

Avi-tourism is the new buzzword for Goa

PANAJI — Home to 400 of India's 1,100-odd avian species, Goa, in a fresh initiative, is now banking on the birds in the hope it can spur the arrival of high-end tourists in the state.

Avi-tourism, according to Goa tourism ministry officials, will help the state attract high-end tourists through an inherent strength the tropical state always had, but never capitalised on.

"Goa accounts for 400 out of the 1,100-odd bird species in India. This is a fact which is not known to many. We are in the process of promoting birding as a tourism activity in order to attract high-spending tourists to the state. Avi-tourism is generally associated with family tourism, a concept Goa wants to promote," Tourism Minister Dilip Parulekar told IANS.

Conventionally known as a beach tourism destination which attracts three million tourists every year, Goa's relatively unexplored hinterland is dotted by five wildlife sanctuaries and one bird sanctuary.

While beasts like the Great Indian Gaur, Royal Bengal Tiger, leopards, panthers, cheetals and blue bulls are already an attraction, the tourism department aims to add more focus to the areas by formally introducing the concept of birding.

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Natural History Society in tandem with Britain's Bird Life International — namely Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary, Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary and Carambolim Lake, in addition to the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary.

The tourism department, in association with the forest department, is also trying to include three more IBAs — Bondla Wildlife Sanc-

tuary, Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary and Navelim wetlands in Bicholim — for those keen on avi-tourism.

"Goa has greater potential for avi-tourism than is currently being realised. Goa offers the perfect setting for ornithologists and bird-watchers, which would include fanatics for the highly specialised ones and those who are into it as a hobby," Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) chair-

man Nilesh Cabral said. "Avi-tourism has attracted attention in recent years as an environmentally-friendly activity," he added. The tourism department has already tied up with the Bird Institute of Goa, an autonomous society based in Panaji, to promote ornithological interest in the state. The combine will develop bird trails in Goa for tourists.

The GTDC has also resolved to rename 45 rooms at a tourist residency near Old Goa, a popular tourist site close to the Salim Ali bird sanctuary that it operates, after birds found in the area.

The months of October to February are the richest when it comes to avian diversity in Goa, especially on account of the wide range of migratory birds which flock to Goa's wetland hot spots — namely,



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The state's exotic avian list also includes the frog mouth bird, blue-eared kingfisher, collared kingfisher, Malabar grey hornbill, grey-headed bulbul, rufous babbler and the state bird — the flame-throated bulbul.

Goa Tourism's avi-tourism ambitions may also get a shot in the arm from the Konkan Railway corporation's plans to further develop the Carambolim Lake — known as a home for a wide variety of bird-life, including migratory birds — as a birding hub by planting more trees bearing fruits like mangos, almonds, cashewnuts and chikoos around and along the Karmali station, located alongside the lake.

The lake is home to birds like purple heron, gray heron, jacana, pintail, indian stork, cuckoo, waterfowl, egrets, moorhen, lesser whistling teal, shoveler, garganey, red-rumped swallow and the coot — and, in the recent past, even the pink flamingo. — IANS