



SHORT REPORT

Five years of “Pink Celebration for Flamingos” at Porbandar, Gujarat, India

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Introduction

Mokarsagar Wetland Conservation Committee (MWCC) is a registered non-profit organisation, which aims to recognise Mokarsagar wetland complex of Porbandar. The objective of the committee is to develop a comprehensive management framework for Porbandar’s Wetlands of international importance and to maintain the ecological character of Mokarsagar through conservation and wise use. Mokarsagar Wetland Complex (21.565433 N, 69.764237 E) is the largest wetland of Porbandar district of Gujarat and spread across more than 100 sq km. The wetland complex supports more than 200,000 waterbirds annually and therefore is shortlisted as a potential Ramsar site as well as Biodiversity Heritage Site. Recently, a Public Interest Litigation has been also filed in Gujarat High court to declare it as a wildlife sanctuary.

Porbandar is a coastal town in Gujarat state of India. Porbandar is well known as the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation. Porbandar is also known as “Surkhabi nagri” in local Gujarati language where Surkhab means flamingo and nagri means city. In fact, a real flamingo city is situated in Rann of Kutch, Gujarat and Porbandar is called Surkhabi nagri due to its flamingos which count in thousands. Flamingos are

found in abundance in the vicinity of the human habitation in Porbandar. Each year about 40000 lesser and about 9000 greater flamingos are recorded from wetlands at Porbandar during the Asian Waterbird Census by MWCC. April to June is the courtship time for these birds and they perform the most stunning and beautiful courtship dance during this period wherein. A tightly-packed group of flamingos march and perform synchronized movements to attract a partner.

To celebrate this spectacular natural history event, MWCC in collaboration with various organisations have organised “Pink Celebration” every May since 2014 to raise public awareness of the flamingos. The number of participants rises every year and in 2018 we expected almost 80 to 90 participants from all over India. Every year, the event receives positive feedback from the participants, Forest Department, NGOs, conservationists, wildlife photographers and nature lovers of Gujarat. The Pink Celebration provides an excellent opportunity to observe the courtship dance of the lesser flamingos at Chhaya Wetland of Porbandar. With more than 10,000 flamingos congregating in one place, this is an unforgettable experience, so back in 2013, MWCC decided to organise an annual event for wetlands and flamingos. Mr Kishore Joshi, Co-founder, MWCC coined the term Pink Celebration for this event.

Objectives of Pink Celebration

1. To spread awareness on the importance of flamingos as a flagship wetland species.
2. To educate participants on the importance of wetlands.
3. To strengthen and develop knowledge.
4. To highlight the unique wetlands of Porbandar for legal protection.

Schedule of the event

Every year, Pink Celebration is a two-day event. Day 1 starts with participants' registration and inauguration in the presence of local NGOs, Forests Department staff and participants. Inauguration is followed by expert talk with PowerPoint presentations on various aspects of birds and wetlands. Every year, a talk on the courtship dance of the flamingos is given by the author of this paper. In the evening, a field trip to nearby wetland is organised. As an example, the talks organised in 2017 were: Courtship dance of Flamingos by Dhaval Vargiya; Bird call and its importance by Viral Joshi; Bird ringing by Dr Dishant Parasharya; Birds of Gujarat and key species identification by Ashok Mashru; E-birding by Dr Gaurang Bagda. Day 2 starts with a field trip to Chhaya wetland for a flamingo watch and ends after lunch. We make sure that all participants watch and understand the steps involved in the flamingo's courtship dance. Chhaya wetland where flamingos are seen in their thousands is surrounded by human habitation, industry and other infrastructure. To raise awareness among locals, MWCC volunteers freely distributed a brochure about the flamingo's courtship dance to every home in the vicinity on World Environment Day 2016 (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Flamingo brochure distributed among locals on World Environment Day 2016 (Photo credit: S. Sadrani)

Funding for Pink Celebration

Gujarat Council on Science and Technology (GUJCOST), Government of Gujarat, partially funded the event in 2014. Pink Celebration 2016 was fully funded by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), India, so there were no participation fees. It was jointly organized by Gujarat Forest Department, GIZ, India, and Mokarsagar Wetland Conservation Committee, Porbandar. It was a programme under Indo-German Biodiversity Programme's Conservation and Sustainable Management of Existing and Potential Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in India (CMPA) project.

In 2015, 2017 and 2018, we raised 40% funding through participation fees and remaining expense were fulfilled by MWCC. We keep minimum participation fees of 500 Indian Rupees (around \$7) and provide a binocular bag or messenger bag, notebook, pen, all meals for the two days, brochures on the birds and an article on the wetlands of Porbandar. MWCC would like to organise a joint meeting of any Indian FSG members alongside of "Pink Celebration" in the future.

Citation: Vargiya, D. (2018). Five years of "Pink Celebration for Flamingos" at Porbandar, Gujarat, India. *Flamingo e1*, early view.