ministry has had a survey done and asked the Indian Institute of Public Administration to validate the results. According to the feedback from the states, about 2.17 lakh rural

habitations are badly affected by contaminated groundwater. The worst affected states are Rajasthan, Karnataka, Gujarat, MP and AP, which face contamination by excessive fluoride. States where water is affected by salinity are Rajasthan, West Bengal, Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Ban on reclamation of wetlands proposed

The Hindu, 14th Mar 2005

The Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Kerala, prepared by the Kerala Forest Research Institute, proposes banning of reclamation of wetlands and protection of the mangroves.

It suggests that mangrove forests should be declared as protected areas and local bodies entrusted with their restoration and management. Introduction of exotic aquatic species should be banned, and (estuarine) bar-mouth areas should be declared as no-fishing zones. Continuous monitoring of the health status of flora and fauna of the estuarine, marine and freshwater ecosystems should be undertaken.

The State Plan, prepared under the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, also calls for stoppage of issue of tenure rights and title deeds in forest areas. The land ceiling laws should be repealed.

Alarm Bells Sounded Over Disappearing Wetlands - Bindu Shajan

Perappadan

The Hindu, 28th Mar 2005

The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) has warned about the alarming pace of disappearance of wetlands and estimates that by 2050, freshwater biodiversity will witness a drastic decline across the country.

In the first ever- comprehensive data collection and evaluation of its kind in the country, SACON has brought out a report card of the number and condition of the

wetlands in the country. And the results, according to SACON members, aren't very encouraging. The report besides providing the status of wetlands in the country is also hoping that the information will help initiate conservation planning of the wetlands on a national scale. Reliable and updated information on the extent of wetlands, their biodiversity values, ecosystem service values and socioeconomic importance are vital for evolving long-term conservation policy, legislation and administrative interventions.

The survey showed us that the wetlands in the country were fighting a losing battle and also at stake is the flora and fauna that survived on these wetlands. We need to rethink about how to protect these precious resource," said the official.

Meanwhile, what this multi-dimension survey came out with included prioritization of 655 wetlands in the country for conservation, projection of 199 wetlands for recognition at the international level, providing a broad characteristics such as turbidity level and vegetation of all the wetlands in 72 districts, compiling site records of threatened and near threatened species of wetland birds in various States, understanding of the 109 endemic aquatic plant species in the country and a classification of wetlands on socioeconomic use values.

Soil quarrying blights the land and wetland

The Hindu, 11th May 2005

'The present regulatory system of controlling quarrying of soil or earth is ineffective and evasive.'

The indiscriminate quarrying of soil/earth in large quantity as filling material for building purpose and reclaiming the wetland, lakes etc. in the name of developmental activities is having negative impact on both the hillocks and the wetland system. In the absence of a "regulatory mechanism and the requirement of any quarrying-permit, such

clandestine activities are taking place on a very large scale throughout the State", according to Dr K.K. Ramachandran and Dr D. Padmalal of Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS), Thiruvananthapuram. In fact, Environmental Impact Assessment is not done in the case of soil quarrying in the State.

"The present regulatory system of controlling quarrying of soil or earth is ineffective and evasive," Dr Padmalal told *Business Line*. Under the new Panchayat Raj Institutions of decentralized planning, these regulatory powers, protected under law, should be given to district or sub-district panchayats, as the case may be, he said.

According to Dr Padmalal, any type of conversion of wetlands is prohibited under the Kerala Land Utilization Act, 1967, unless permitted by the competent authority. "But it is hardly observed and the Government, the guardian of the Act itself often flouts the law," he alleged. In fact, reclamation of paddy fields for non-agricultural purposes had also negatively affected the ecological system besides shrinking the area for paddy cultivation.

The low-lying paddy fields in the State used to function as a reservoir during the monsoon seasons and the water accumulated in these low-lying areas used to help recharge the underground water table in the summer, Mr. N.K. Sukumaran Nair, General Secretary, Pampa Parirakshana Samithi, said. Whether quarrying is done for laterite brick or soil or clay or for river sand, it is the smaller landholder, located on the hillock or the riverbank, who is severely affected. Other environmental problems such as depletion of ground and surface water resources have also been raised, he said.

