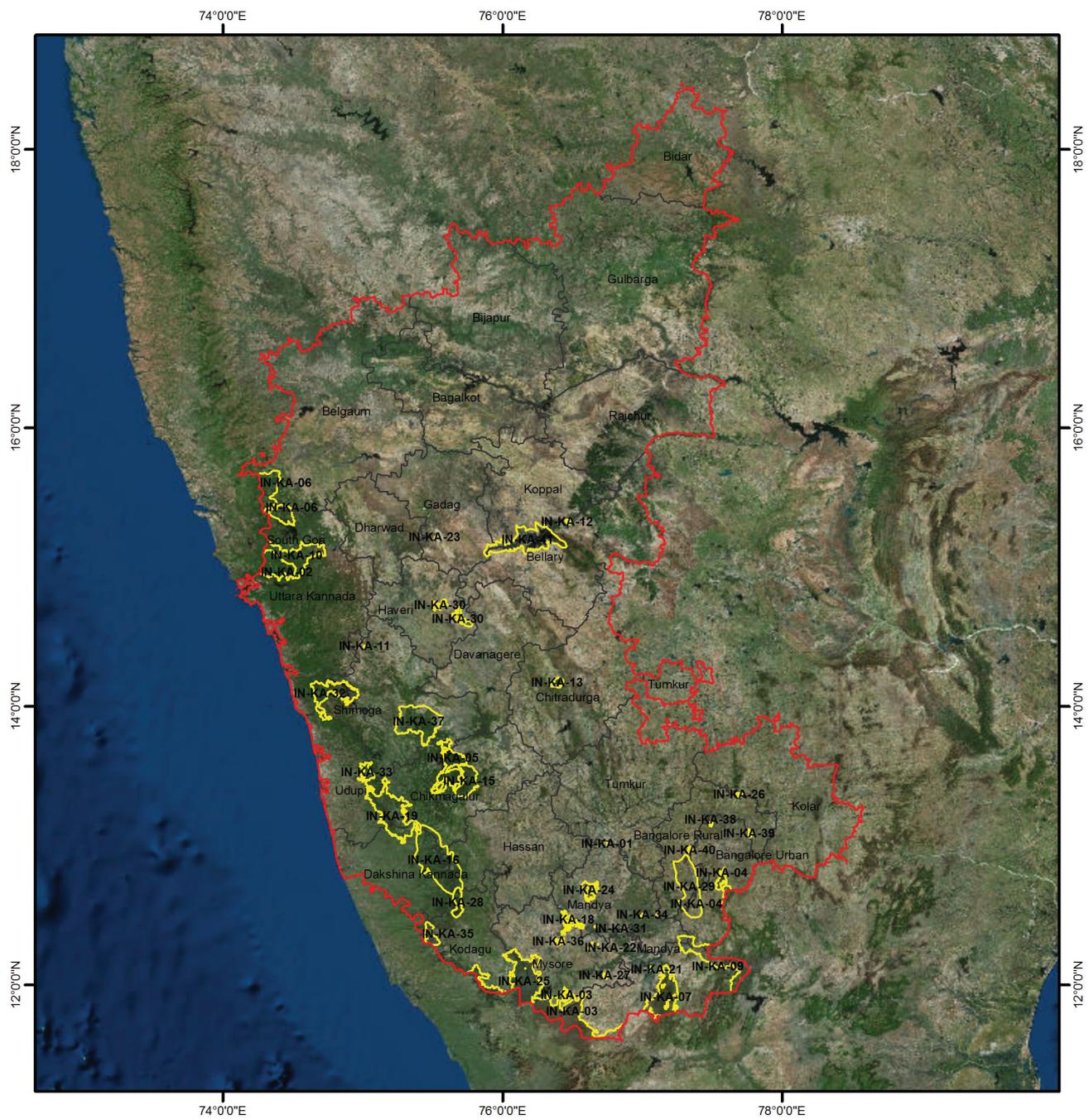


IN-KA

Important Bird Areas in Karnataka








0 1,300 2,600 5,200
Kilometers



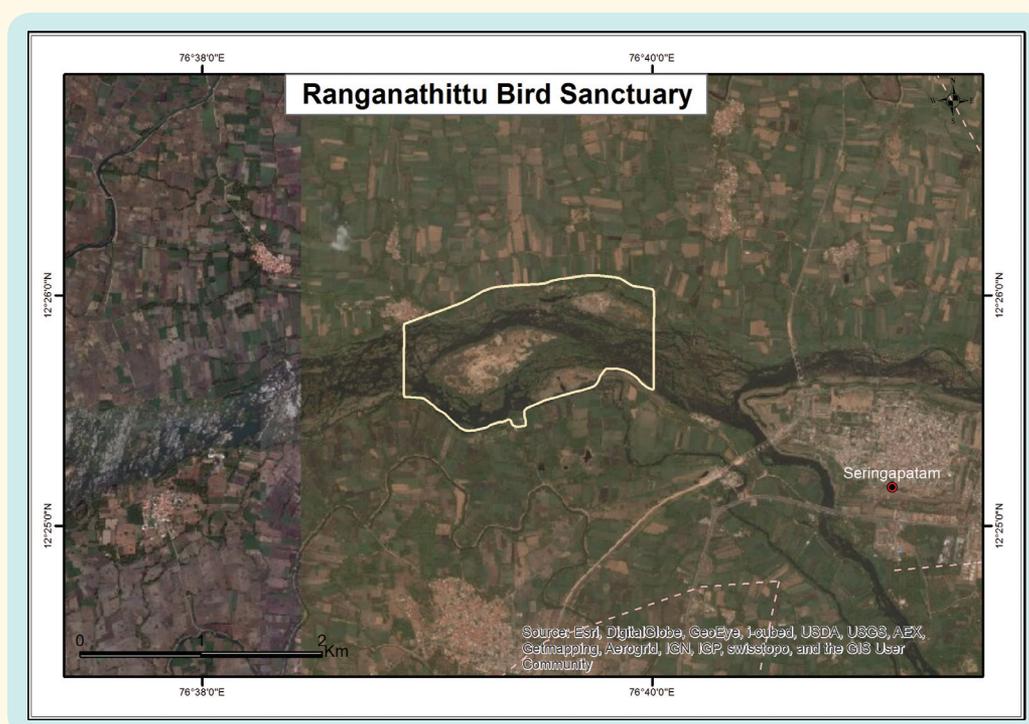
RANGANATHITU BIRD SANCTUARY

IN-KA-31

IBA Site Code	: IN-KA-31	Area	: 67.5 ha
Administrative Region (State)	: Karnataka	Altitude	: 690–715 msl
District	: Mysore	Rainfall	: 800 mm
Coordinates	: 12° 22' 50" N, 76° 39' 05" E	Temperature	: 15 °C to 35 °C
Ownership	: State	Biogeographic Zone	: Deccan Peninsula
		Habitats	: Riverine Vegetation

IBA CRITERIA: A1 (Threatened species), A4i (>1% of biogeographic population threshold)

PROTECTION STATUS: Established July, 1940, officially declared Bird Sanctuary 1980.



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Ranganathittu is one of the oldest bird sanctuaries of India, with one of the most picturesque heronries in the country. The sanctuary was declared in 1940, at the behest of Sálim Ali, after his Mysore State bird survey (Ali & Whistler 1942–1943), but was officially declared only in 1980. It is situated c. 16 km from Mysore, just off the Mysore-Srirangapatnam road. Ranganathittu is a cluster of six islets and one main island formed by a weir built by the ruler of Mysore across the River Kaveri in the 1640s. The weir has impounded water that is carried through an aqueduct to Srirangapatnam. The impounded water forms a large, deep reservoir with a number of islets, which provide good nesting habitat for birds. The sanctuary is surrounded by irrigated agricultural fields where many birds forage.

The Kaveri river is quite slow flowing within the sanctuary, with many secluded waterways where it is almost still, providing just the right type of habitat for

colonial nesting of waterbirds. The flora is mainly riverine vegetation with *Salix* sp., *Terminalia arjuna*, *Vitex* sp., *Millettia pinnata*, *Ficus* sp., *Pithecellobium dulce*, *Pandanus tectorius*, *Caesalpinia bonducella*, bamboo and sedges.

AVIFAUNA

During early 1980 and before, nesting was mainly restricted to pre-monsoon and monsoon breeding. Due to staggered breeding season among the nesting species, bird nesting can be seen in the heronry round the year now. The breeders include Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*, Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, eight heronry species: Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Great Egret *Ardea (Egretta) alba*,



DHIRITMAN MUKHERJEE

The birds in Ranganathittu have become used to people, so they can be approached quite close from the boat

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Indian Pond-heron *Ardeola grayii*, and Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Since the late 1980s, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* and Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* have also commenced breeding at the site. In addition, nesting of White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*, Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis*, White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*, Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, and Streak-throated Swallow *Hirundo fluvicola* can be seen within the sanctuary. Boat facility provided by the Forest Department enables close

observation of the breeding activity, since the birds are used to the movement of humans and boats.

Nearly 170 bird species have been recorded. In winter, Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea*, Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*, Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Common Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*, Blyth's Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, and Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* are found here. There is a record of vagrant Lesser Frigate Bird *Fregata ariel* (Huilgol 2007), and sporadic sighting of resident Grey-headed Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* and Lesser Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis*. Even a Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* was once sighted near Srirangapatnam which is near this IBA (see Link: Umesh Srinivasan 2001).

