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Salim Ali Centre
for
Ornithology and Natural History

Editorial

The Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) brings out the second issue of *SAROVAR SAURABH*, an ENVIS Newsletter on wetland ecosystems, sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India. The major goal of the Newsletter is to share information about wetlands with various users and, to highlight conservation issues of relevance to wetland community of professionals, managers, environmentalists and other stakeholders.

The newsletter is organized into five segments: Inventory of Wetlands, salient features of the findings from SACON, and wetlands of International significance e.g. Ramsar Sites, compiled list of threatened and near-threatened birds and Website of the month. In addition to monthly compilation of news items on Wetland Ecosystem, it is an attempt towards establishing linkages with information users, carriers and providers from among government, academia, business and Non-Governmental Organizations including that with the ENVIS.

To make this effort worthwhile the editorial team of *SAROVAR SAURABH* seeks active participation of its readers in terms of providing information, news, views, photographs and articles on issues of wetland conservation.

We welcome your feedback on the Newsletter and its contents.

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An Inventory of Wetlands

Ramsar convention (1971) of wetlands has identified inventory and classification as the key activity (www.ramsar.org). In India, they have been several efforts at inventorying by different agencies. These includes, efforts to map and identify areas for conservation of wetland by MoEnF (1990) – 4.1 Mha (above 100ha in size) covering 67,429 wetlands; WWF-India-AWB (Anon, 1993) – 10.8 Mha (excluding paddy fields and fisheries); SAC Ahmedabad (1998) – 7.58 Mha (all types of wetlands), 3.56 Mha (freshwater wetlands) and the latest by SACON's on inland freshwater wetlands alone, covering 7Mha.

In the fast deteriorating scenario of the wetland wealth of the country, the utmost priority, as already indicated by the National Wetland Committee of the MoEnF, should be given to document the existing wetland resources. Hence, the project was envisaged to develop a 'comprehensive inland wetland inventory, mapping and classification on a large spatial scale using existing and also by designating hierarchy of wetlands for conservation. The broad objectives of the project were:

The salient features of the findings and achievements are listed below

- Prioritization of 655 wetlands in the country for conservation at three levels; wetlands of international, national and local significance
- Projection of 199 wetlands for recognition at International level as Ramsar sites
- A GIS database on the nation-wide distribution of wetlands for 232 districts of the country
- A spatial database on the wetlands 2 ha and above for the select 72 districts from 10 states covering land use classification at level I, and wetland attributes at levels II and III.
- Broad characteristics such as turbidity level and vegetation of all the wetlands (2 ha and above) in 72 districts
- Species richness and abundance of waterfowl in the major wetlands in all the states, except Andaman and Nicobar, and Lakshadweep islands
- Site records of Threatened and Near Threatened species of wetland birds in various states
- Georeferenced distribution of 29 species of Anatidae, in Arc/info coverage
- Georeferenced distribution of 109 endemic aquatic plant species in the country in Arc/info coverage
- A broad classification of wetlands on socioeconomic use values
- Pattern in the levels of heavy metals and, organochlorine pesticides in the fishes of select wetlands of 14 states in India
- Creation of a comprehensive database on the major groups of Threatened wetland animals (birds, turtles, fishes) and endemic wetland plants of each state
- A comprehensive Inland Wetland Conservation Atlas with value added spatial data on distribution of wetlands in over 232 districts spanning almost all states. Other thematic details include classification of wetlands above 2 ha for 72 districts, distribution of bird and endemic aquatic plant species, and levels of environmental contamination.
- Creation of an easily accessible public domain database for all the data created and compiled.
- An outline for a National Wetland Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for 2004-2020.
- Establishment of a strong network of field personnel in the country
- An outreach and awareness campaign on conservation among various stakeholders across a wide cross section.

