

## **“ KNOW THY HERITAGE — SUNDARBANS NATIONAL PARK ”**

Sundarbans National Park is one of the top ecotourism destinations in India , more precisely in West Bengal . It is located at South 24 Parganas of West Bengal . It is a part of the Sundarbans on the Ganges Reserve Forest in Bangladesh . It is densely covered with large mangrove forests and a home of various endangered species including tigers , aquatic mammals , birds and reptiles . It was declared as a core area of Sundarbans Tiger Reserve in 1973 , a wildlife sanctuary in 1977 and established as a national park on 4th May ,1984 . It is recognised as the World Heritage Site by UNSECO in 1987 and from 1989 it is considered as a World Network of Biosphere Reserve . It has been designated as a Ramsar site since 2019 . The largest Tiger Reserve and National Park in India covers 2585 square km of the Indian Sundarbans .

The total area of the Indian part of the Sundarbans forest , lying within the latitude between 21°13' — 22°40' North and longitude 88°05' — 89°06' East , is about 4262 square km , of which 2125 square km is occupied by mangrove forest across 56 islands and the balance is under the water . The park is surrounded by a Buffer Zone of 885 square km which consists mainly the mangrove forests . The core area of the park has its own natural boundaries with the river Matla on its West , the river Haribhanga on its East , with Netidhopani and Gosba in the North . The four Sundarbans National Park have been lumped together as they all share the common features of the estuarine mangrove ecosystem . The average minimum and maximum temperature is 20 degree centigrade and 48 degree centigrade respectively . Rainfall is heavy with humidity as high as 80 percent as it is close to the Bay of Bengal . The monsoon lasts from mid-June to mid-September . Prevailing wind is from the North and North-East from October to mid-March and South-West Westerlies prevails from mid-March to September . Storms which sometimes develop into cyclones are common during the months of May and October .

Sundarbans National Park is a part of the world's largest delta and home to the largest mangrove forests . In its brackish waters , mudflats and trees , reside an incredibly variety of flora and fauna . There are 64 plants species which have learned to survive in brackish water and saline inundation . Some of the common species include Sundari , Champa , Hatal , Golpati , Dhundul and Genwa . There are about 78 species of mangroves in these forests . They are extremely important as they play a vital role for the marine organisms . It is a home to a rich variety of wildlife , with the Royal Bengal Tigers the main attraction and enjoying a larger presence . Apart from the Royal Bengal Tiger , it is a home of various animals like Leopard Cats , Flying Fox , Pangolin , Indian Grey Mongoose , Wild Boar and many more . It is also famous for its marine life . There is a conservation programme in the park for Estuarine Crocodile and the Olive Ridley Turtle . In recent decades , the Indian Rhinoceros , Swamp Deer , Hog Deer , and Water Buffalo have become locally extinct . It is a wealth for the number of other threatened aquatic mammals such as the Irrawaddy and Ganges River dolphins . The site also contains an exceptional

number of threatened reptiles including the King Cobra and significant populations of the endemic river terrapin which was once believed to be extinct . Two of the four species of highly primitive Horseshoe Crab are found here . The Sajnakhali area , listed as an important bird area , contains a wealth of waterfowl and is of high importance for migratory birds .

The park has strict protection since its creation . The core area is free from all human disturbances like collection of woods , honey , fishing ,and other forest produces . However , in the buffer area fishing , honey collection and wood cutting are permitted in limited form . Protection of the park from poaching and theft of forest products is done by well armed forest staff who patrol in motor boats and launches . Forest offices and camps are located at several important parts of the park . Anti-poaching camps are manned by two to three knowledgeable labourers under supervision of concerned Beat Guard or Forester or Range Officers . Habitat of wildlife is maintained through eco-conservation , eco-development , training , education and research . Ten Forest Protection Committees and Fourteen Eco-development Committees have been formed in the fringe of Sundarbans Tiger Reserve to help in this regard for the situation . Seminars , workshops and awareness camps are organised in the vicinity of the park to educate the people on eco-conservation , eco-development , and such other issues . Mangrove and other plants are planted in the fringe area to meet the local need of fuel wood for about 1000 villages and to conserve buffer area . Conservation of soil is done to maintain the ecological balance . Several sweet water ponds have been dug up inside the park to provide drinking water for the wild animals . Controlling man eating tigers is another major activity . The number of casualties has been reduced from 40 to 10 per year . The reduction in number of casualties is a result of strict control over the movement of the people inside the tiger reserve , alternative income generation and awareness building among people . Straying away of the tigers from the nearby villages by way of nylon net fencing is the presently taken as the most successful method . Solar illumination of villages is another success method . Now the youths of the villages are given special training in controlling and the straying away of tigers from the villages .

Though strict protection exists in the park , there are a few loopholes . Due to wandering the tigers , man and tiger conflicts still continue to be an issue for that reason an average of 45 people killed annually by tigers every year and this conflict are the ones who goes there for collection of honey and firewood as well as fishing . The geographical topography with hostile terrain criss-crossed by several rivers and their tributaries , long international border with Bangladesh , fishing trawlers and launches enables poaching and cutting of wood , affecting the mangrove forests . Lack of staff , infrastructure and lack of funds exacerbate the situation .

Therefore , we can conclude that even though there are many challenges over there still is praiseworthy . Thus , being a responsible citizen we should protect it and should work on the fields that indeed need improvement .

BY,

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