

WETLANDS BIRDS IN MYSORE DISTRICT

Wetlands in general include lakes, rivers, streams, tanks, marshes, esturities, deltas, seashores, mangrove swamps and coral reefs. Lakes include small and large irrigation tanks also. Birds are usually abundant on lakes and esturies.

There are a large number of irrigation tanks scattered all over Mysore District. In the south west region, they are perennial (8-10 months full of water). There are 20 major tanks with water spread area exceeding 200 hectares. Most of these tanks are fed by streams, and water level increases after monsoon showers.

A typical tank scenario consists of uplands bordered with trees, ^{with} lowland grasses sloping towards the shallow waterzone of the tank. The interface between land and water shows clear zones with sedges, rushes, reeds, submerged water weeds and floating vegetation from shallow to deeper waters in that order. This presents a very scenic view with placid open waters. There is a luxuriant growth of plankton in the open waters due to abundance of sunshine in the region. This gives rise to richness of crustacean and insect larvae supporting myriads of fish life. This in turn supports diversity of bird life. The richness of avifauna depends on variety of microhabitats created by vegetation and topography.

The marshy areas at the edge of water are more productive and a large number of birds are found actively feeding here especially the waders. Some of ducks and geese which are herbivorous also prefer marsh water interface. The colour of the water could be a good indicator of the degree of pollution. The water may be clear or turbid or greenish with nutrient-rich influx from surroundings or dirty, being highly polluted.

The sandpipers, stilts and wagtails will be waiting in the low lands covered with grasses for feeding on insect larvae and worms. In the sedges will be found warblers strutting and flying from bed to bed.

The zone of emergent vegetation like reedbeds are inhabited by moorhens and other gallinules.

Sometimes weaver birds build nests in colonies by slinging together the long leaves of macrophytes typha. The gallinules also make use of them building platform nests. Diving ducks will be found in fishing open waters. The coots will be found ranging over the entire wetlands.

The trees provide perching places for cormorants, storks and King fisher. The cormorants will be found drying their wings on the rocks after diving for fish since they cannot fly efficiently with wet feathers. Pelicans and coots are usually found on large tanks where fish is abundant. On the large trees around, a number of water birds will be roosting

and build their nests in single or mixed colonies. Herons nest in colonies in places called as heronaries.

Herons are also wading birds, patiently waiting for their prey on the edge of the water. Gray heron, a solitary large bird (3ft), will be seen on most of the tanks. Its neck is slender with kink and has large toes to balance its body on soft mud while foraging.

The spot billed ducks are common resident ducks on most of the tanks. Their numbers are seen augmented during winter when they are found amidst migratory ducks. The floating vegetations provide walking pads for jacanas which balance themselves with long toes, seeking invertebrates and tiny frogs.

The common kingfisher found singly by the tank plunge dives to fish while the pied kingfisher hovers over the water in a stationery position and hurls itself with great speed at water to catch fish.

Migratory Birds:

During every winter (beginning with october- November onwards) a large number of ducks, geese and waders start arriving on water bodies in South with unfailing accuracy. They come from eastern Germany, Europe, Siberia, Central Asia and as far as China, crossing thousands of miles. They scatter over all the major tanks. It is a great spectacle to

be observed on the wetlands around Mysore. They include gargneys (blue winged teal), cotton teal, pintails, pochards, shovellers, Black winged stilts, sandpipers, the barheaded goose and some small birds. They come in large flock of hundreds, with exception of shovellers who are seen in few numbers. Gargneys and pintails are commonest. A marsh harrier is also a common winter visitor seen singly hovering over the reedbeds to pick up unsuspecting prey. Only a few migratory storks could be seen. One may occasionally come across a small flock of lesser flamingoes or a few stragglers left behind. On some tanks painted storks are common. They have been found breeding near karanjikere on the tall trees surrounding the area.

Most of the migratory birds depart by March. Every year since 1987, Asian Waterfowl Census is carried out- in the month of January all over India and neighbouring S.Asia. Since bird watchers from Mysore very actively participate in this programme of international significance, the amateurs and new comers with background in bird watching should join and enjoy the watching the unusual spectacle of bird migration right at their doorstep.

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(A List of Wetland birds is appended)