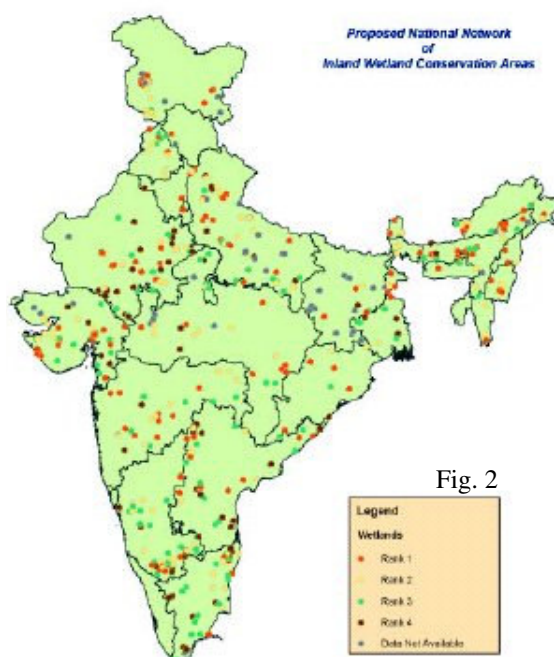
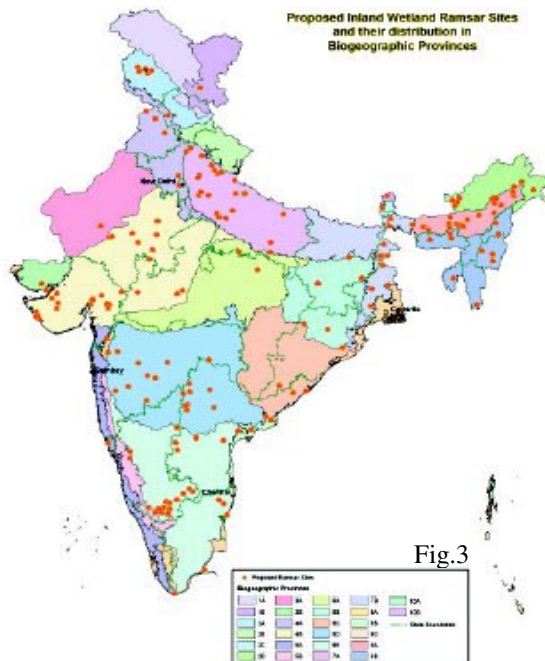


Fig. 2

A total of 16 parameters include hydrology, birds, vegetation, fishes, and socioeconomic attributes were chosen for prioritization. Criteria on birds, size of the wetland and socioeconomic were only considered for arriving at the conservation value assessment, as all other data were not available uniformly for most wetlands. Yet this exercise is again, first of its kind to be attempted at a national level. In all, 655 inland wetlands were prioritized. Ranks were given for 604 wetlands according to the availability of the above data. Of the 604 sites surveyed, 167 were identified as top-ranking sites followed by 173 in the second rank and 264 in the third and fourth ranks together. Distribution of the prioritized wetlands is given in Fig.2.



Altogether 199 wetlands fulfilled more than one criteria to be qualified for declaration as Ramsar site (Table below). A few more wetlands, which are currently included in the fourth rank, are potential Ramsar sites. These sites, according to the AWC data are potential, but could not be assessed during year 2002, because of the drought. Distribution of the proposed Ramsar sites in each state is given in Fig.3.

Action needs to be taken to prepare detailed proposal for the 199 wetlands as potential Ramsar sites. The remaining 438 wetlands prioritized for conservation, may be recognized as wetlands of national and local importance and, the entire 655 wetlands, may be brought under a National Network of Wetland Conservation Areas. Those wetlands having “low socio-economic pressure” from the local people may be declared as protected areas, while those with “medium and high use pressure” may be declared as Community Reserves to be managed by stakeholders with the participation of wildlife experts and managers.

Threatened & Near Threatened Birds in the major inland wetlands

During the current survey a total of 26 threatened bird species (5,637 birds) and 12 near threatened birds (51,680) were identified. Compiled list of birds are given below:

Threatened Bird Species

Common Name	Scientific Name
Baer's Pochard	<i>Aythya baeri</i>
Baikal Teal	<i>Anas formosa</i>
Blacknecked Crane	<i>Grus nigricollis</i>
Bristled Grass Warbler	<i>Chaetornis striatus</i>
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>
Finn's Weaver	<i>Ploceus megarhynchus</i>
Greater Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos dubius</i>
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
Indian Skimmer	<i>Rynchops albicollis</i>
Longbilled Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Marbled Teal	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
Masked Finfoot	<i>Helipais personata</i>
Pallas's Fishing Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucoryphus</i>
Sarus Crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>
Sociable Lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>
Spoonbilled Sandpiper	<i>Eurynorhynchus pygmeus</i>
Spotbilled Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
Spotted Greenshank	<i>Tringa guttifer</i>
Swamp Francolin	<i>Francolinus gularis</i>
Whitebellied Heron	<i>Ardea insignis</i>
Whitebacked Vulture	<i>Gypus bengalensis</i>
Whitewinged Wood Duck	<i>Cairina scutulata</i>
Wood Snipe	<i>Gallinago nemoricola</i>

Near Threatened Bird Species

Common Name	Scientific Name
Blackbellied Tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>
White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Blacknecked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
Blyth's Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo hercules</i>
White-eyed Pochard	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Greyheaded Fishing Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyetus</i>
Himalayan Fishing Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga humilis</i>
Lesser Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus minor</i>
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Pale Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
King Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>

Website of the month

www.wetlandsofindia.org

Salim Ali Centre of Ornithology and Natural History an autonomous center aided by MoEnF, GOI, New Delhi. SACON recognized as ENVIS center for wetland ecosystem. Recently website was updated with includes detail information of inland wetlands biodiversity, wetland maps for selected 72 districts, its ranking across the country for prioritization and finally proposed the sites for Ramsar convention.

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SAROVAR SAURABH

ENVIS NEWSLETTER on Wetland Ecosystem

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