Grey area

The Hindu Business line, 15th June 2005

A scene of mass reclamation of kole land as seen in suburban Thrissur. The kole wetlands with an area of 13,632

hectares and spread over the districts of Thrissur and Malappuram are facing severe threats. The reclamation of wetlands for use as raw material in brick kilns and change in land-use pattern has resulted in the extinction of rare migratory birds. Paddy fields are being converted to cash crop plantations and the marshes filled for new constructions.

40% of water birds under threat, warn experts

The Financial Express, 13th Feb 2005

Experts on wetlands have said that 40% of world's all water birds and 20% of 10,000 known freshwater fish species are under decline, and are facing threat of extinct. Many wetland reptiles were under decline while nearly one-third of the world's amphibian species were threatened which was more than that for birds and mammals, said Dr. Max Finlayson, president of Wetlands International, at the third Asian Wetland Symposium in Bhubaneswar. Quoting the millennium ecosystem assessment results, he said that the results showed that wetlands, both inland and coastal, were in trouble.

Fresh water can save Keoladeo Park

The Hindu, 20th Feb 2005

The Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur - withering away due to scarcity of water - can be saved from extinction only by a fresh infusion of water from the Panchana dam on Gambhiri river flowing 100 km away from the unique birds sanctuary. The delay in the release of water from this traditional source would prove disastrous for the bird habitat. This was the consensus among the speakers at a dialogue on the current state of Keoladeo National Park organized by the Tourism and Wildlife Society of India (TWSI). Journalists, intellectuals and two members of the Rajasthan Assembly, addressing the open forum, expressed concern over the threat of extinction looming large over the

sanctuary recognized by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Rare dolphins on verge of extinction

IANS Bhubaneswar, 21st Feb 2005

The rare Irrawaddy dolphins at Asia's largest saltwater lake Chilika in Orissa supports a population of about 130 Irrawaddy dolphins, or Orcealla Brevirostris are being threatened with extinction due to unregulated fishing and high-speed tourist boats, conservationists have warned. Since April 2004, 13 dolphins have died in the Chilika Lake, 110 km from here. Of these as many as seven have died this month alone, says the Wildlife Society of Orissa.

With the death of about a dozen dolphins every year, the Chilika population is not expected to last beyond a decade, environmentalists fear. The possibility of a quantum jump in the death rate due to the increase in the movement of mechanized boats and fishing activity is ever present. Apart from Chilika, which has a unique combination of marine, brackish and fresh water ecosystem, Irrawaddy dolphins are also found in Songkhla Lake in Thailand. While it is difficult to spot them in Thailand, they can be easily sighted in this lake. The Irrawaddy dolphin has a very low rate of breeding, producing only one baby after every three years with a gestation period of nine months.

In recent years with the promotion of tourism in Chilika by the Orissa government, there has been a jump in the number of tourists. During the peak tourist season from October to March, more than 600 tourist boats fitted with noisy and polluting engines operate in the waters. Boat drivers are given tips to move closer to the terrified animals, who try to break out of this cordon and get hit by the propeller blades, said conservationist Bapu Singh Samonta from Parikud village near the lake.

Besides, the forest department should also post patrol boats and ensure a ban on

the use of certain fishing nets that trap dolphins, he said. In India very little is known about the whales, dolphins and porpoises that inhabit coastal waters, said an official of the Chilika Development Authority.

Gangetic river dolphins struggling to survive: WWF

Gurukhateshwar, 8th May 2005

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is frantically appealing to save the Gangetic Dolphins in Garmukhateshwar, home to some of the world's rare fresh water dolphins now being driven to extinction due to poaching and excessive fishing. The World Conservation Union had recently changed the status of the Platanista Gangetica, one of the only four freshwater dolphins in the world, from vulnerable to endangered.

Latest surveys show the population, which swam freely in India's sprawling Ganga and Brahmaputra river systems, had fallen to just 1500 from the already moderate 5000 from the 1980s. WWF says fragmentation of their habitat by barrages and dams, lack of awareness and education of the river's stakeholders, pollution of large stretches in the rivers and killing for oil and its blubber are its biggest threats.

The international body has now roped in local fishermen, school children, local environmental groups and even army men, for a riverboat rally to raise awareness about saving the beautiful animals.

