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Estuarine Bird Conservation in Uttara Kannada

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Uttara Kannada district towards centre of India's west coast, with over 410 bird species, accounts for 82% bird species of the Western Ghats-west coast region. The reason for such exceptional bird diversity is due to the richness of habitats that range from coastal and marine areas to evergreen to dry deciduous forests of the Western Ghats, scrub and grasslands, rivers and lakes and so on. Of the coastal habitats the estuaries, mainly of four important rivers account for about 170 bird species. The estuaries are richly productive areas, abundant in food reserves for the birds, in the form of various invertebrates, fishes etc. The mangrove vegetation, growing in dense entangled patches makes ideal homes for birds. The mudflats produce huge quantity of bivalves and gastropods. About 50% of these birds are winter migrants from Eurasia and Himalayas and local migrants. Some of these birds like parakeets, doves, Indian koel, crow pheasant, Indian jungle myna, Indian tree-pie etc. are relatively common ones and not habitat specialists. Of the winter migrants may be mentioned European kestrel, brown headed and black headed gulls, slenderbilled gull, sandpipers and plovers, ducks and teals. Of the resident water associated birds are cormorants, herons, storks and egrets. The rare mangrove-inhabiting kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) and rare visitors to the salt pans such as the black stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and brahminy duck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) are notable of the estuaries. More than 5000 ducks, including pintails (*Anas acuta*) and garganey (*Anas querquedula*), over-winter in the reed covered marshes of Aghanashini. The bird population and diversity of estuarine areas had suffered serious setback over last few decades due to abandonment of cultivation of estuarine rice in favour of shrimp farms, steady destruction of mangroves and various other human activities. However the situation is reversing due to intense efforts over the last few years by the Forest Department on mangrove planting, formation of local committees for protection of mangroves and the spread of general awareness among the local population.