

Bharatpur springs back to life

Migratory Birds Return To Keoladeo As Rains Fill Up Parched Water Bodies In Sanctuary This Year

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Jaipur: Heavy monsoon showers this year may have caused floods in several parts of the country but have come as a blessing to Bharatpur's Keoladeo bird sanctuary. The rains rejuvenated the bird sanctuary which had almost dried up as monsoon had eluded the region for the past several years.

After a gap of about eight years, this bird sanctuary is now flush with water. According to sanctuary sources, it has already received about 250 million cubic feet (mcf) of water. It is not just that, ample water has also led to growth of fish, plankton, snails and other organic matter. This is considered ideal for attracting migratory birds.

"Due to excessive rain in Karauli district, water from the Pachna dam reservoir has overflowed and, as a result, we are getting a lot of water over the past few days. Though the sanctuary needs about 550 mcf of water, whatever we have received so far is sufficient to rejuvenate the park," sources added.

Water from Pachna dam comes to Ajanbund through Pichuna canal, considered to be the lifeline of the sanctuary.

One of the finest bird sanctuary in the world, Keoladeo Ghana National Park, as the reserve bird sanctuary is officially known, attracts a huge number of migratory birds. More than 300 species of birds are found in this small wildlife park spread over 29 sq km, of which 11 sq km are marshes and the rest scrub-

land and grassland. Animals like sambar, chital, nilgai, boar, etc. are also found here.

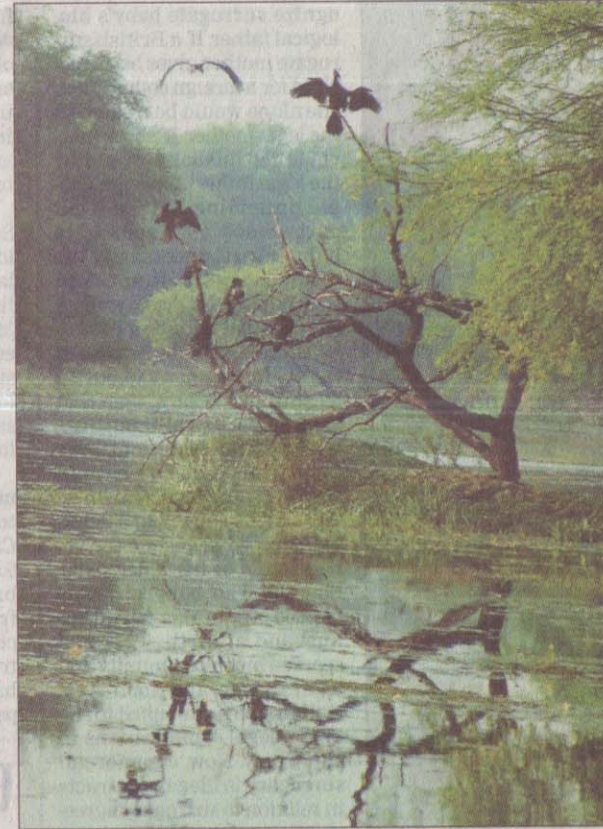
The sanctuary had been plagued by water scarcity since the past several years due to scanty rainfall, thereby threatening the very existence of the sanctuary. It even faced the threat of being stripped of its "World Heritage Site" tag, forcing the Rajasthan government to initiate some projects to fetch water to the park.

Out of these projects, the Chiksana canal project, aimed at drawing 50-60 mcf of flood water during the monsoon, has been completed while two more projects — the Govardhan drain project and the Dholpur-Bharatpur Chambal drinking water project — are pending due to paucity of funds. Last week, a team from Planning Commission visited the sanctuary to gauge the situation so that some funds could be diverted for it in the next plan.

To address the emergency situation, deep bore wells and shallow bore wells were dug inside the park. But the construction of wells has not been of much help since birds prefer flowing water.

The monsoon has also brought along with it a huge flock of migratory birds to Keoladeo. Sources at the park said birds such as painted storks, open billed storks, cormorants, egrets, herons, night herons, etc have already started nesting. In fact, the open billed storks have already laid eggs and some of them have hatched, sources said.

Other birds like the 'pin tail' and 'gar-ganey teal' have just started arriving.



BLESSED BY MONSOON: Rains have rejuvenated Keoladeo bird sanctuary which had almost dried up as monsoon had eluded the region for the past eight years

