

28-01-2017

THE HINDU

Of lakes and birds

The Asian Waterfowl Census conducted by Coimbatore Nature Society records 127 bird species and a total bird count of 7079, across the 22 wetlands in the city

Achankulam had a rare visitor - a Bar-headed Goose all the way from Mongolia. Similarly, the Kannampalayam wetland had a surprise visit from the rarely-seen Eurasian Sparrowhawk. The Coimbatore wetlands had quite a few such encounters. Comb ducks were spotted at Ukkulam; a solitary Eurasian Wigeon strayed into Pallapalayam, and quite a few Green-winged Teals dropped in too. These special visitors are mentioned in the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) conducted by the members of Coimbatore Nature Society (CNS). A Pavendhan who took part in the AWC at Coimbatore wetlands says: “The Bar-headed goose flies over the Himalayas to spend its winters and is often spotted at the Nanjarayan Tank in Tirupur. But this year it made an unscheduled stop at Coimbatore. The Stork-billed Kingfisher was also reported in the city. It is usually seen at the foothills.”



Eurasian Sparrowhawk

While last year CNS had surveyed only 13 water bodies, this time the number increased to 22 wetlands. “Besides the bird population, the annual census also monitors the status and condition of these wetlands.



Spot-billed Duck.

The census is scientific data, says Selvaraj PR, the president of CNS. “ Some of the migratory birds to the coastal region stopped by here. We don’t know if it was because of Vardah. We saw some notable resident birds too like the Bronze-winged Jacana and Blue-tailed Jacana. Another migratory bird, the Baillon’s Crake, that breeds in Northern Russia and Mongolia was spotted at Krishnampathy wetland. This is the second sighting in recent years. The exercise helps bird watchers to build on the data and a long-term observation of wetlands.”

K. Sravan Kumar, a CNS member participated in the bird count for the first time and he is thrilled. “Coimbatore is blessed with many wetlands fed by River Noyyal. There are over 30 wetlands. It was a great opportunity to visit so many wetlands in a short span of time. We saw sandpipers at Valankulam, and pelicans and painted storks at Kurichi.”



Ethnic rice varieties to come under a brand

Agriculture dept. plans project to rejuvenate rice cultivation in Wayanad

The Agriculture Department will launch a project for developing rice cultivation, especially rejuvenation of ethnic rice varieties by following organic methods, in Wayanad district.

The project aims at promoting the cultivation of indigenous and scented rice varieties of the district such as Gandhakassala, Jeerakassala, Kayama, Thondi, Marathondi, Chomala, Adukkan, and Veliyan on 3,000 hectares this year.

Rice will be procured from farmers at a premium price through the Kerala Agro Industries Corporation and the product will be marketed under a brand.

“The project to be executed under Haritha Keralam, a multi-dimensional development project of the government, is envisaged to expand the rice cultivating area in the district from 8,000 hectares to 11,000 hectares in a year,” principal agriculture officer M.P. Valsamma said.

Minor irrigation projects in the district would be utilised for summer cultivation of the crops. “Facilities for organic certification of produces will be set up at each Krishi Bhavan. We have asked the government to set up a certification agency for the purpose,” Ms. Valsamma said.

“We are constituting farmers’ self-help groups (SHGs) at the ward level and they would spread the message in the farm community on the importance of following organic agriculture practices,” she added.

The members of the SHGs would be trained in producing organic manure and in organic pest control measures. They would also be trained in integrated agriculture practices, organic certification, and production and marketing of organic products, she added.

The functioning of Agriculture, Soil Conservation, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, and Fisheries departments would be coordinated to provide timely helps to the farmers, Ms. Valsamma said.

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