

Editorial

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For the editorial this time, I want to share my experience of visiting a bird's paradise, especially for the little ones to read and relish. My parents' marriage anniversary was on March 16th, 2024. Fifty six years of togetherness is a lengthy relationship by all means. This sort of an achievement became a wonderful occasion to celebrate for all of us. I couldn't think of anything better than showing them the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, also called the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, with its vibrant array of birds. We were so pleased to view the migratory birds that were to depart shortly to traverse continents, as we drove through the lanes and bylanes of towns into a tiny resort to soak in some relaxed time.

Located in Rajasthan's Bharatpur district at the meeting point of the Gambhir and Banganga rivers, Keoladeo Ghana National Park was formerly a seasonal flood-plain caused by a natural depression. Now it is an important bird-breeding and feeding ground with its extraordinary avian richness. It has a history of royal hunting reserves during the 1950s for the Maharajas and the British. It is said that Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy of India from 1936 to 1943, shot over thousands of ducks in a single day. This Park has also been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985.

As soon as we arrived, Prakash—a charming and assured tour guide with 23 years of experience—took us around the Park, using his telescope and taught me how to use my phone to click photos of birds while using binoculars. He informed us that the Bird Park was 29 square kilometers in size, of which 18 square kilometers were made up of dry ground and 11 square kilometers were made up of wet land, as we strolled through the lengthy section of the Park. He continued sharing information about the 370 different bird species that can be found in the Park, including about 100 local species in addition to the permanent birds and 150 migratory species from Siberia, Russia, China, and Mongolia.

This bird sanctuary is particularly known for migratory 'Siberian Cranes'. These birds fly from Siberia to India during winter months as they are cold-blooded animals that cannot survive in the extreme winters of their country.

Additionally, food production and food availability also reduces during winters, pushing these birds to migrate to India.

While there were initial worries about the area being too dry, Prakash noted that weather conditions had already improved so it was not a concern anymore.



Other than birds, there were 22 different species of mammals in the Park also, including small deer, jackals, hyenas, and wild boar, in addition to 40 different species of eagles, 30 different species of ducks, and other bird species including rafter, egret, cormorant, spotbill, ibis, flycatcher, and babbler that can be seen during winter. Luckily, he added, they have also spotted a leopard, which was usually visible to visitors on their sightseeing trips. A number of snake species, including cobras and vipers, can also be seen in this Park. He claimed that bird visibility varies occasionally in the Park. For instance, the green bee-eater was only seen during the spring and summer and was invisible during winter. Further, he also informed that there were bats in the Park, like fruit bats. Visibly exhilarated, Prakash shared that his lengthy interview and photograph regarding the Bird Park were also included in a BBC show.

As he energetically went on, the region was formally recognised as a National Park in 1981, but its traditionally known as 'ghanna' meaning a dense forest. It is said that the name 'Keoladeo' originated from the Lord Shiva temple located behind the Park. The Park also featured a hunting area where the royal family went duck-hunting from 1902 and 1964.

Seeing the various birds, their nests, and the entire marshy environment was an amazing experience. Our day trip taught us a great deal. Imagine what a rewarding and enriching experience it would be to take growing children to such a well-endowed National Park on special occasions.