



# The Telegraph

calcutta, india



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| Thursday , October 20 , 2011 |

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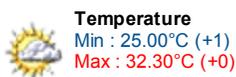
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## Calcutta Weather



**Rainfall** : 0.00 mm  
**Relative Humidity**:  
Max : 95.00% Min : 66.00%  
**Sunrise** : 5:39 AM  
**Sunset** : 5:5 PM  
**Today**  
Partly cloudy sky. Maximum temperature likely to be

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## Citizen salve on bird haven

A STAFF REPORTER



Enough is enough, they said. And as the government slept, a decisive citizens' initiative to save Santragachhi Jheel as a wintering wildfowl habitat was born.

At 7 on Wednesday morning, workers recruited by a group of nature lovers stepped into the hyacinth-filled waters of the sprawling lake adjacent to Santragachhi railway station to start a month-long task that the forest

department has been postponing, for reasons ranging from institutionalised lethargy to lack of funds.

The nature lovers behind the month-long initiative to prepare the lake for the arrival of the birds in early November include former cricketer Arun Lal, activists Mudar Patherya and Purnima Dutta, Arjan Basu Roy of Nature Mates-Nature Club, businessman Jayanta Chatterjee and doctor Kallol Banerjee, among others.

"Your reports woke us up, for which we are grateful. We decided on Monday afternoon that we would visit Santragachhi Jheel to assess its condition and we did so on Tuesday morning. By noon, we had made all the required arrangements, including flow of funds, to keep the clean-up operation going," Patherya told **Metro**, which had first highlighted Santragachhi Jheel's importance as a bird habitat in a full-page feature on January 30.

The 13,75,000sq ft water body that attracted 10,363 ducks last winter — the head count was done by the NGO Prakriti Samsad — is currently a dense carpet of hyacinth and plastic waste. Veteran birders warn that migrant wildfowl might never return to the lake if they find the conditions less than ideal to roost this winter.

"The forest department was to have started work on cleaning the lake and building islands for the birds by August. We can't look the other way when the government fails to perform. We needed to take the initiative and we have," said Basu Roy, part of the 12-member core group.

Cricketer-turned-commentator Arun Lal said he joined the group because there was "no point sitting and criticising the government".

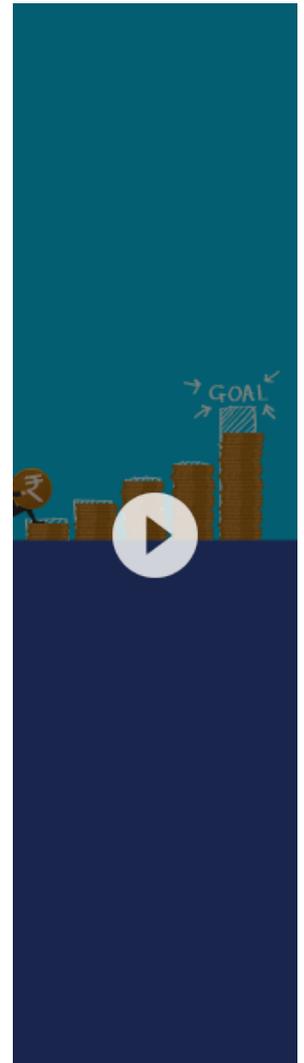
"I am deeply interested in birds and trees. I have purchased land at Raipur, in South 24-Parganas, where I have planted 3,000 trees. I look after orphaned birds.... As citizens, we have a responsibility to do something to conserve nature. So when I came to know about Santragachhi Jheel, I decided to be a part of the group that has undertaken the work of cleaning it," he said.

Paul Walsh, a former official of the British deputy high commission and the founder of the Jungle Crows rugby team, was among those who turned up at Santragachhi on Wednesday to support the initiative. Players from the Jungle Crows are set to join the clean-up operation on Thursday.

"We have participated in similar projects earlier in schools and playgrounds. So when I got a call from a friend, I told him that our players would help remove the hyacinth," Walsh said.

Local support came from members of the Chhottodal Club, located a few metres from the lake.

Experts say the biggest challenge is to ensure that the lake is cleaned in a manner that leaves the food sources and roosting places of the birds intact.



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Workers were seen placing two parallel bamboo poles on the hyacinth bed to build a bridge to the deeper portions of the lake. A backhoe payloader will be at hand on Thursday to help move the hyacinth to pick-up vans. The citizens' group is trying to get companies that produce manure from water hyacinth to take away the plants removed from the lake.

"Over the next 15 days, much of the water hyacinth will be cleared. If the birds can see the waters and islands in between for roosting, they won't fly away," Patherya hoped.

Santragachhi Jheel, owned by the railways, attracts mostly the Common Lesser Whistling Duck. The count of trans-Himalayan visitors like the Ferruginous Pochard, Comb Duck, Garganey, Northern Pintail and Swinhoe's Snipe has dipped over the years.

In the virtual world, the number of signatories to the save-Santragachhi Lake petition initiated by veteran birder and conservation activist Sumit K. Sen crossed 500 by Wednesday evening. Sen appealed to nature lovers to donate to the citizens' initiative.

Amid the public activism, the government remained in meeting mode.

"We have a meeting on Thursday to discuss how to mobilise funds and when to start cleaning the lake," divisional forest officer Goutam Chakraborty said.

*Is private initiative the answer to government apathy? Tell [ttmetro@abpmail.com](mailto:ttmetro@abpmail.com)*



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