

CONSERVATION OF NANDUR MADHAMESHWAR WETLAND, INDIA

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The importance of wetlands, the way they sustain biological diversity, harbour and attract migratory birds is well known. How these wetlands can be protected, managed and conserved are important issues. In the present paper the authors, being managers of protected areas, have tried to illustrate these issues with specific reference to Nandur Madhameshwar wetland.

Nandur Madhameshwar wetland, situated in the proximity of Nasik city in Niphad Tehsil, was formed by the dam constructed at the confluence of Godavari and Kadwa rivers in 1907. The wetland has been included in the directory of Asian wetlands and Dr. Sálím Ali opined that it is a lovely area that has the potential of becoming the "Bharatpur of Maharashtra". In addition to its rich resident avifauna, this wetland attracts many migratory birds, mainly demoiselle cranes, flamingoes, spoonbills, many species of storks, ibises, herons, egrets, ducks, sand pipers, stilts, and other waders. It was notified as a sanctuary as per the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 in 1986. However, the efforts of protecting, managing and conserving it were started by the Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department only in 1994. The problems in settling the claims of local people, other agencies and departments on the land, the resource study of the area, fluctuations in the population of migratory birds, planning of research studies, threats to the area and management issues have been described in this paper with practical and particular reference to Nandur Madhameshwar wetland.

INTRODUCTION

The vast area of the Deccan plateau, in Maharashtra state in India, faces acute water shortage in summer, in spite of sufficient rainfall. The rivers flowing through this tract are full of water, occasionally threatening to flood in the monsoon. It is a peculiar situation. To alleviate the continuous suffering of the scarcity affected people of Nasik and Ahmednagar districts, the British Government formulated the Godavari canal system scheme by constructing dams across the Darna river at Nandgaon and at the confluence of

the Godavari and Kadwa rivers at Nandur-Madhameshwar in 1907-1913. The Nandur Madhameshwar water reservoir is situated in Niphad tehsil near Nasik. In 1956, an earthen dam was constructed at Gangapur across the Godavari river, close to its origin at Tryambakeshwar, from which Nandur Madhameshwar reservoir gets water when it is released from the Gangapur and Darna reservoirs. The water stored at Nandur Madhameshwar is subsequently released through canals to far off areas in Nasik and Ahmednagar districts for irrigation. With the flow of water, a lot of silt and organic matter was deposited in the reservoir and in the surrounding areas which were mainly agricultural fields. With the passage of time, small islands of silt and organic matter were formed, many shallow ponds created, providing biological conditions that favoured the growth and stabilization of aquatic vegetation and fauna. Thus the man-made reservoir and surrounding areas (i.e. agricultural fields having winter crop) turned into a good wetland habitat.

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