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Concrete plans could kill Lalbagh lake

With Bengaluru's environment already taking a serious beating, nature lovers in the city were shocked to see loads of sand bags being dumped on the shore of the lake inside Lalbagh where birds like kingfishers and bee eaters arrive to nest. The authorities are apparently working to concretise the shore of the lake to save trees under threat from soil erosion around it. "Soil erosion was uprooting the trees along the semi- island inside the lake and so something had to be done," says an officer at the botanical garden, one of the few large lung spaces the city can still boast of. While he claims that the concrete shoreline will not affect the nesting of birds which usually takes place at the other end of the lake, bird lovers are not convinced. Besides stones being placed on the western side of the lake, a 2 ft wall is being built inside it to stop snakes from entering or venturing out of it when its water level dips. Bengaluru's nature lovers are worried that these changes will affect the ecology of the lake and turn it into a lifeless tank. "Altering the shoreline of a waterbody can destroy the life it supports. The Lalbagh lake attracts a large number of waders, which are dependent on a shallow shoreline for their food. Also birds like kingfishers nest in the mud wall around the lake as it generates food such as insects and worms, which their young ones need for nourishment in the first few days of their lives. Cementing the shoreline will take all this away," says anxious bird watcher, Manjunath R. Prabhakar. Environmentalists are upset that most lakes in the city are being turned into 'soup bowls' by the building of walking tracks along them and the alteration of their shorelines. "The civic bodies take an engineering approach to maintaining water bodies and give no thought to the ecological aspects. As a result the lakes are turning into mere tanks and losing their role as wetlands. We have spoken to successive governments about this but no one seems to be listening," laments Dr T.V. Ramachandra of the energy and wetland research group at the Indian Institute of Science(IISc.) Biodiversity expert Harish R. Bhat says birds are leaving the city and looking for nesting grounds on its outskirts where the waterbodies still have their ecology intact. Bird expert M.B. Krishna too warns that once the lake boundary is concretised in Lalbagh the birds may keep away from it, leaving the city poorer for losing them.

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