

World Wetlands Day Celebration in Indian Himalayan Region 2nd February 2008



WWD 2008 celebrations in Uttarakhand

With technical inputs from CEE Himalaya and support from National Service Scheme (NSS) Uttarakhand State Council for Science & Technology (U-COST), Dehradun organised WWD 2008 celebrations on 2 February at Asan wetland in the youngest State of Uttarakhand in Indian Himalayan Region.

More than 80 school and college students and 20 resource persons and personnel from several organizations took part in the event. There were series of lectures and presentations. A relevant film was screened and a drawing & painting competition was held. Prizes were given to the winners.

Resource persons from CEE Himalaya (Dr. Abdhesh Gangwar), U-COST (Dr. Rajendra Dhobal, Dr. Kusum Arunachalam, Dr. Rakesh Singh, Dr. D.P. Uniyal), Wildlife Institute of India (Dr. S.K. Mukherjee & Dr. B.C. Choudhury), Uttarakhand State Forest Department (Mr. Bhuwan Chandra & M.S. Pal), NSS (Dr. Sat Pal Singh Sahni), Government PG College (Dr. Rachna Nautiyal), NERIST (Dr. A. Arunachalam) spoke on the occasion and talked about the importance of wetlands, ecological degradation taking place world over and the role wetlands can play in mitigation of several problems.

About 287.5 m long and of 450 ha size at an altitude of 389.4 m above mean sea level, a man made, Asan wetland is situated between latitudes 30° 24' - 30° 28' N and longitudes 77° 40' - 77° 44' E. It is near village Dhalipur close to Herbertpur, 38 km. from Dehradun, and is at the confluence of the Yamuna hydel canal and river Asan. In winters, it provides a good habitat for migratory waterfowls that come here in large numbers. Being situated on a major National Highway (N.H. 72) it attracts large number of tourists. There are around 1924 houses in the catchment area with nearly 12485 human beings.

It is an ecologically sensitive area in Doon Valley and a biodiversity hotspot having about 166 species of plants and animals including 66 species of birds. This was declared 'Asan Conservation Reserve' under Wildlife Protection Act 1972 by the Government of Uttarakhand.

About 66 wetland bird species are seen in this area (33 winter visitors, 4 summer visitors, 15 local migrants and 14 residents). This is one of the best sites for congregations of Brahminy Ducks. During winter, it is not unusual to count as many as 8,000 waterfowls. More than 150 species have been recorded in this area,

including many globally threatened and near threatened species. International organizations viz. International body for conservation of nature (IBCN) & Bird International has declared it as an Important Bird Area of India (IBA) with IBA site code:- IN-UT-O1.

The dominant aquatic vegetation comprises of *Typha elephantina*, *Potamogeton pectinatus*, *Ceratophyllum demersum* and *Eichhornia crassipes*. The surrounding bushes include *Xanthium strumarium*, *Eclipta prostrata*, *Ipomoea fistulosa*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Euphorbia spp.*, *Mimosa pudica*, *Achyranthus aspera*, *Polygonum glabrum*, *Polygonum lanigerum*, *Aeschynomene sp*, *Ageratum conyzoides*, *Phyllanthus spp*, *Monochoria hastata*, *Mosla dianthera* and *Lantana camara*. In the catchment area the dominant tree species are *Shorea robusta*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Lannea coromandelica*, *Dalbergia sisoo* and *Bombax ceiba* etc.

WWD 2008 celebrations in Jammu & Kashmir



In another celebration at Government Primary School, Salamabad, CEE Himalaya organized a day long programme for the students and teachers of earthquake affected Uri area in Baramulla district of Jammu & Kashmir. 128 students including 78 boys and 50 girls of standards 3, 5, 8, 9 & 10 and 9 teachers along with some villagers participated in the programme which was organized with an objective to make the students aware about the importance of the wetlands for the ecosystems and humans in particular. Students were told about their role in conserving the water bodies in their locality and wise use of wetlands towards achieving sustainable development.

A painting competition was organized for the students in which 18 students including 9 boys and 9 girls participated. The theme for the competition was 'Healthy Lakes'. Prizes were given by the Head Master of the school. The programme concluded with the screening of a film on Bio-diversity of Jammu & Kashmir. Some of the salient points emerged during the programme include:

- Conservation of wetlands in the region is the moral duty of all the students as well as the teachers and local people
- Deforestation should be checked in local level to avoid sedimentation in the water bodies
- New plants should be planted by the students to conserve water bodies in the valley
- Digging lakes deeper for holding extra water and check against drying up.

Finally all participants agreed that 'Healthy Wetlands support Healthy People'. It is to be mentioned here that this school has been reconstructed as 'Anadshala' (school of joy) under the rehabilitation programme being implemented by CEE in Baramulla and Kupwara districts.

There are 16 wetlands enlisted in Jammu & Kashmir, 9 of which fall in the Kashmir Valley. Environmentalists predict a possible death of these wetlands within the next seven years if encroachments and mushrooming of willow plantations continue around the wetlands. Deposition of silt, human encroachment, drop in water levels and pollution threaten all these nine lakes resulting in a drop in the arrival of migratory birds.

To mention a few examples, Hygam, in Sopore is badly affected, with its area shrinking from 4.5 sq km to 1.5 sq km during the last 15 years due to human encroachment. Hokersar wetland, situated 16 km north of Srinagar, has shrunk to 4.5 sq km from 13.75 sq km over the years. It serves as an abode to about six lakh resident and migratory birds of at least 21 species. Continuous siltation has decreased the depth of the reservoir accompanied by decrease in water level due to willows. As per the official records Hokersar hosted 450,000 migratory birds last winter, but the number of winged visitors is declining. Famous Wullar and Dal Lakes of the Kashmir Valley are exposed to a constant threat of pollution. Wullar Lake once considered as the largest lake in Asia now its depth remains only up to 6 meters. Local people directly depend on it for fishes, fodder, nadroo and vegetables etc.

Surinsar-Mansar Lake, Tsomoriri Lake, Wular Lake and Hokera Wetland have been designated as Ramsar Sites. Wullar, Tsomoriri, Tisgul Tso & Chisul Marshes, Hokersar, Mansar-Surinsar, Ranjitsagar, Pangong Tsar wetlands have been identified under National Wetlands Conservation Programme of India.