

Tourism only way to protect environment: Fonseca

It was a pastime turned to passion for Savio Fonseca, businessman from Panaji. Using an entry-level camera to now becoming a serious campaigner for birds of Goa, Fonseca along with Bikram Grewal, an author, bird-watcher and conservationist from Delhi are all set to release 'Birds of Goa' a photographic field guide. **The Goan** caught up with Savio on his latest venture

Q: You are primarily a businessman, what got you into bird watching?

Savio: There's a time in your life when you feel it's time to give back. When I moved from my village to Panaji, I realised that there were as many as 75 different species of birds just along the St Inez creek. At that time, I realised that this area would soon turn into a concrete jungle and that vital link to the past would be lost. From there, there has been no turning back.

Q: There are similar projects on the birds of Goa done earlier, how will your venture be different?

Savio: For the first time in Goa, we have actually mapped several bird hotspots like the Pilerne plateau, Raia-Curtorim lakes, Carambolim lake, Cotigao, Bhagwan Mahaveer and Salim Ali wildlife sanctuaries. We have detailed maps of these places guiding a bird watcher to particular spots where one has a greater chance of seeing the bird.



Q: What's the scope of avi-tourism in Goa? Does it justify a grant from tourism department?

Savio: We approached the tourism department for two reasons, one is to bring down the price of the book at Rs 499, which otherwise would be around Rs 2,000. We wanted this book to have as large a reach as possible. However, more important was the decision to approach the tourism department and not the forest

department. Tourism is the only way we can protect Goa's environment and more particularly the birds of Goa.

Let me give you an example: In Carambolim, when I went to shoot a rare species of owl, I happened to be noticed by a senior man who lived alone and asked me what I was up to. So I told him I was searching for an owl to shoot it. I didn't find the owl, but the next time I went there, he called out to me and showed me where the owl was. I gave him a tip and told him, if you find other tourists coming to this spot, call them and show them the owl. They too will tip you. As time passed and he realised that the owl could be a source of money, every time there was loud music or people bursting fire crackers, he would ask them to stop out of fear that the owl would fly away and he would lose his money.

If Goa can find this kind of

monetization from eco-tourism, it will be the surest way to protect our environment and people can also make money.

Q: Is your deal with the Tourism department for the long term?

Savio: In terms of money it's just the book, but over time we will be allowing the tourism to use our photographs in their campaigns, we will also devise a long-term plan for promoting knowledge of rare birds that visit Goa. One of the biggest hurdles is that people lack knowledge.

There was one instance where I saw a rare species of parrot on a coconut tree in St Inez.

It was the first time that bird was seen in Goa. It continued to remain there every time I visited, until one day I found the tree had been cut down. Since then that bird has not been seen in Goa.