

land thus reclaimed was either encroached upon or brought under cultivation. Both these activities, together with untreated sewage and solid wastes, reduced the lake's water area to less than half.

There is currently 3-4 meter thick, and probably even more, deposit of organic sludge under the water. Most of the water hyacinth has been flushed out but few plants remain and continue to grow. The aquatic vegetation has changed considerably from what was recorded in late 1970s. The submerged plants that could provide oxygen and help reduce organic matter in water are no more there. The shallow depth of the lake (due to siltation) and the large amounts of organic matter have changed the character of the lake completely. It has started attracting a larger number of birds of different species most of which feed on invertebrates. Birds that nest on trees and those feeding on plants or fish are rarely seen in the lake.

After 40 years of neglect and treatment with contempt, the people of Jaipur are trying to revive a dying lake but not because they have love for it but with an eye on making money by offering a glimpse of the "well embalmed mummy" of a former celebrity. The National Lake Conservation Programme of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, has sanctioned funds for the restoration of the lake through a series of measures such as the treatment of city's domestic wastewater before some of it is released into the lake, dredging of a part of the lake to remove the sediments accumulated over decades, beautification of the surroundings (lake front only) and the renovation of the palace.

The State Government, in partnership with private enterprise, is now making efforts to improve the lake and hopes to attract domestic and foreign tourists to visit it for recreation. But we have already stripped the lake of its vitals the major sources of water inflow. Much of the lake area has been brought under human occupation. Plans are made to sustain the lake by feeding it with "tertiary-treated" wastewater. Ponder over the irony: the Mansagar created for supplying water for irrigation needs today water for its own survival! Remember, the sewage generated in the city is the product of the water transported from Jamwa Ramgarh and extracted from the deep aquifers. The thick organic deposits under the water have been left uncared and will continue to haunt the lake.

Today we rejoice over the many species of birds having made the Mansagar their winter retreat but the planned use of the palace is likely to drive them away. The crowd of visitors on the promenade and the boats moving on the lake will also influence the birds. The rest of the Nature around the lake has no place in the schemes of Mansagar's rehabilitation.

The half-hearted implementation of an ill-conceived restoration plan will not "restore" the lake to its pre-independence pristine glory. It must be admitted that under the present socio-economic conditions, complete restoration will be wholly impossible. For the sustained long-term well-being of the Mansagar, attempts needs to be made to ensure its water supply and high water quality in a natural manner. This also requires the cooperation, support and participation of all the people of Jaipur.

Wetland Gems of Rajasthan

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As first-time visitors to India last year (04), we were captivated by the brilliant colors, artistic creativity, friendly people, and delicious food. The main purpose of our trip was to participate in the International Workshop on Environmental Education and the 7th Indian Birding Fair, which were both held in Jaipur. These two events were meticulously planned and executed by members of the Tourism and Wildlife Society of India. We were moved by the dedication of teachers, students, and local conservationists to improving the condition of Rajasthan's environment and wildlife populations. While in Jaipur, we received a good introduction to Rajasthan's wetlands and their associated birdlife.



The rich cultural heritage of Man Sagar makes it a unique place to view birds and hold the Birding Fair. In the dry climate of Rajasthan, wetlands like Man Sagar provide critical habitat for migratory and resident birds. Indeed, these wetlands are as precious as gems for many birds. Some of the waders (small water birds) we observed arrived at the lake from as far away as northern Russia. It is amazing to us that 167 species of birds have been observed at this small sanctuary. Over two days, we were joined by thousands of school children who visited Man Sagar to learn about wetlands and observe the unique wetland birds. We enjoyed sharing stories with them about wading

birds in the United States and the similarities of important wetland habitats. We also shared various craft activities and games that we adapted from migratory bird curricula prepared for the Americas. We enjoyed the activities as much as the children. The Tourism and Wildlife Society of India, the Jaipur Development Authority, the Rajasthan government, and local biologists should be commended for their continuing work to protect Man Sagar as a "Bird Park". This very successful cooperative conservation effort is inspiring, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proud to be part of this conservation partnership. Throughout the world, successful conservation requires the commitment of many, and often diverse, organizations and individuals. The progress at Man Sagar highlights how cooperative conservation can be successful.

In addition to our enjoyable visit in Jaipur, we had the opportunity to visit another wetland gem --- Keoladeo National Park. Meeting Bachu Singh at first light, we were welcomed by three jackals that nonchalantly crossed the road ahead of us. We spent the next four hours slowly making our way around one of the foot-trails near the headquarters, stopping often to scan through flocks of thousands of resident and migrant waterbirds. Ducks, herons, and storks were everywhere. The highlight of the morning was a close view of a pair of Indian Sarus cranes, of which the male was banded as a nestling by Bachu. He was as delighted as a new father to see that his "son" had now grown and found a mate. Passing through a field on our return, we spotted two Indian rock pythons --- both lazily enjoying the sun on the cool morning. After lunch, we hired a boat for a trip into the lagoons. Perched on the edge of rickety nests, almost-fledged painted stork young noisily, and continuously, demanded food from their parents. The water in the lagoon was amazingly clean and supported a rich growth of aquatic plants. This lush growth and abundant fish supply explains why so many resident and migratory water birds congregate in Keoladeo; migratory birds connect India with many central Asian countries. Also in the lagoons were local women hired to hand-remove the invasive water hyacinth --- an exotic water weed that can smother productive wetlands.



We continued our wildlife viewing via rickshaw and explored farther reaches of the park. Although hundreds of park visitors shared the main access road on this November Sunday, the wildlife seemed undisturbed by the visiting throng. The park's policy of limiting trails only to non-motorized access (foot, bicycle, rickshaw, and boat) seems to have minimized the effects of human disturbance on water bird reproduction and feeding. We also observed large groups of spotted deer and nilgai in the park, many which included numerous young. To end the day, we had spectacular views in fading afternoon light of white-breasted kingfishers and brilliantly-colored Indian rollers. Over dinner, we were delighted, and impressed, to discover that we had seen 130 bird species during our day in the park.

Our visit to Rajasthan was comparable to some of the best wildlife viewing experiences we have had anywhere in the world. Through our positions with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and as

hobbyist travelers, we have had numerous opportunities to visit protected areas across the Americas and in Asia. These travel experiences have enhanced our knowledge about, and changed our outlook on, globally significant protected areas. Certainly, Keoladeo National Park deserves the continued attention of the global community, and Man Sagar has the potential to provide a quality wildlife experience for local and international visitors. After visiting India for the first time, we are anxious to return and learn more about its natural and cultural history. The parks and people of India have so much to offer, and we will encourage our friends and acquaintances to overcome their fears of political unrest to take a step into the unfamiliar. We hope all visitors, local and international, will value Rajasthan's precious wetland gems.

Note: Mrs. Heather and Mr. Brad came from USA, led the 7th Birding Fair and gave demonstration of bird ringing/conservation programmes to about 3,000 students by organising a stall (see photograph). Going back, they left a donation (US Dollars 100) for TWSI, saying well done. By writing the above article for the 8th Birding Fair, they have sent in, by cheque, another donation to TWSI (US Dollars 500). Hail Heather-Brad. We wish there are more supporters for Bird Conservation and a threatened habitat like Keoladeo National Park!