India names two new Wetlands of International Importance

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India

India has added two wetlands to the List of Wetlands of International Importance, on the occasion of World Wetlands Day.

Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary ("Ramsar Site" no. 2464), a freshwater wetland near the coast of the Gulf of Kutch in Gujarat State, was formed following the creation of a bund (dike) in 1920 to protect farmland from saltwater ingress.

As one of the important waterbird habitats in North-West India, the Site provides breeding, feeding and roosting grounds for a wide range of resident aquatic and also land-based birds. It provides habitat for over 310 bird species, including 125 waterbirds; over 165,000 individual waterbirds have been counted. These include the endangered Pallas’s fish-eagle (Haliaeetus leucoryphus) and Indian skimmer (Rynchops albicollis), and the vulnerable common pochard (Aythya ferina). The Site also regularly supports more than 1% of the south and south-west Asian population of Dalmatian pelican (Pelecanus crispus), more than 2% of greylag goose (Anser anser) and more than 20% of common crane (Grus grus).

More than 180 plant species are present, including the critically endangered Indian bdellium-tree (Commiphora wightii). The Site contributes to the maintenance of hydrological regimes, erosion protection and nutrient cycling. It is used for recreation and tourism, and scientific and educational activities.

Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary (Site no. 2465), a freshwater marsh in the Sant Kabir Nagar district, is the largest natural floodplain wetland of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The Sanctuary was established in 1980 and is protected under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972); an “eco-sensitive zone” extends up to a kilometre around its boundary.

The wetland is internationally important for its birdlife as it supports over 80 species. It provides a wintering ground for over 25 species which migrate on the Central Asian Flyway, some of which are threatened or near-threatened such as the endangered Egyptian vulture (Neophron percnopterus), the vulnerable greater spotted eagle (Aquila clanga), common pochard (Aythya ferina) and swamp francolin (Francolinus gularis), and the near-threatened oriental...
darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) and woolly-necked stork (*Ciconia episcopus*).

The wetland also supports 119 plant species and 45 species of fish: it is home to the vulnerable European carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) and the catfish *Wallago attu*, and the near-threatened Gangetic ailia (*Ailia coila*) and silver carp (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*). The Site is also used for recreation and tourism and contributes to food supply and nutrient cycling.