

## THE INDIAN THAR DESERT

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The Indian Thar Desert in northwestern India is of about 200,000 sq.km. with nearly 80% falling in 11 districts of Rajasthan. It also extends in parts of Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat, and also across the border. The Indian desert is an extension of the Saharo-Arabian deserts, therefore, we find very few endemic birds. It is also connected with the semiarid parts of peninsular India, which further helps in the movement of taxa. Stoliczka's Whinchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* is the only bird exclusive to the Indian desert.

### Protected Areas

Less than 1% of the Indian desert is under the seven protected areas (Table 1). Thanks to irrigation facilities, Punjab and Haryana have been totally converted into cropland. In the Rajasthan part of the desert, there are only three protected areas, two inadequately protected. However, there are many Vishnoi areas where any sort of hunting is not allowed. Also in a large number of village tanks (e.g. Kolayat, Diyatra, Kheechan) waterfowl get good protection.

Table 1. Protected areas in the Indian desert

State	Name	Type	Protection
Punjab	Harikke	Wetland	Adequate
Haryana	Sultanpur	Wetland	Adequate
Rajasthan	Gajner	Scrub/Wetland	Inadequate
	Desert NP	Arid	Inadequate
	Tall Chapper	Grassland	Adequate
Gujarat	Flamingo City	Wetland	Inadequate
	Narayan Sarovar	Scrub	Inadequate

In Gujarat, we have the flamingo sanctuary in the Great Rann of Kutch which is protected due to its inaccessibility to general public but movement of military officials greatly disturb the breeding flamingoes. There are about 8 species requiring attention in our desert areas (Table 2).

Table 2. Important bird species of the Indian Desert

Name	Status
Houbara	Declining
Great Indian Bustard	Declining
Stoliczka's Whinchat	Rare and endemic
Whitewinged Tit	Rare
Imperial Sandgrouse	Declining (?)
Laggar Falcon	Declining (?)
Redheaded Falcon	Rare
Flamingo	Abundant but breeding areas threatened

## Indira Gandhi Nahar Project (IGPN)

Nearly 600 km long Indira Gandhi Nahar Project is under construction for the last 30 years. It starts from Harike reservoir in Punjab and goes up to Ramgarh in Jaisalmer. Distributaries and channels will be over another 8,000 km. This largest irrigation canal system in the world will change the ecology of Indian desert. No environmental impact assessment has been done. Through plantations beside canals and seepage wetlands, suitable habitats for generalist species (e.g. ducks, waders, egrets, herons, babblers, munias and parakeets) have been created but the specialist species of the desert (e.g. Houbara, Great Indian Bustard, sandgrouse) have been edged out.

### Conservation Priorities

1. Environmental Impact Assessment of the Indira Gandhi Canal.
2. Status of Houbara and Great Indian Bustard.
3. Status of Stoliczka's Whinchat, Imperial Sandgrouse, Pintail Sandgrouse.
4. Strict protection to 'Flamingo City' during the breeding season
5. Strict protection to Desert National Park
6. Identification of more areas in the Indian Desert for conservation action.

## CONSERVATION OF BIRDS IN THE WESTERN GHATS - AN OVERVIEW

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The Western Ghats and the narrow west coast together harbour an avifauna comprising 508 species including 599 forms. Of these 324 species (64%) are resident locally or over the entire range. Fifteen species (3%) are endemic. A total of 195 species (38%) are passerines (Daniels, in press).

### Inventory

Inventorying birds of the Western Ghats has been on since historical times. The entire period can be broadly divided into 1) Pre-independence/British Period (1860-1935) and 2) Post-independence Period (1935-till present). The beginning of the second period was marked by the emergence of the late Dr Salim Ali as an Indian Ornithologist. His pioneer work in the Western Ghats started with his surveys of the birds of Travancore-Cochin and Mysore. Several students and colleagues of Dr Ali have followed up research on the birds of the Western Ghats since then. Significant contributions were made after c. 1970 through local studies by V S Vijayan (Point Calimere, Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary, Lalitha Vijayan (Periyar WLS). A J T Johnsing (Mundanthurai WLS) and M A Reza Khan, Priya Davidar and Anvarul Islam (upper Nilgiris).