

World Wetlands Day Celebration in Uppalapadu, Guntur District, India on 2nd February 2009

The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History (SACON), Deccan Regional Station, Hyderabad, as a part of its Environmental Information System (ENVIS) activities, celebrated World Wetlands Day on 2nd February 2009 at the famous Uppalapadu wetlands, Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. More than 100 school children and several academicians, scientists, policy makers from a number of organizations took part in the event. This event was celebrated in collaboration with several organizations, **Forest Department, J.P.High School and Guntur Railway Division.**

Wetlands are among the least protected ecosystems in developing countries, and India is particularly vulnerable to their degradation and loss. There are thousands of lakes, ponds, marshes, lagoons, estuaries, backwaters and mangrove swamps that are vital to the country's water needs, food production and biodiversity, but environmental policy has largely failed to acknowledge their contribution. The Uppalapadu, a fresh water tank situated in Uppalapadu village under Village Council (Gram Panchayat) revenue land of Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. This place is very important for the globally threatened Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus phillippensis*) species. Uppalapadu is only 8 km from Guntur Town.

The morning started with the bird watching programmes with school children at Uppalapadu wetland area. More than 100 school children from different schools were present at the event. All the students learnt about food habits and migration in birds but also water pollution, and the methodology for lake restoration. The children's programme was followed by an official function commemorating World Wetlands Day. Mr. Srinivas, DFO, Guntur, Dr. S. N. Prasad, Scientist & Head, SACON – Deccan Regional Station, Hyderabad, Dr. Lalitha Vijayan, Scientist, SACON, Coimbatore, Railway Divisional Manager, Guntur, Principal, J. P. High School, Miss N. Sheeba, Research Scholar, SACON were also presented for this programme. All delivered their talk about the importance of wetlands and the role wetlands can play to mitigate several problems. The programme culminated with a pledge to protect wetlands taken by all guests, officers and students present on the occasion.

About SACON's initiatives to conserve the wetlands

SACON is one of the centres of excellence of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India. SACON's mission is "**To help conserve India's biodiversity and its sustainable use through research, education and peoples' participation with birds at the centre stage**". The scientific staffs are organized into the division of Avian Ecology, Wetland Ecology, Terrestrial Ecology, Ecotoxicology, Environmental Impact Assessment, and Conservation Biology. The **Environmental Information system (ENVIS)** Centre on wetland ecosystems has been established at the SACON, Coimbatore supported by the MoEF, Government of India to facilitate generation and dissemination of information on various facets of wetland ecosystems.

The Centre will work towards fulfillment of the following objectives: -

- Database creation on Wetland Ecosystems to be added on website with regional language interface.
- To establish and operate a distributed clearinghouse to answer and channel queries related to the allocated subject.
- To establish linkages with information users, carriers and providers from government, academic, business and Non-Governmental Organizations including that with ENVIS.
- Identification of information/data gaps in the specified subject areas and action taken to fill these gaps.
- Publication of ENVIS newsletters for dissemination of wetland Information.

For further information on wetlands of India, please visit our site (<http://www.wetlandsofindia.org/>)

Some of the photographs of celebration are given below.

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Wetland Day Celebration at Uppalapadu, Guntur



Guests/Dignitaries attending the WWD function



School children attending the WWD function



Prize distribution ceremony at J.P. High school



Congregation of birds at Uppalapadu Wetland



Spot-billed Pelicans nesting on the top of the plants near Uppalapadu lake