

SHORT REPORT

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

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Abstract

Porbandar is a coastal town in Gujarat state of India and well known as Surkhabi nagri in local Gujarati language where Surkhab means flamingo and nagri means city. Each year about 40,000 Lesser and about 9000 Greater Flamingos are recorded from wetlands of Porbandar during the Asian Waterbird Census by the Mokarsagar Wetland Conservation Committee. April to June is the courtship time for these birds and to celebrate this event MWCC has organised “Pink Celebration” since 2014 to raise the public’s awareness of the flamingos. The objectives of the event are i) to spread awareness on the importance of flamingos as a flagship wetland species, ii) to educate participants on the importance of wetlands, iii) to strengthen and develop knowledge and iv) to highlight unique wetlands of Porbandar for legal protection. MWCC has collaborated with various NGOs during these five years and have always received positive response from participants. “Pink Celebration” is a two-day event. Various expert talks and a field trip occur on Day One, with a morning field trip on the second day with the event ending after lunch. MWCC would like to organise a joint meeting of any Indian FSG members alongside of “Pink Celebration” in the future.

Resumen

Porbandar es una ciudad costera en el estado de Gujarat de la India y conocida como Surkhabi nagri en el idioma local de Gujarati, donde Surkhab significa flamenco y nagri significa ciudad. Cada año, cerca de 40,000 flamencos menores y alrededor de 9000 flamencos mayores se registran en los humedales de Porbandar durante el Censo Asiático de Aves Acuáticas por el Comité de Conservación de Humedales de Mokarsagar. De abril a junio es el momento del cortejo para estas aves y para celebrar este evento, MWCC ha organizado la "Celebración Rosada" desde 2014 para despertar la conciencia del público sobre los flamencos. Los objetivos del evento son: i) difundir la conciencia sobre la importancia de los flamencos como una especie emblemática de humedales, ii) educar a los participantes sobre la importancia de los humedales, iii) fortalecer y desarrollar el conocimiento y iv) destacar humedales únicos de Porbandar para protección legal. MWCC ha colaborado con varias ONG durante estos cinco años y siempre ha recibido una respuesta positiva de los participantes. "Celebración Rosa" es un evento de dos días. Se realizan varias charlas de expertos y un viaje de campo el primer día, mientras que el segundo día se realiza un viaje de estudio por la mañana y el evento finaliza después del almuerzo. MWCC desea organizar una reunión conjunta de cualquier miembro de la FSG de la India junto con la "Celebración Rosa" en el futuro.

Résumé

Porbandar est une ville côtière de l'état du Gujarat en Inde et bien connue sous le nom de Surkhabi nagri en langue gujarati locale, où Surkhab signifie flamant et nagri signifie ville. Chaque année, environ 40 000 flamands nains et environ 9 000 flamants roses sont répertoriés dans les zones humides de Porbandar lors du recensement des oiseaux d'eau asiatiques par le Comité de conservation des zones humides de Mokarsagar. Avril à juin est la période de parade nuptiale pour ces oiseaux et pour célébrer cet événement, le

MWCC organise «Pink Celebration» depuis 2014 pour sensibiliser le public aux flamants roses. Les objectifs de la manifestation sont i) de sensibiliser le public à l'importance des flamants roses en tant qu'espèce phare des zones humides, ii) de sensibiliser les participants à l'importance des zones humides, iii) de renforcer et développer les connaissances et iv) de mettre en valeur les zones humides uniques de Porbandar pour Protection légale. MWCC a collaboré avec diverses ONG au cours de ces cinq années et a toujours reçu une réponse positive des participants. «Pink Celebration» est un événement de deux jours. Divers exposés d'experts et une visite de terrain ont lieu le premier jour, avec une visite de terrain le matin la deuxième journée, l'événement se terminant après le déjeuner. Le MWCC aimerait organiser une réunion commune de tous les membres indiens du FSG à côté de la «célébration rose» à l'avenir.

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 km². 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 flamingo march and perform synchronized movements to attract a partner (Figure 1).

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.



Figure 1: Breeding display of lesser flamingos at Porbandar wetlands. Photo credit: D. Vargiya.

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 One 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 Two 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 2).



Figure 2: 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.