Parikshit Gautam, Director-Fresh Water and Wetlands Programme, WWF-India said the river dolphins are the watchdogs of the water and keep it clean off natural toxins and pollutants ensuring clean water for millions alongside the river plains. "Local people know that the presence of dolphins and all but they do not know what threat they are facing". Gautam said the locals are extremely aware of their environment but did not know about conservation and this

campaign was designed precisely to plug this loophole.

PM visits Ranthambore National Park May 24, 2005

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the Ranthambore National Park this morning as part of his two-day visit amidst nation wide protest over the large-scale poaching of tigers and their complete disappearance in Sariska.

He made it clear that he was firmly committed to saving tigers and would not tolerate any fudging with tiger census figures, or any politics over the issue. Singh also advised forest officials to adopt the Kaziranga model of eco-development, which has seen the number of tigers go up to 86.

Wildlife groups say that Ranthambore's tiger population has dropped from the 35 listed in 2001 to just 15 and blames their disappearance on poaching inside the state-protected park. On Monday, the PM met Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and forest officials. The Rajasthan CM asked the Prime Minister a financial help of Rs.119 crore for the Ranthambore and Sariska National Parks. (Staff Reporter)

Rare Saras crane congregation spotted in Gujarat

The Hindu, 10th June 2005

With the first drops of pre-monsoon showers on Gujarat, a rare congregation of endangered Sarus cranes has been spotted on the outskirts of the city engaged in courtship rituals indicating start of their breeding season.

The spotting is considered to be important for a state which, with a mere 1,800 birds, stands only second in the country after Uttar Pradesh as far as the number of Indian Sarus cranes (*Grus Antigone Antigone*) is concerned. "Indian Sarus cranes which are non-migratory are rarely found in large congregations and this pre-monsoon assembly is a very rare

sight," said Deputy Conservator of Forests Uday Vora.

About why Sarus cranes are generally spotted in agricultural fields in the State, Vora said, "The optimal habitat of these omnivorous cranes includes a combination of marshes, ponds, fallow lands and cultivated lands." The future of these cranes in India is closely tied to the quality of wetlands, which faces problems of high levels of sewage inflow and of pesticide residues, he added.

Declare wetlands as sanctuaries

The Hindu, 19th Feb 2005

The nature's gift of thousands of excellent wetlands in Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari and Tuticorin districts must be preserved and declared as sanctuaries as thousands of resident and migratory birds flock to these eco-friendly spots each year, Robert Grubh, Director, and Institute for Restoration of Natural Environment, said.

Speaking at a workshop for foresters and rangers of the Forest Department held here yesterday in connection with the 'World Wetland Day,' Dr. Grubh said that wetlands across the country were considered to be the best in the world owing to favorable climatic conditions in the country, which is conducive for birds and other organisms to make the land their habitats.

He said freshwater wetlands at Suchindram, Thearoor, Puththaeri, Chunkaankadai, Vembanur, Irachchakulam, Kothandaramankulam, Sengulam and Veeraani — in Kanyakumari district, Karungulam, Ariyakulam, Velloor, Kadamba — in Tuticorin district and all the wetlands close to the course of the perennial Tamirabarani river could be converted into sanctuaries.

Govt. to develop water bodies to attract Siberian Cranes

The Hindu, 10th June 2005

To woo "winged" visitors including the Siberian Crane, which have stopped coming to the country from far off places, experts have identified over 300 potential wetlands that could be developed for safe and pleasant stay of the migratory birds in India. "The Government is committed to safeguard the migratory birds and develop places which could be used by them as winter home and breeding grounds. Various scientific organizations have recommended numerous sites that could be used for the purpose," Union Minister for Environment and Forests A Raja said inaugurating a five-day 'Central Asian Flyway Meeting' here.

"We are considering to put in place a 'National Wetland Policy', in consultation with experts, for proper conservation and management of migrating water fowls," he said. The country supports more than 1200 species of birds, of which more than 250 species are water birds. Many of these species are migratory that are primarily located in different countries across North, Central and Southern Asia, he said.

The deliberations would cover conservation measures for over 175 species of migratory water birds, including 26 globally threatened and near-threatened water birds migrating between the countries. Over 80 experts from about 30 countries have gathered here to deliberate upon ways to conserve migratory water birds and their habitats in Central Asian Flyway (CAF) region.

