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## NAVBHARAT TIMES



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## Endangered bird flocks back to state

Subhro Niyogi, TNN | Dec 26, 2012, 03:25AM IST

BURDWAN: The lesser adjutant stork - a critically endangered migrant bird - has been sighted in Bengal's only oxbow lake in Burdwan, much to the delight of the locals and bird-lovers. Not only are they surprised to see the large stork arrive in numbers, what's added to their joy is the return of birds to the lake for the first time in three years.

The lake, spread across 10km in Purbasthali or Chupi Char, was a favourite habitat for migratory birds few years back. But it got filthier and choked by hyacinth over the last decade. It would have remained deserted but for the initiative of two NGOs and a corporate house that cleaned up much of the wetland.

"For several decades now, the lake has been an integral part of the area's socio-economic activity and sustains fishermen, bird guides, boat operators as well as eateries and shops in the neighbourhood. When the lake was covered by hyacinth, the birds deserted the waterbody. So did birdwatchers. It adversely impacted all the villages located along the lake. We sent an appeal for help in mid-November," said Achinta Sinha of Kasthashalin Banobithi, a local NGO.

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The forest department had cleaned up Santragachhi Jheel earlier his year but it was unable to act in Purbasthali because the lake is not a protected wetland. For years, it was refreshed naturally with river Ganga's flow and the annual floods that swept off the hyacinth. But since 2,000, the lake has never overflowed due to lack of rainfall. This led to hyacinth clogging the lake.

"As the government did not intervene, the once lively lake turned into a clogged waterbody. Water birds like lesser whistling ducks, northern shoveler, northern pintail, cotton pygmy-goose, common coot and Indian pond heron that were regular visitors lost their annual sanctuary as the water shrunk," said Arjan Basu Ray of Nature Mates, which had cleared the Santragachhi and Bijoygarh lakes.

Nature Mates managed to rope in corporate body [Magma Fincorp](#) and the clean-up started on December 4. "We try to engage in social activities because we are conscious that our business - financing vehicles that emit pollution - has an adverse impact on it," said Magma Fincorp senior vice-president Kaushik Sinha.

Over the next three weeks, 600 men with the help of three country boats removed a significant amount of hyacinth, facilitating the mobility of the waterbody and creating a significant opening for birds.

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Even before the job was done, a flock of lesser adjutant stork arrived at the lake, taking bird watchers completely by surprise. "I have been going to Purbasthali every winter for nearly 25 years and have never spotted the lesser adjutant stork. Just sighting the birds was so rewarding," said Basu Ray.

Since then, more birds have arrived at the lake, bringing smiles back to despondent fishermen and eco-tourism operators. "The socio economic scenario plays a vital role in implementing conservation initiative. When locals benefit from natural resource, they tend to protect them for their own survival and well-being. That's what has happened in Purbasthali," said block development officer Mudassar Mollah.

Conscious that the initiative has to be sustained over a few years to ensure that the lake remains clean and birds arrive regularly, the NGOs and the corporate body have decided to continue the activity for at least three years.

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Cnograts. for cleaning the waterbodies which has resulted visit of lesser adjuiant stork and other migratory birds.The participation of local people is very important to safeguard the local heritage which has been shown by the people of Purbasthali.

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