Habitat similar to Ranganathittu exists at Gende Hosalli Islands, a few kilometres downstream of the Kaveri river, however only a few colonies have been recorded. But sporadically, up to two dozen Oriental Darters breed in trees on the sides of feeder canals.

OTHER KEY FAUNA

The terrestrial and arboreal fauna of the sanctuary includes Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsi*, Monitor Lizard *Varanus bengalensis*, Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*, Indian Flying Fox (Fruit Bat) *Pteropus giganteus*, Bonnet Macaque *Macaca*

ENDANGERED

Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
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VULNERABLE

Asian Woollyneck	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
Indian Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga hastata</i>
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga clanga</i>

NEAR THREATENED

Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
Red-headed Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>
River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>

radiata, and Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*. A large population of over 1,000 Greater Indian Fruit Bat *Pteropus giganteus* inhabits the tall trees at Ranganathittu.

The aquatic fauna includes Common Otter *Lutra lutra*. The sanctuary is also home to 30–40 Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata*. A very healthy population of about 75–80 Marsh Crocodiles *Crocodylus palustris* inhabit the waters at Ranganathittu.

About 14 species of freshwater fishes including the Mahaseer are known to inhabit the waters at Ranganathittu: Deccan Mahseer *Tor khudree* (*Barbus tor*), Nilgiris Barb *Hypselobarbus dubius* (*Barbus dubius*), Carnatic Carp *Barbodes carnaticus* (*Barbus carnaticus*), Fringe-lipped Peninsular Carp *Labeo fimbriatus*, Orangefin Labeo *L. calbasu*, Cauvery White Carp (Mrigal Carp) *Cirrhinus cirrhosus*, Helicopter Catfish *Wallago attu*, Butter Fish *Callichorus bimaculatus*, Tank Gobi *Glossogobius striatus*, Cobra Snakehead *Channa marulius*, Banded Snakehead *C. striatus*, Spotted Snakehead *C. punctatus*, Spiny Eel *Mastacembelus armatus*, and Featherback *Notopterus notopterus*.

Ranganathittu has its own endemic species of plant *Iphigenia mysorensis*, a relative of the lily found nowhere else in the world.

TOURISM AND RECREATION

Ranganathittu is one of the most sought after destinations for tourists in this part of the country. Boating at this riverine habitat adds to the charm of the area. It also attracts travellers bound for Mysore, who often make a casual stopover

at the sanctuary. With the breeding season of the birds spread throughout the year, there is a steady flow of visitors round the year. With several thousand visitors flocking at the site, tourism is an important money earner at the site.

THREATS AND CONSERVATION ISSUES

Floods: Flooding occurs regularly every monsoon, when excess water is released from the Krishnarajasagar Reservoir/Dam upstream from the sanctuary. During floods, the water level has been recorded rising up to about 5 m. As a consequence, most of the nests built at lower levels on the island vegetation get washed away. One of the nesting species that is most affected has been the Black-headed Ibis. However, once the flood waters recede, the birds start nesting again (Neginhal 1980, Shetty *et al.* 1991, Subramanya & Naveein 2005, Subramanya *et al.* 1991).

Pollution: Pollution load of fertilizers and pesticides drained from the surrounding agricultural land into the sanctuary is a major and persistent concern. Bagasse from sugarcane industries upstream often finds its way into the sanctuary. The effect on the waters has not been studied.

Tourism: Over 200,000 tourists visit this sanctuary every year. As in other tourist destinations, this seems to be the major problem here. The huge number of visitors disturbs the nesting birds on the islands. Breeding birds are disturbed when tourists go very near the birds, attracting crows which pillage eggs and chicks. In fact, the crows follow the boats! Restricting recreation and tourism in the nesting area would help to prevent degradation of the habitat and



ASAD R. RAHMANI

Ranganathittu is one of the most popular birding areas for serious birdwatchers, amateur photographers, and the general public



ASAD R. RAHMAN

Although 15 to 20 large birds are the star attraction, more than 170 species have been identified from Ranganathittu, including a few globally Threatened birds

biodiversity. As a consequence of high visitor flow, the growing population of crows and monkeys in Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary is becoming a menace for the other birds and even for tourists. It is reported that the crows and monkeys scare away the birds and also destroy their eggs. They have to be controlled, and if necessary even exterminated.

Intensive photography: Ranganathittu is one of the most favoured destinations for nature and wildlife photography. Photographers trying to get too close to nesting birds are a source of immense disturbance. Birds like the River Tern, which nest on the rocky outcrops in the midstream of the river are frequently disturbed. There should be a policy to restrict photographers from approaching too close to the nesting area.

Mini hydel projects: Very recently, there was a move to establish a 3MW mini hydel project very close to the sanctuary. As the project was proposed to be established so close to the sanctuary boundary and within the designated Eco-sensitive Zone around the sanctuary, permission was denied (Anon. 2012).

KEY CONTRIBUTORS

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