

Nannaj bustard Area (an IBA): In great need of local community support

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Recently I got the opportunity to get involved in the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) census held by the forest department, at Nannaj Bustard Sanctuary (an IBA), Solapur in September 2007 and 2008, as well as the waterhole census of March 2008. The population of the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* in Nannaj area is nearly 30-35.

Nannaj is one of the rare surviving habitats, in India where we can sight the Great Indian Bustard, Blackbuck and Grey Wolf at a single site. Unfortunately due to insufficient data on seasonal movement and exact population of the birds, the management and conservation implementations become very difficult. We already have the bitter experience of the Great Indian Bustard conservation tragedy in Karera Bustard sanctuary which should not be repeated at Nannaj.



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Pic: sujit Narwade

The three representative fauna of dry Indian grasslands: Grey wolf, Blackbuck and Great Indian Bustard

Recently, the government banned all mining and buying as well as selling real estate, in surrounding villages of the sanctuary and Solapur city. Restrictions were laid on the land transactions in a large geographical range. The area under the Sanctuary covers more than forty villages and thousands of acres of land private as well as government undertakings as per the government declaration in 1980s. The exact information on existing population and its probable occurrence sites in the area are not available at present. People from various fields like farmers, builders, industrialists as well as political leaders aggressively protested against the court decision of ban on sale deed activities. In this article I want to discuss one of the possible reasons for such an anti sanctuary campaign by the local people.

Solapur is one of the fast developing cities of Maharashtra, spreading along three main highways to mega cities Vijapur, Hyderabad, Pune, and three sub highways to Barshi, Tuljapur and Akkalkot. Open land for development is not easily available (adjoining Solapur city) in the current situation. According to the local people, the land at Nannaj and the surrounding area is a

wasteland and no longer useful for humans. Not only this, the local people who helped in the establishment and development of the Sanctuary are now protesting against wildlife conservation, due to rumours spread by some antisocial elements that the government is going to relocate them. Illegal activities like poaching, intentional cattle grazing, burning grassland patches within the Sanctuary are going on under the name of protests. It has resulted in an alarming situation for the wildlife residing here. There is an urgent need to have the local people in favour of the Sanctuary.

Apart from all the efforts taken by the forest department to conserve the wildlife, there are new challenges that get aroused. For example, the *Gliricidia* plantations within the Sanctuary are carried out by the Social Forestry department. This has reduced the ideal habitat for wild grassland species. When forest officers realised the problem and decided to remove the plantation they again had to convince the people that it is necessary for maintaining the original habitat. Increasing population of Wild Boars *Sus* sp. in these plantations is raising threats for the crops surrounding the Sanctuary.

Apart from the core area the Great Indian Bustard is seen in the private land surrounding the sanctuary. Visitors always complain that they never see any Great Indian bustard when they visit the sanctuary at day time. People should be made aware that GIB is more active in the early mornings and evening time. Not only this, people get confused between the Great Indian Bustard and Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* which leads to inclusion of false records. It is necessary to provide proper guidelines to people for bird watching and their conservation aspects.

Nannaj is well known and is a healthy grassland comprising a wide range of wildlife. Large number of quails, larks, Indian Courser *Corsorius coromandelica*, Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*, Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exultus*, Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus* and of course the Great Indian Bustard reside here. Mammals like the Grey Wolf, Indian Fox *Vulpes benghalensis*, Golden Jackal *Canis aurieus* and Blackbuck are also present.

Conservation approach

Local people need to be told that,

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Yellow-wattled Lapwing prefers dry short-grass plains

because and only because of them, the wildlife in the Sanctuary is able to survive. Patches of continuous grassland from the existing area of the Sanctuary and surrounding area should be surveyed for assessment of current population of the mentioned species and their potential threats.

Local educational institutes need to be approached for effective and constant monitoring of wildlife. Establishment of a forum to keep communication between interested local as well as global communities through website will work efficiently. Help from the local media for publicity to support this campaign will definitely make the difference. Good and enthusiastic volunteers must take initiatives for strengthening the Great Indian Bustard conservation campaign.

People should be made aware of the endangered status of the Great Indian Bustard and its importance in the ecology. Proper training should be provided to the local people for identification of the Great Indian Bustard and Woolly-necked Stork. Conservation awareness programs and workshops should be organised at schools, colleges and in local communities. Such a multi channel approach including various communities is necessary for the conservation of grassland of this IBA.



Pic: sujit Narwade

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse breeds in the so-called wasteland of Nannaj Sanctuary



Pic: sujit Narwade

Woolly-necked or White-necked Stork is often mistaken for the Great Indian Bustard due to its large size and white neck



Pic: sujit Narwade

A pack of Grey Wolf are regularly seen in Nannaj