



Estuarine birds of Uttara Kannada

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Estuaries and birds

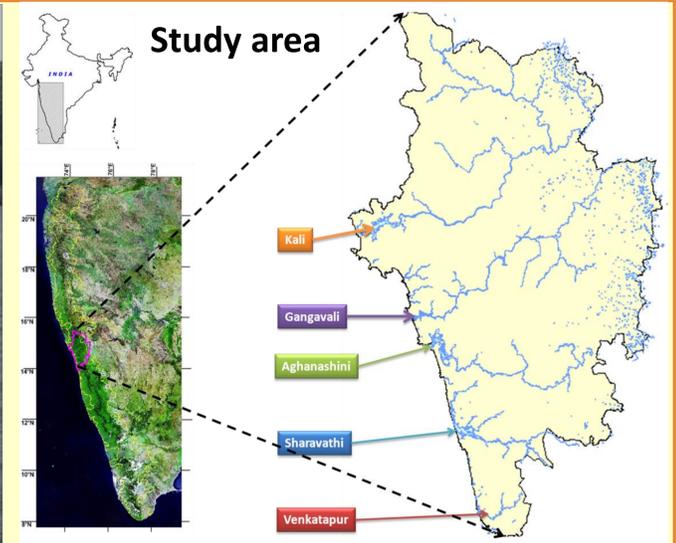
Estuaries are places where rivers meet the sea, where fresh water and salt water mix and mangroves and sedges grow. Rated highly productive ecosystems in the world for fisheries and clams estuaries are very good habitats for birds, especially water birds.

In the Aghanashini estuary of Uttara Kannada are found almost 130 bird species, over 40% of them are winter visitors, which come from northern countries and regions like Siberia, Eastern Europe, northern Himalayas, north and central Asia etc. The abundance of food in the estuaries in the form of fishes, seeds of grasses, sedges and various invertebrates like insects, polychaete worms, crustaceans, molluscs, etc.

The estuary has several micro-habitats for birds, especially mudflats, mangroves, shallow marshes with reeds and grasses, deep open water, *Gajni* rice fields etc. A bird species may use one or more of such micro-habitats.



Aghanashini estuary



Study area

Aghanashini estuary is ideal place for bird studies, both resident birds (throughout year) and winter migrants (ideally November to March). To get best results visit various bird habitats and micro-habitats within the estuary.

Mangrove birds



Purple Swamp-hen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) in *Acanthus* bushes

Mangroves are rich in food like crustaceans, crabs, fish, bivalves, polychaete worms. Birds visit mangroves for feeding, roosting, nesting and breeding. Mangrove birds include Herons, Storks, Raptors, Owls, etc. Wintering waders feed in mudflats and roost in mangroves.



Mudflat birds



Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Mudflats are intertidal areas very rich in food such as soft shellfish, polychaete worms, small crabs, small fish, etc. for birds like Sandpipers, Plovers, Curlew, Terns, Gulls, etc. Their beaks are long and straight or curved to probe in mudflats for small animals, especially good for taking out preys from vertical holes. Many have thin long legs suitable for walking in mud and shallow water.



Open water birds



Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)

Open water birds are ducks, grubs, coots, terns and gulls; most are migratory winter visitors. They have broader beaks for scooping, grasping, straining and filtering. Webbed feet help them in swimming. Gulls and Terns with strong beaks feed on crustaceans, fishes, molluscs, crabs.



Shallow marshes with reeds and grasses



Great Egret (*Egretta alba*)

This habitat has Storks, Egrets, Cormorants, Darters, Herons, Ibis, Ducks and Teals. They feed on fishes, crabs, reptiles, molluscs, seeds, etc.



Gajni rice fields are rich in habitats and microhabitats and a variety of water birds feed on fishes, crustaceans, molluscs, plant parts and rice grains. Top predator birds like Kites, Shikra, Marsh Harrier, Hawks and several Kingfishers are associated.



Gajni rice field



Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)



Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Other estuarine habitats

Salt pans: No birds nest here. Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Indian Reef-heron, egrets, lapwings, plovers etc. are observable.

Oyster-bed birds: Oyster beds occur more towards river mouth of Aghanashini. The members of *Haematopus* (winter visitors) with their long, strong bills can smash oyster shells and other shell fish.



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