Habitat of flamingos

The Sewri and Mahul mudflat region of Mumbai has been identified as an important bird area (IBA) because it harbours a large population of the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*), a globally near-threatened species. The region located along the Arabian Sea, stretching 10 km long and 3 km wide and comprising mangroves and mudflat vegetation. It was declared as an IBA as it qualifies three criteria, viz., supporting globally threatened species (A1), >1% population of a congregatory waterbird species (A4i) and ≥20,000 waterbirds (A4iii). The mudflats also contain several valuable species, i.e., critically endangered species like Oriental White-rumped Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*), endangered species like Spotted Greenshank (*Tringa guttifer*), vulnerable species such as Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), and near-threatened species like Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*). The area is heavily polluted with wastes, both industrial and domestic, discharged into the creek through several inlets. However, it still supports a large population of birds, including the small waders and the flamingos (Figure 1). The area is dominated by mangrove vegetation and also supports 53 vascular plant species. *Avicennia marina* is a dominant plant species in the area, and *Rhizophora mucronata* and *Excoecaria agallocha* are also found. The area also includes 8 reptiles, 5 species of bivalves, 2 species of pulmonates and 9 species of crustaceans. According to a study done by the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Coimbatore, recently, the total number of Lesser Flamingos reported in March 2007 and 2008 was 10,520 and 12,996 respectively. During 2007–08, 324 Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) were counted during January and February. These flamingos were distributed all along the mudflats of the region from Retibhandar to Tata Power Company. A total of 68 species of birds have been recorded during the study. The birds were disturbed by the ship-repairing activities at Sewri port and also by tourists and private boats. Effluents from different industries and oil seepage from some of the leading oil companies are causing water contamination. This ultimately affects the feeding and roosting ground for these birds.

The Maharashtra State Road Transport Development Corporation has proposed the construction of a 22 km long Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) bridge, passing over Thane creek and connecting Sewri and Nhava in Mumbai. This bridge will link the island city of Mumbai with the southern part of the mainland. The main concern regarding the project is that a part of the bridge will pass through the flamingo habitat. The construction work affects the feeding grounds of these birds and also the mangrove vegetation. Further studies are needed on the flamingos and their habitat in the Sewri–Mahul mudflat region so that disturbances are minimized and the construction work is done in a planned manner.


**Chiranjibi Pattanaik**

**S. Narendra Prasad**

**Lalitha Vijayan**

1 Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Deccan Regional Station, Hyderabad 500 017, India
2 Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anakatty Post, Coimbatore 641108, India
*e-mail: chiranjibipattanaik@gmail.com*