

Bird Watching At Ousteri



Bird watching was organized for teachers at Ousteri Lake on July 2 & 9, 2017. The objective was to curate water birds, resident as well as migratory, and to understand their role in the ecosystem. 30 teachers assembled at the lake at 6 am. Primary School Teacher (PST) Surendhar B. was the guide for the session.

Teachers spotted 600-700 birds. Bird observation and recording sheets were used to note down the observations. A spotting scope was available to help teachers get a closer look at each bird. Surendhar began the session by describing the physical features, habit and habitat of these birds using the book "Birds of Indian Subcontinent".

Role of birds in the ecosystem

- Birds are good pollinators and help in seed dispersal. They carry seeds in their intestines and deposit them in new places.
- Bird droppings make the water body healthy. They contain high levels of nitrogen, phosphate

and potassium – three major nutrients essential for plant growth.

- Birds scavenge carcasses and help prevent the spread of diseases.
- Birds are natural pest-controlling agents. They control pests (vermin) in farms, gardens and other places.

Besides the above-mentioned uses, birds also feed our souls with their soothing rhythm and lovely behavior that moves us to write poetry and literature.

Ideas for discussing birds with students

Bird watching is not just a very enjoyable learning activity but also enhances the concentration, memory and observation capacity of children.

1. Students can be introduced to bird watching at school before coming to water birds, considering the complexity. For watching water birds, students

can be taken to a nearby water body early in the morning. Binoculars are a must for waterbirding as the birds stand far away from the banks. However, schools or at-home students can watch birds with the naked eye as they won't be very far off. Identification can be done through refined observation of physical features, calls and behavior patterns.

2. Mobile applications such as e-bird and websites like Xeno Canto are useful. E-bird and Xeno Canto have a database of bird sounds.

3. Carrying out bird count in the lake – species by species. Teachers can carry out bird watching at school during lunch hours. E-bird can be used to document the information captured through bird watching.
4. Teachers can participate in Campus Bird Count Program, which is a part of Great Backyard Bird Count organized by Bird Count India.

Some of these species were spotted during the session



Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)

Description - It is the only kingfisher with an all-black-and-white plumage. Found around still fresh waters, slow-moving rivers and streams, also tidal creeks and pools



Gull-billed Tern

(*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

Stocky, with wide wings. Stout blackbill. Tail short and notched. Black cap when breeding. Head nearly white during winter, with dark smudge behind eyes.



Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)

Dark reddish-brown plumage, and darker grey back. Narrow yellow bill. Black crown with two lanceolate plumes. Inhabits marshes, lagoons and lakes surrounded by dense vegetation



Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)

Get their name from their distinctive pink terial feathers. Head of the adult is bare and orange or reddish in colour. Distinctive black breast band with white scaly markings.



Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)

A large white marsh bird with naked black head and neck. Long, stout, black, down-curved curlew-like bill. Found in marshy wetlands inland and on the coast.



Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Water birds with black body and white bill. They are tailless birds that look like ducks when swimming. Aggressively territorial during the breeding season, often found near shallow vegetated lakes.

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)



Description - Small water bird with a pointed bill. The adult is unmistakable in summer, predominantly dark above with its rich, rufous coloured neck, cheeks and flanks, and bright yellow gape.

Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)



Streamlined body, narrow, sharp-pointed wings and a deeply forked tail. The upperparts of the little tern are pale grey, contrasting with the entirely white underparts. Inhabits lagoons, estuaries, river mouths and deltas, lakes, bays, harbours and inlets.

Intermediate egret
(*Mesophoyx intermedia*)



Description - Is a heron with all-white plumage, generally dark legs and a thick yellow bill.

Black-winged stilt
(*Himantopus himantopus*)



Description - The Black-winged Stilt is a black winged white wading bird with long and fine pink legs, giving the bird an elegant look. Gregarious, wades in deep water as its legs are long. Breeds in large colonies.

Whiskered Tern
(*Chlidonias hybridus*)



A more slender bird than many other tern species, this fork-tailed tern has two distinct plumages. The bill and legs are red, a striking feature that allows this species to be distinguished from other terns

Lesser Whistling Duck
(*Dendrocygna javanica*)

Long grey bill, long head and legs. It has a buff head, neck and darker crown. The back and wings are darkish grey, and there are chestnut patches on the wings and tail. Lives in freshwater lakes, with vegetation, where this duck feeds on seeds and other vegetation.

Brahmini Kite (*Haliastur indus*)



Adults have a reddish-brown plumage and a contrasting white head and breast which make them easy to distinguish from other birds of prey. Inhabit coastal plains, estuaries, rivers, lakes, swamps, marshes, reservoirs, rice fields and urban areas.



Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)



Small white egret with dark grey-black legs, black bill and a bright yellow naked face. The Little Egret is also called the Lesser Egret. Lives in tidal mudflats, saltwater and freshwater wetlands, and mangroves



Greater Flamingo
(*Phoenicopterus roseus*)

Greater flamingos are likely to be the only tall, pink bird in any given locale. They also have long, lean, curved necks and black-tipped bills with a distinctive downward bend.

Spot-billed pelican or grey pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*)



A large squat water bird grayish white with brown nuchal crest. Short stout legs large webbed feet. Nest in colonies and the nest is a thick platform of twigs placed on trees. Several nests are seen in the same tree.



Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Has a hunched posture. The non-breeding birds have completely white plumage with yellow bill and yellow-grey legs.

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