State to develop wetlands to attract birds

The Hindu, 13th June 2005

Home to nearly one third of the bird population of the country, Gujarat is planning to improve and develop its wetlands in a big way to attract more migratory and resident birds. The state has remarkable biodiversity, providing a rich habitat for a fascinating variety of birds. Hence the forest department plans to develop wetlands in a big way," said

additional principal chief co-coordinator of forests Pradeep Khanna.

The wetlands that the department is planning to improve include Nal Sarovar in Ahmedabad, Thol in Mehsana, Khijedia in Jamnagar, Namikholsar in Navsari, Wadwan in Baroda and Pariej in Kheda district. The development of wetlands envisages improving the site, setting up observatory points, construction of interpretation centre and strengthening of embankments, added Khanna.

Among the wetlands, Nal Sarovar in Ahmedabad district is a fresh water wetland and is the largest bird sanctuary in the state with about 226 species of the birds of which 150 are waterfowls. The Nal Sarovar Lake is a natural lake with shallow waters and muddy lagoons, dotted by 360 islets, which offers an ideal wintering ground for thousands of migratory birds. The state has second largest population of the Sarus cranes in the country. As per the census conducted by the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) foundation last year, their population was found to be growing.

Another bird census conducted in the 25 districts by the forest department last year indicated the presence of over 13 lakh birds. A total of 1,192 wetlands were covered during this census in which 154 species of the birds were covered. While the maximum number of birds was found in Jamnagar district (3,62,431), the least number of birds were found in Dangs district (67). Birds were also found in large number in Dhola Vira in Kutch (86,000), Amipur in Porbandar (52,000), Patangadi in Dahod.

Nepal's birds undergo rapid decline

A new publication from Bird Conservation Nepal (BirdLife in Nepal) makes shocking reading. While reports of the worsening conservation status of birds

and other biodiversity are all too familiar, what is truly disturbing about the situation presented in The State of Nepal's Birds 2004 is the speed with which it has happened. For example, River Tern *Sterna aurantia* was regularly described as common from the 1950s to the 1970s, and reported as still locally common around rivers in the Royal Chitwan National Park and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in 1991. But there are no recent records from Chitwan, and the largest number seen at Koshi in the last three years has been six.

More birds slipping towards extinction

BirdLife International's annual evaluation of how the world's bird species are faring shows that the total number considered to be threatened with extinction is now 1,212, which when combined with the number of near threatened species gives a total of exactly 2,000 species in trouble - more than a fifth of the planet's remaining 9,775 species. Of the species currently in trouble, 179 are now categorized as Critically Endangered, the highest level of threat.

For more:

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/06/red_list_update.html

India to Count its Vanishing Vultures

India will launch a census of its vultures, a group of ornithologists said, as the birds are vanishing rapidly due to a mystery virus and shrinking nesting sites. The population of vultures, nature's scavenger and rodent controller, has fallen from tens of thousands just a decade ago to a few thousands also because of a veterinary drug found in cattle carcasses that the birds feed on, experts say.

For more:

<http://www.planetark.com/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/30905/story.htm>

Events

WaterPower XiV

July 18-22, 2005

Hilton Austin, Austin, Texas, USA

<http://www.hcipub.com>

Children's World Summit For The Environment;

26 - 29 July 2005; Aichi, Japan;

<http://www.children-summit.jp>

3rd World Environmental Education Congress;

2 - 6 October 2005; Torino, Italy;

<http://www.3weec.org/>

Third International Conference on River Basin Management

6-8 September, 2005

www.wagner.co.uk/conferences/2005/index.html

Useful weblink

World Water Day

www.worldwaterday.org

Ramsar Website

www.ramsar.org

United Nation Development Program

www.undp.org

Global Environment Facility

www.gefweb.org

Wetlands International

www.wetlands.org

America's Wetland

<http://www.americaswetland.com>

Website of the month

<http://www.punenvvis.nic.in>

Punjab State Council for Science and Technology has ECCB-ENVIS node working on Environment, Popularization of science, Biotechnology, Water regime management and consultancy cell for industrial pollution control.

ISSN 0972-3153

SAROVAR SAURABH

ENVIS NEWSLETTER on Wetland Ecosystem

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Published by

Environmental Information System (ENVIS) Centre

Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology &

Natural History (SACON)

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Sponsored by

ENVIS, Ministry of Environment & Forests

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