

# Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



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## Habitat Concerns....

### Coral reefs need serious attention

Gujarat has 1600 km plus coastline with adjoining coastal habitats, such as intertidal mudflats, mangroves, salt pans, coral reefs etc. Coral reefs are considered to be the rain forests of the oceans. Such an adjective is due to the rich biodiversity hidden beneath the blue waters. These reefs provide for plentiful feeding, as well as breeding grounds, for variety of micro-organisms, worms, fishes, crabs, mollusks and many other aquatic life forms. India is blessed with four major coral reefs and Gujarat is lucky to have one out of these. The coral reef here is on the fringes of southern shore of the Gulf of Kachchh. The area falls on the central-Asian migratory fly-way for the birds and acts as an entry point for the birds in Gujarat as well as India.

Coral reefs are a great source of food for these water birds. Species such as Crab-plover (*Dromas ardeola*), Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*), Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*) and many more species are observed in good numbers in this patch. The area is also a haven for the shorebirds. The avifaunal diversity of this area is well documented with more than 200 species of birds. The area was declared as Marine Protected Area (MPA), in the early 1980s.

However in the last 20 years, industrial development has progressed enormously in and around this part of Jamnagar Dist. Two huge refineries have come up in the precincts of this ecosystem. Constant ship traffic, containing tons of crude oil, is a routine feature in this tract. Dredging to maintain the ship's navigational channels patent, dumps tons of sedimentation over the reefs. Damaging and degradation of these pristine coral reefs would not only ravage the affluent aquatic biodiversity of this part of the ocean but rob the birds of their rich feeding source. Dumping of waste from ships as well as industrial and domestic sewage is increasing pollution level in the reef zone. The possibilities of accidental oil spills too cannot be ignored. Being eco-geographically at a crucial junction, the vulnerable coral reefs of the Gulf of Kachchh need serious attention. Conservation of such biodiversity-rich habitat will surely help, maintain good socio-economic balance also. Let us act now before it is too late.

- Dishant Parasharya

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Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) was founded in 2000 with the objective of conservation of birds of the State through field research, documentation, training, awareness activities, networking with like-minded NGOs; and lobbying for protection of birds and their habitats. It is the only statewide network of bird-watchers, ornithologists and conservationists of Gujarat striving to achieve the above goal.

BCSG brings out a quarterly newsletter – 'Flamingo'. Articles, notes on bird-life of Gujarat, interesting bird sightings, knowledge about important bird areas, information / appeal regarding conservation issues, reports on society's events and activities are published in 'Flamingo'. For publication of articles/notes in the Flamingo, both the common English and scientific names must be given when a bird species is mentioned for the first time and later references, common English name only. Common English and scientific names should follow Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp (2011), Birds of Indian Subcontinent, Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

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## Editorial....

Gujarat has a distinction of being endowed with a variety of bird habitats. These include areas as diverse as flats of the Greater Rann of Kachchh, to subtropical forests of Dangas, and inundated paddy fields of south Gujarat, to the grass lands of Saurashtra. This is one reason why it boasts of a hefty, ever-increasing checklist of about 525 bird species. There are some unique habitats like Gulf of Kachchh, with its mangrove-fringed coast-line, intertidal mudflats, coral reefs and clusters of tiny islands surrounding the tip of Saurashtra peninsula, all together sheltering many water-dependent bird species and even providing breeding sites to many of them. Continuing, unabated development along the coast would prove to be an ecological disaster in long run, aptly spelled out in 'Habitat concerns'.

The third title page carries a picture of Late Maharao Vijayarajji of Kachchh Province with his morning's bag of hares and geese shot down for sport. Paradoxically, Greylag Geese, which used to visit this land in thousands about 100 years ago, are no more marking their presence here since last at least half a century. At the same time, these geese are sighted in increasing numbers in central Gujarat and Saurashtra in the last 15-20 years. Many alterations are happening with regard to distribution and density of avian species. Rising number of small and big dams and the growing irrigation network through canals, especially the 'Sardar Sarovar Yojana' with its complex grid of water channels, have downrightly transformed the wetland scenario of the State. Are we in cognition to what is happening to our birdlife with this transformation?

The other day, I had an opportunity to participate in the bird-census event at Nal Sarovar, the only Ramsar site of Gujarat. During the discussions, I was surprised to know that 'Ramsar' tag, except for offering a 'Status', would hardly accord more benefits to the site, either financially or indirectly through imposition of more stringent regulations. Nal sarovar too has been victimised by unchecked inundation through Narmada run offs. Would it not be obligatory for all of us now to regularly monitor important wetlands, beyond making bird-counts, and ensure their natural character which has been responsible for attracting birds since ages!?

Lastly, on behalf of BCSG, I congratulate Viral Joshi, our member and contributor for this magazine, for winning the Sanctuary Asia 'Young Naturalist Award'. We wish him all the success for the future.

- Bakul Trivedi, M.S.