



HABITAT SPECIALIST FLAMINGOS IN HOSPET & ALMATTI: A TIME TO BEGIN “ANNUAL NATURE PILGRIMAGE FAIR”

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ABSTRACT

Habitat specialists - Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) having majestic look, 1.5 metre tall, pinkish birds from the Rann of Kutch (Gujarat state) migrate to the south in winter. They are known to congregate at Pulicat lake (Tamil Nadu state) in winter. They migrate to Gujarat in the summer to breed. On their way back, they spend some time in large reservoirs such as the backwaters of Tungabhadra dam near Hospet (Bellary district) and Almatti dam (Bijapur district) in Karnataka state. Since 5 years, Greater Flamingos have been flocking in large numbers at Hospet and Almatti. India is a land of rich cultural heritage. Numerous festivals are celebrated throughout the country with great pomp and glory. Like any other Indian state, Karnataka has a rich history with several festivals (utsavs). Crores of rupees sanctioned by government is spent on these festivals. If such festivals are financially supported by the state government, why not Flamingo festival at

Hampi or Almatti is the question of birdwatchers. (a) Indian Bird Fair (IBA) is organized since 1997 and it is initiated by Tourism and Wildlife Society of India. (b) In order to make more and more citizens aware of the natural treasure and to seek public opinion so as to conserve the Important Bird Area (IBA), Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has been organizing Flamingo festival since 2000. (c) Andhra Pradesh government passed orders in 2012 including the annual Flamingo festival in the state tourism calendar and commenced celebrating the same since January 2013 at Pulicat lake bird sanctuary in Nellore district (AP state). If such conservative efforts are on by NGOs and a few state governments in India, Government of Karnataka can also initiate similar festival at Hospet or Almatti. An attempt is made in this paper to give details of need for *annual nature pilgrimage fair* in Karnataka state.

INTRODUCTION

With increasing human-driven threats and decreasing natural habitats, over 12.4 per cent of the total bird species worldwide are threatened. Only 19 per cent of all bird species are migratory and among them 11 per cent are threatened (Anon, 2010). Out of more than 1,200 species of birds reported from India till date, nearly 350 species are migratory including very large number of forest birds. In India some

of the threatened migratory birds include Siberian Crane, Greater Spotted Eagle, Lesser Flamingo, Sociable Lapwing, Spotted Greenshank, Spoonbill, Sandpiper, Imperial Eagle, and Wood Snipe.

Avifauna are important for the ecosystem as they play various roles as scavengers, pollinators, predators of insect pest, bio-indicators of different kind of environment like



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urbanization and industrialization. They are very sensitive indicators of pollution problems and function as early warning system (Jeevan *et al*, 2013). Besides, the globally threatened bird species, even some common migratory species such as Bar-headed Goose, White-eyed Pochard, Black Stork and White Stork are also decreasing in number. All these large migratory birds require wetlands. With a large number of migratory birds in India on the threatened list it was crucial to take immediate steps to protect them. India falls on the South-Asia migratory route and being the largest country in the region, for some migratory species India is very important during their winter sojourn. India's role is crucial in protecting migratory birds and wetlands. We need to celebrate the wonderful phenomenon of bird migration and to highlight threats faced by most migratory birds, which are crucial indicators of environmental conditions and can have far-reaching impact on humans. Activities like the annual Flamingo festival have also been creating awareness about migratory birds (Rajagopalan and Yajaman, 2013).

FESTIVALS IN KARNATAKA STATE:

Karnataka has a rich history with several festivals observed. Characteristically regional variations are observed as affected by historical, agro-climatic and modern influences (Inamdar and Chimmad, 2005). The tourism is a social and economic phenomena which has become a fast growing global industry. The tourist attraction of Karnataka includes natural scenery, wild life sanctuaries, rivers, waterfalls, green mountains, traditional art, typical fairs and festivals. (Wodeyar 2007). With a vision to preserve, promote and propagate the language, culture and heritage of Karnataka in India and abroad, the government of Karnataka is spending huge money on various festivals. It is suggested that Domestic Promotion and Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH) scheme has been able to fulfill its goals of creating

awareness about domestic tourism during the 11th Five Year Plan. The continuation of the scheme is recommended during the 12th Five Year Plan, though focus of promotion may shift to cover the new potential areas. (Choudhary *et al* 2013). Table 1 gives the list of important festivals observed in Karnataka state and the amount spent by government on such events.

