

Decline In the Population of Migratory Birds in Santragachi Jheel



Ziniya Ghatak

Student, B.Sc., 3rd Year
Department of Environmental Science
Asutosh College
ghatakziniya25@gmail.com

Acting as the transitional zone between the land and the water, the wetlands are perhaps one of the most significant habitats contributing much to the biodiversity of India. They serve as an important ground for a number of resident and migratory bird species. One such home of migratory birds is the Santragachi Jheel. The urban wetland is situated adjacent to the turbulent Santragachi Railway Station, in the district Howrah of West Bengal, around 8km away from the center of metropolitan city Kolkata.



Source: Sandipan Chatterjee (Outlookindia.com)

The lake covers an area of 12.77 hectare with 12 small islands at the center serving as the shelter to the visiting migratory birds. The area is dominated by dense human habitations, small scale industries and railway yards. Over the past years, migratory bird species like the lesser whistling duck, northern pintail, purple heron, gadwall and many others have found their home here. Besides this a large number of local non-migratory bird species like cattle egret, pond heron also inhabits this lake.

However, over the past few decades there has

been a rapid decline in the number of bird species visiting the lake. The famous environmental activist Subhas Dutta has appealed the High Court Green Bench [Original Application No. 06/2016 (EZ)] regarding the pollution of the jheel. It has been alleged that the water body has been polluted due to dumping of municipal and plastic wastes. Besides this the construction undertaken in the northern side of the Jheel by filling up of a portion of the water body, increasing encroachment by the railways and the rapid growth of water hyacinth are also the other important reasons behind the decline in number. According to the order of the National Green Tribunal (OA 119/2015/EZ) regarding the filling up of the water body by the railways it is claimed that as per the Railway Act of 1989, under Section II, the railway has every right and jurisdiction to fill up any pond or water body for the purpose of construction of railway or building.

Although there are dustbins encircling the bank of the jheel, due to irregular cleaning and lack of awareness of the inhabitants, majority of the solid wastes find its way into the jheel thus contaminating it. The liquid waste water from the washing of the trains containing petroleum and other pollutants through connectives reach the lake and the use of the Jheel water by the dwelling nearby slum contaminates it thus altering the habitat conditions affecting the bird population. The hotels located adjacent to the wetland also use the water of the wetland for cleaning and washing the utensils. The leftovers of the hotels

along with other waste materials are directly discharged into the Santragachi Jheel. The vegetation of the Jheel is dominated by water hyacinth which covers almost the whole surface of the lake. This results in depletion of dissolved oxygen and light penetration levels altogether hampering the optimal physical condition of the Jheel. Maximum weed coverage was found to be in the winter months when the migratory birds visit the place.

As per the allegations of Subhas Dutta, the NGT has passed an order (O.A. No. 06/2016/EZ) regarding the measures that were to be undertaken to prevent the Jheel from further pollution. The construction of the sewage treatment plant has been abandoned in preference to an alternative to the short-term measures. It was said that a proper drainage system is to be worked out with Mackintosh Burn Limited both for the disposal of sewage and storm water. The outfall of this proposed drainage system particularly the sewage disposal drain is to be aligned with the existing drainage system of Howrah Municipal Corporation. For the daily disposal of garbage around the Jheel moveable compactors will be put in application. In collaboration with the Forest Department, HMC would take up the responsibility of cleaning up of the water hyacinth and the plankton from the Jheel. Besides these logical efforts have been taken up for setting up of the main STP and the

regular cleaning along with aid and assistance from the Forest Department. The Santragachi Railway authority has agreed to provide a significant amount of land for setting up of STP for the treatment of sewage diverted from the Jheel. Along with this efforts will be taken to remove the encroachments and based on the ratio of contribution of sewage the cost of STP will be shared by the Railway and HMC as stated in the order of NGT. However as per Subhas Dutta who visited the Jheel in June 2022, claimed that despite the orders of the court the authorities had not cleaned the Jheel. The HMC, Railways and KMDA as the opinion that every possible steps have been taken to clean the lake. When last time, before the hearing of the court, the activist visited the Jheel and reported that the water of the Jheel will be sent to the laboratories for testing the level of pollution. Notwithstanding the lesser number of migratory birds in the year 2018, this year near about 5703 birds have visited the Jheel, thus restoring their numbers once again.



REFERENCES:

1. Roy, U. S., & Mukhopadhyay, S. K. (2017). Winter Avian Aggregation at Santragachi Jheel: An Urban Wetland in West Bengal, India. *World Scientific News*, 71, 191-198.
2. indiaenvironmentportal.org.in
3. www.anandabazar.com