

SANCTUARIES AND NATIONAL PARKS IN EASTERN INDIA

WEST BENGAL

Has eight sanctuaries covering an area of approximately 675 sq.kms. Of these, three are in the Sunderbans within easy reach of Calcutta, and the remainder are in North Bengal. The best way to visit the latter is to take a plane from Calcutta to the airfield situated closest to the sanctuary, and thence by road. Train journeys to all of them are tedious. Except for the Tourist Bungalow in the Jaldapara Sanctuary, the other North Bengal sanctuaries have ordinary Forest Rest Houses, which provide furniture and crockery, but one has to carry his own bedding and arrange for his food. So far, West Bengal has not constituted any National Park. The best time to visit the sanctuaries is from November to April, except for the Senchal Sanctuary. No special staff is sanctioned for any of the sanctuaries. Details in respect of each are given below:-

I. JALDAPARA SANCTUARY

Constituted in 1941 for the protection of the Indian one-horned Rhinoceros. It covers an area of 93 sq.kms, in a linear strip 16-19 kms wide along the Torsa River in North Bengal. The nearest railway station is Hashimara on the North-East Frontier Railway, from where the Barodabari Bungalow is only 2 kms away. The nearest airfield is Hashimara, connected by non-scheduled flights with Calcutta. Jeeps and trained elephants are available on hire.

The Tourist Bungalow at Barodabari has three bedroom suites with a lounge and a dining room. Catering arrangements are provided. The charges for accommodation only are Rs 8/- per day for a double room and Rs 5/- for a single.

Today there are about 80 one-horned Rhinos in the sanctuary, and in addition tigers, elephants, bears, sambhar, swamp deer, hog deer, Goyal and Bison have also benefitted.

Reservation of accommodation and transport is done by the Divisional Forest Officer, Cooch Behar Division, P.O. COOCH BEHAR.

II. MAHANADI SANCTUARY

Constituted in 1955 with an area of 128 sq.kms, in the Darjeeling district, near Sukna railway station on the N.E.Railway, 9 kms from Siliguri Junction. Nearest airfield is Bagdogra, 24 kms away, and connected by a regular IAC service with Calcutta. The best rest house is at Sukna. The animals that have benefitted are the tiger, elephant, bison, sambhar, cheetal, barking deer, and pigs. Reservations are made by the Divisional Forest Officer, Kurseong Division, P.O. DOW HILL, Dist. Darjeeling.

III. SENCHAL SANCTUARY

Is the oldest sanctuary in West Bengal, created in 1940, over an area of 39 sq.kms, embracing the hills around Darjeeling. Though Ghoom railway station on the N.F.Railway adjoins the sanctuary, it is more convenient to stay at Darjeeling which has first class hotels, and is only 8 kms away. Cars can be hired at Darjeeling. The sanctuary has motorable roads on three sides, and another passes through it at certain points. The view of the snows from Darjeeling and the sunrise from Tiger Hill are world famous. The animals in it are the Serow, Himalayan Bear, barking deer, and Goral. The best times for a visit are from April-May and October-November. Further information can be obtained from the Divisional Forest Officer, Kurseong Division, P.O. DOW HILL.

IV. GORUMARA SANCTUARY

Is a small one with an area of only 8.5 sq.kms, and was constituted in 1949 for protecting the rhinoceros. The animals found today are the rhinoceros, elephant, tiger, bison, sambhar, barking & hog deer, buffalo and pig. The most convenient railhead is Mal Junction on the N.F.Railway, and the airfield is again Bagdogra. Taxis are available at Mal Junction, which is 25 kms away from the Sanctuary. There are two rest houses at Gorumara and Chalsa. Reservations are done by the Divisional Forest Officer, JALPAIGURI.

V. CHAPRAMARI SANCTUARY

Has the same area as the Gorumara sanctuary, with the same railhead, airfield and animal population. The most convenient rest house is Chapramari. Reservations are done by the Divisional Forest Officer, JALPAIGURI.