FLAMINGOS: Flamingos are habitat specialists and hence destruction or alteration of habitat is considered a serious threat to their population (Tere and Parasharya, 2011). The Greater Flamingo is a seasonal migrant seen largely in winter at Pulikat lake and the numbers counted were 8,000 in 2005, 15,000 in 2006 and 13,000 in 2007 (Kannan *et al* 2008). Greater Flamingos in India breed primarily in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. They visit other areas such as Sambhar Lake (in Rajasthan), Sewri-Mahul (Mumbai) and Bhigwan (Pune). 20,000 flamingos flocked to the brackish water at Mumbai's Sewri-Mahul mudflats in 2014, after having flown all the way from Gujarat. The birds that breed in Kutch (Gujarat) migrate to Mumbai every year to escape the winter. This mudflat area is rich in algae, insect larvae and diatoms which the flamingos love to feed on (Kateshiya, 2013; Madhumitha, 2014). Kutch desert sanctuary is the largest and the only breeding ground of Greater flamingos in the entire Indian subcontinent. Due to the presence of flamingo breeding areas, this sanctuary was identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and Bird Life International (Desai 2012). Flamingos are seen in large numbers since 2010 at Almatti (Rozindar 2014). Greater Flamingos breed at Rann of Kutch (Gujarat state) and migrate to the south in winter. They congregate at Pulicat lake (Tamil Nadu state) in winter. Flamingos migrate to Gujarat in the summer to breed. On their way back, they spend some time in large reservoirs such as the backwaters of TB



dam and Almatti dam. Since 2000, Greater Flamingos have been flocking in large numbers at Hospet (Anon, 2014a, b). Best place to see in Hampi vicinity is backwaters of TB dam in early winter and later summer as stopovers for passage migrants (Kottur, 2014). They are also reported from backwaters of Krishna river near Bagalkot and also in Raichur's Manchalapura. A few lakes and tanks in North Karnataka are home to flamingos which land here in January and spot them till the months of May-June (Manjunath, 2013). Jeevan *et al*, 2013 have documented rich avifauna diversity including flamingos at Shivamogga town on the banks of river Tunga and opined that the area still provides some potential habitats for the declining population of the threatened birds. Hence there is the need to monitor these areas, with a focused study on status, distribution and conservation and it can be achieved only through public participation. Padmavathy *et al* (2010) have opined that wetlands are very fragile and constitute treasure of biodiversity. The avifaunal diversity in Ousteri freshwater wetland, (Puducherry) has a total of 109 species including flamingos. Such unique diverse systems are under threat like weed infestation and variations in food availability in different seasons. Among the goals of wildlife conservation are to ensure that nature will be around for future generations to enjoy and to recognize the importance of wildlife and wilderness lands to humans (Birasal, 2014).

Tungabhadra (TB) Dam is constructed across the Tungabhadra River, a tributary of the Krishna River. The dam is near the town of Hospet in Karnataka. It is a multipurpose dam serving irrigation, electricity generation, flood control, etc. It was completed in 1953. The dam creates the biggest reservoir on the Tungabhadra River with 101 thousand million cubic feet (tmc) of gross storage capacity at full reservoir level (FRL) 498 m MSL, and a water spread area of

378 square kilometres. Height of the dam is 49.5 meters **Almatti Dam** is a project on the Krishna River in North Karnataka which was completed in July 2005. Water is released in to Narayanpur reservoir after using for power generation to serve the downstream irrigation needs. Geographically, dam is located in the Bijapur district, but large areas of Bagalkot district are submerged due to filling of the reservoir. The dam holds a gross water storage capacity of 130 TMC at 519 meters MSL. During summer, backwaters of both Almatti and TB dam turn into a home for migratory birds. Including flamingos, several other birds migrate in thousands. Bird lovers and ornithologists are drawn here and spend hours capturing their movements with their cameras. According to RFO, Srikant Kanadal, the birds which are protected under the wildlife protection act, have been visiting the backwaters of Almatti for the last few years (Rozindar, 2013). Flamingos were spotted till 2009 at Almatti, but for some reason, they stopped coming. Again they have arrived in thousands in 2013 and 2014. According to forest department sources, 100 species of birds, several of them are migratory, are reported from Almatti backwaters.

