

WATERBIRDS DIVERSITY OF RANCHI DISTRICT

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Many species of water birds are migratory. Knowledge about their number, trends and distribution is a fundamental tool for their proper management and conservation. Data collected for Ranchi District have shown potential for formulating plans to monitor management and conservation of water birds in the region.

It is said that in the past, Ranchi used to be a happy hunting ground for sportsmen, but on account of progressive shrinkage of areas under forests, to make room for cultivation, the fauna has largely diminished. The ruthless exploitation of timber resources in the district during world war (1939-1945) and thereafter for commercial purposes has further diminished the forest area which used to be inhabited formerly by variety of animals (Anon, 1965)

Besides the Red Jungle Fowl, the most common of important birds were the pea fowls. Painted Spurfowl known as "*Askal Murgi*" were found in rocky forests. The cock of the species carried four spurs – two on each leg, whilst the hen was armed with only two spurs. The Grey Partridge and Green Pigeon were also common while the Sand Grouse was not found in large numbers.

Among the water birds Lesser Whistling Teals were most common. The Nukta or Comb Duck frequented the waterbodies in southern parts of the District. The spotbills were rarely found. Of the other migrant species of wild fowl – Gadwall, Garganey, Common Teal, Tufted Duck, White-eyed and Brahminy Duck were common to sight. In early December and again in late March, even Grey-legged Geese were often seen flying over Ranchi. The Bar-headed Geese were also seen on the rivers of Ranchi District.

Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand is a common territory where both the Himalayan and peninsular forms are found. Thus one can find Malabar Whistling Thrush, White-throated Ground Thrush and Southern Yellow-cheeked Tit in this District. Some of the other common species found are Sand Grouse, White-browed Blue Flycatcher, Black-headed Bunting, Merganser and Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*). In winters one can find the Grey-headed Flycatchers, Minivets, Harriers, Shrikes, Nuthatchers and Nightjars.

Apart from the game and hunting birds, the total number of species recorded were over 400 as per Ranchi District Gazetteer (1961), as against 294 mentioned by V. Ball (1874). According to experts, these 400 species, cover practically the entire range of families of avifauna, the only deficiencies being the absence of

some of the large aquatic migrants. The dams of Kanke, Hatia, Lataratu and Getalsud have started attracting a large number of aquatic migrants.

Geographical areas covered by the present study include several wetlands in Ranchi District. These wetlands are Kanke, Getalsud, Hatia, Ratu and Lataratu Reservoir, which are man made water bodies of considerable extent and majority of them are not more than 30-40 years old. The first three of them are incidentally not very far off from the town and despite this attract large number of water birds. The Lataratu Reservoir is around 30km away from town and is amidst Sal forest, with a couple of villages in its vicinity. The number of species of birds and the total number of each species of birds was observed from January 2001 to March 2001. The water bird species were observed swimming in water/ flying over it or on the bank of the water body/marshy edges. A few guide books on Indian birds and a binocular were used while sighting and identifying the species.

The number of birds of each species, sighted at different locations has been recorded in Tables 1^w to 5^w.

A total of five sites were covered around Getalsud Reservoir, the largest fresh water body in the district, reported a total of 571 water birds of 14 species. Although this enormous water body is not under any legal protection and a small fringe of it forms a part of the Ranchi Zoological Park. All other sites, including Getalsud are under threat of sporadic poaching. The Tufted Pochard and Little Grebe are the most abundant species recorded.

Significantly a small number of Common Crane (*Grus grus*) and Pallas's Fishing Eagle have been sighted. A comparison with checklist of birds of Ball (1874) shows that these species are either new to this region or had not been recorded earlier. The population of the "Common Crane" counted for South Asia in years 1994, 1995 and 1996 was 10, 149, 17,325 and 4,384, respectively. Their count is much lower than that of the Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*), which have been reported to be more abundant. Incidentally, none were reported from Jharkhand (Lopez & Mundkar, 1997).

Similarly, the count of birds in India for year 1994, 1995 and 1996 mentions the number of Pallas' Fishing Eagle to be 0, 3, and 12, respectively (Lopez & Mundkar, 1997). Only one was recorded in 1996. As the status of this species is little known in Ranchi District, further monitoring of their population in coming years is urgently needed.

All the wetlands, under study are subject to various use and threats. Sporadic hunting of water birds, pollution and disturbance due to agriculture has been identified as the main threats to these wetlands.

REFERENCES

- Anon. (1965). pp.30-35. Ranchi District Gazetteer.
Lopez, A. and T. Mundkar (1997). *The Asian Waterfowl Census*. Wetlands International
Ball, V. (1874). Avifauna of Chotanagpur. *Stray Feathers* 2: 1-355.

^w See Tables 1 to 5 for water birds distribution information in Ranchi District as a web supplement at www.zoosprint.org