

Birds flock to dream woods along nightmare creek

Paul Fernandes | TNN

Panaji: A hectic urban life may leave citizens little time to peek into the foliage, but if they did it in a quiet corner of the terribly polluted St Inez creek they would be surprised by the continuous chirping of birds that can be heard over the roar of traffic.

The once-idyllic natural tidal creek has over the last few decades turned into a sewer, asphyxiated by the fast paced development that started in the 1980s.

Yet, winged visitors uncommonly seen in Goa and several other species of resident birds have been spotted in this avian paradise along a 400-metre stretch of the creek by amateur birder Sa-

vio Fonseca over the past two years.

"I have documented 64 species of birds and a few mammals and reptiles with details of their population, frequency of sightings and also photographed most of them except a few," Fonseca said.

A topo sheet of the Survey of India (SOI) shows that St Inez creek was influenced by the tidal influx as far as Tonca. "The entire landscape was then a marshy wetland, thinly populated, and occupied by paddy fields and orchards," National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) scientist Antonio Mascarenhas said. This means that a large number of bird species could be seen along the creek.

While, the many species of

Savio Fonseca



A pair of lesser whistling ducks

fish and aquatic life of the past decades cannot be now seen in the highly toxic, sewage-laden waters, bird life continues to thrive in the trees and shrubbery, lining

the 1.5-km long creek up to Tonca. Flowing down from the Nagali hills in Taleigao towards the south, the creek is largely silted, as it courses through the fields to the city

and surfaces at Camrabhat.

Other birders are also pleasantly surprised at the city's bird diversity in its backyard. "It is amazing that the bird life has survived amidst the mess in St Inez creek," amateur city birder Tallulah D'Silva said.

Fonseca discovered the spot of ornithological interest after he shifted to his new home. "When my family moved to St Inez, we were pleasantly surprised by the avian and wildlife diversity in the middle of the capital," he said. A stretch of the creek, thickly wooded and slightly out of bounds for people near Tambdi Mati is just the haven for birds. "You can hear a bird before you can see it," he gushed.

Most of the birds are residents, but several migrants have also been spotted during the winter season.

The birder has no favourites, but is happy about spotting and photographing some uncommon birds.

Rosy starling and egyptian vulture are migrants, while among residents not seen frequently are vigors sunbird, blacklored tit and alexandrine parakeet.

Goa Bird Conservation Network (GBCN) state coordinator Parag Rangnekar agreed and said, "Alexandrine parakeet is an uncommon bird, and its conservation status is presently being reviewed in the country."

► **Good birder's list, P 5**