FLAMINGO FESTIVAL: A NEW APPROACH: Flamingos in the Sewri-Mahul area are a treasure for Mumbai and the area is designated as an IBA by BNHS. Flamingos should be properly protected and developed as a sustainable eco-tourism destination. The objective of Flamingo Festival is to make more and more citizens aware of this natural treasure, so that public opinion is built for the conservation of the area (Anon, 2005; Sathe, 2010; Singh Vijay, 2013).

The primary objective of the Festival is to introduce the common man to these beautiful birds that have been visiting Mumbai every winter for years and to sensitize them towards



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conserving their habitat. The second objective is to use this as an effective platform to reach out to the people with the message of nature conservation and the environmental issues that face us today. During this festival BNHS stalls display its books and other educational material and a special stall for kids. Information from BNHS bird experts and watching through binoculars and spotting scopes is an unforgettable experience for the visitors (Vachharajani, 2011).

Festival to witness pink carpet: Organizing a festival of birds is a new approach to bring environmental awareness to the masses. In India, we hear about Diwali and Ganesh idol immersions but very few are aware of the flamingo festival organized yearly at Pulicat Lake, an IBA. It was started in 2000 and now has become quite popular among the local people. Pulicat Lake has been known for its ecological importance and the second largest lake in India, sprawled over the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. During winter, thousands of flamingos cover Pulicat lake like a pink carpet. Besides flamingos, thousands of ducks and waders also inhabit this shallow water body.

During the flamingo festival, the public relations department of the state government organizes various other activities to attract people from all walks of life. People enjoy several exhibitions including photographic exhibition on birds and the Pulicat Lake. Lake Bird Lover Society (organizational partner of Indian Bird Conservation Network: IBCN) takes active part during the festival and organizes various activities to spread environmental awareness.

Threat: Despite its ecological, economic, social and cultural importance, the Pulicat Lake is under serious biotic pressures. Nearly 60% of the lake has been already changed into sand-flats

due to siltation. The freshwater inflows from the rivers have been blocked for irrigation. Several parts of the lake are encroached for the farming. Industrialization along the southern part of the Lake further burdens it. Hence the flamingo festival is organized to create awareness.

FLAMINGO FESTIVAL IN AP TOURISM

CALENDAR: The Flamingo Festival was celebrated by a committee in the past, without direct participation from the administration. 'Flamingo Festival' became official as the government of Andhra Pradesh passed order to celebrate the festival as a 3-day annual event from January 7 to 9 in 2013 at Sullurupet in Nellore district including it in the list of State Tourism calendar of festivals (Anon, 2012). The second in the series was celebrated by AP government from January 8-10, 2014. Seminars on bio-diversity, birds and protection of Pulicat Lake were conducted and boat rides were arranged for the visitors at Bheemulavaripalem in Tada mandal. Forests and other areas viz. 1069.9 km² of Bangalore Metropolitan Region (BMR) should be preserved and these are the last remains of biodiversity hotspots of BMR ecosystem (Neginahal, 2008). Nature based tourism has been a very important source of income and employment in Meghalaya as the state is endowed with diverse scenic natural beauty that attracts a large number of domestic and foreign tourists every year (Utpal and Devis 2011). We need to create awareness in people towards biodiversity conservation by reminding them of our strong cultural traditions of preserving animals and plants. The vast resourcefulness of earth and its beauty lies in biodiversity. It is, therefore, our sacred and moral duty to conserve it for posterity (Mukherjee, 2010). State of Tamil Nadu is endowed with unique rich biodiversity and conservation measures taken have improved the population status of many flagship species.



INDIAN BIRD FAIR (IBF): AWARENESS ACTIVITY TO BENEFIT BIRD RESOURCES IN INDIA:

The Indian Bird Fair (IBF) is held every year in the city of Jaipur (Rajasthan). It is the only event of its kind in India. It is conducted on the picturesque embankment of 400 year old Man Sagar Lake (Jal Mahal) in the city of Jaipur, during winter when the migratory species are present. Fair presents an opportunity for education and awareness activities that benefit the bird resource in India. The Fair is attended by nearly 3,000 persons each year. It is dedicated to a cause or to a threatened species. A publication is brought out to highlight such aspects to let people know how to conserve nature. IBF is an experiment to involve citizens in lake conservation by way of bird-watching and it is supported by IBCN and BNHS. Bird conservation education in field is imparted and thus transferred in to class rooms and homes. Several expert birdwatchers are invited to address participants on bird related questions. A quarter million people are estimated to have been bird-impacted through this event since it was started in 1997, initiated by Tourism & Wildlife Society of India (www.birdfair.org). Each Birding Fair has highlighted a critical conservation issue of the day and been dedicated

to an endangered species or a threatened habitat or a worthy conservation cause, and given momentum to campaigns for positive change. The Fairs, which are similar to the British Bird Watching Fairs at Rutland Water, attract thousands of visitors including school children. (Singh Rachna, 2013).

BIRD WATCHING: A GROWING ECONOMIC FORCE:

India is like a sleeping giant, having several National Parks and Sanctuaries, designated several Projects for conservation of tigers, elephants, etc. Yet, most bird watching areas / habitats are not within these reserves, like Kheechan village, where about 5,000 Demoiselle Cranes visit annually during winter. Numerous wetlands up and down the country offer food and shelter to countless number of migratory birds. Bird watching tourism is on the increase in India. More Indians are getting involved in bird watching and there are now e-groups for birds and bird photography, where almost daily, participants make remarkable contributions. Still, bird conservation has a long way to go in India, particularly since wildlife conservation is given low priority. Against this backdrop, I hereby appeal to the government of Karnataka to announce annual Flamingo fair at Hampi or Almatti to promote 'bird watching tourism'.

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**Table 1:
Performance Report of Directorate of Kannada and culture
in respect of schemes and expenditure details**

Amount spent on		In Lakhs	
1	Hampi Utsava	100	2242.5 (during 2013 - 14)
3	Kadambotsava	30	
4	Kittur utsav	30	



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5	Kittur Rani Utsava at Bangalore	30	
6	Hoysala Utsav	30	
7	Lakkundi Utsav	30	
8	Chalukya Utsav	30	
9	Kanakagiri Utsav	30	
10	Dharwad Utsav	30	
11	Sayhadri Utsav	30	
12	Belavadi Mallamma Utsav	30	
13	Basava Utsav	30	
14	Navarasapur Utsav	30	
15	Durgotsava	30	
16	Karavali Utsav	30	
17	Veerarani Abbakka Utsav	30	
18	Jalapatotsava Barachukki, Chamarajnaragar	20	
19	Jalapatotsava Barachukki Mandya	20	
20	Pampo Utsava	10	
21	Sangollirayanna Utsava	10	
22	Nalwadi Krishnaraja vodeyar Utsava	20	
23	Organization of district Utsavas (16 lakhs per district)		
24	Celebrations of Basava Jayanthi, Kanaka Jayanthi, Siddarama Jayanthi, Valmiki Jayanthi, Ambigara Chowdaiah Jayanthi, Poet Sarvagna Jayanthi,		
25	Financial Assistance sanctioned towards (Tribal sub plan) for sponsoring of programmes (state wide) Janapada Utsava under different schemes state wide (2014 - 15)		398.12
26	Organising Kannada Nudi Utsava/Kannada Nudi Habba in all the Taluks and Districts headquarters across the State (Specially in border Districts of the Taluks) promote, facilitate, create awareness, foster Kannada literary (2014 - 15)		85
27	International film festival (2014 - 15)		250

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lake symposium (biannual) event organized since 1998 has been focusing on updating of the current knowledge of the scientific community and bring in awareness among students, teachers and public. It provides a platform for interaction among researchers, policy makers, academics and NGOs and

address the issues related to wetlands and biodiversity. "Proposal for conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable management of aquatic ecosystems" is one of the objectives among the several in the Lake symposium.



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(1) The Indian Bird Fair (IBF) is held every year since 1997 in the city of Jaipur (Rajasthan) (2) Flamingo festival by BNHS at Mumbai (Maharashtra state) since 2000 and (3) Flamingo festival by Andhra Pradesh government at Nellore since 2013 are some of the significant awareness activities organized in India. These activities are aimed to highlight (a) critical conservation issue of the

day (b) dedicate to an endangered species or a threatened habitat (c) worthy conservation cause, and given momentum to campaigns for positive change. Against this background, through this symposium, author appeal the concerned authorities to organize Flamingo festival as “**Annual nature pilgrimage fair**” at Hospet or Almatti.

Plate 1



Greater Flamingos photographed on April 28, 2014 at the Backwaters of Tungabhadra Dam near Hospet in Karnataka