VI. SAJNAKHALI ISLAND SANCTUARY

Is the biggest sanctuary in West Bengal with an area of 360 sq.kms, was constituted in 1960 and is located in the Sunderbans. The most convenient route is to take the train from the Sealdah station of Calcutta for Canning, and from there proceed by country boat or steam launch. The primary attraction here is birds, and the important ones are: cattle egret, paddy bird, little cormorant, black-necked stork, snake bird, white ibis, green bittern, pelican, etc.

VII. LOHIAN ISLAND AND HALLIDAY ISLAND SANCTUARIES

Both are in the Sunderbans, approachable from Calcutta by train up to Diamond Harbour, then by bus to Naukhana, and finally by country boat or steam launch. The important animals in these sanctuaries are tigers, spotted deer, and aquatic birds. For all Sunderban sanctuaries, further information can be obtained from the Divisional Forest Officer, 24 Parganas, 35, Gopalnagore Road, CALCUTTA-27.

ORISSA

Has four sanctuaries with an aggregate area of only some 102 sq.kms, two of them being only 13 sq.kms apiece. All of them are situated close to the urban centres of Puri, Angul and Bhubaneswar. A National Park has been established in the Similipal Hills of Mayurbhanj district, with an initial area of 1,000 sq.kms, and will be eventually extended to cover 2,500 sq.kms. A Biological Park has been located between Cuttack and Bhubaneswar since 1960. It is a combination of a Zoo and a Botanical Garden. Except for the Mayurbhanj National Park, no special staff is sanctioned for any of the sanctuaries. For further information in respect of any of them application can be made to the Chief Conservator of Forests, CUTTACK. Individual details are given below:-

I. MAYURBHANJ NATIONAL PARK

Is located in an area with probably the best wild life in the whole State. It is claimed that except for wild buffaloes and black buck, all the other animals found anywhere else in the State (elephant, bison, sambhar, spotted deer, Nilgai, barking deer, mouse deer, pigs, tiger, panther, bear, etc.) are represented in the National Park. The scenery too is gorgeous, and one waterfall, the Barheipani Falls, are claimed to be 1308 feet high, i.e., higher than the Jog Falls in Mysore.

The best way to reach the Park is to take National Highway No: 6 from Calcutta, which skirts the National Park for a distance of nearly 65 kms. Several roads lead off from this into the Park itself. The Hotel -cum-Rest House at Nawana, if completed, will be about 240 kms from Calcutta by the National Highway, via Bangripost. The rail approach is indifferent. Trains have to be changed at Rupsa for Baripada, but Rupsa is a small station where none of the Mail or Express trains stop. There is no airfield or air connection.

This National Park is well served with rest houses, there being 7 of them, but none provide bedding or catering arrangements. One of them is located at the head of the Barheipani Falls.

Special staff sanctioned for the Park comprises 1 Asst. Conservator, 1 Deputy Ranger, 3 Foresters, 8 Forest Guards and one Guide for conducting tourists. A Jeep is also available for hire by tourists. Reservations are done by the Divisional Forest Officer, National Park Division, P.O. JOSHIPUR, dist. Mayurbhanj.

II. DEBIGARH SANCTUARY

Is the oldest sanctuary in Orissa, created in 1931, but has an area of only 13 sq.kms. Is located in the Barapahar Division, but has no convenient railhead or airfield. The commonest animals are sambhar, and spotted deer, but have been

been sadly depleted through illicit shooting.

III. RAIGODA SANCTUARY

Created in 1938 with an area of 40 sq.kms. Can be most conveniently visited from Angul, which is 37 kms to the North. Angul itself is a small town, and first class hotels are not available. Catering arrangements exist at the Circuit House and bedding is also available. The commonest animals are elephants, spotted deer, sambhar and bison.

IV. CHANDKA SANCTUARY

Created in 1935 with an area of 30 sq.kms, and lies 20 kms West of Bhubaneswar. There is a P.W.D. Rest House at Chandka itself. The animals are elephant, sambhar, spotted deer, barking deer, tiger and panther. Is subject to poaching particularly at night.

V. BALUKHAND SANCTUARY

Created in 1935 with an area of 13 sq.kms along the Casuarina plantations on the sea coast near Puri, with the sole object of providing protection to ~~the~~ the black buck which was very common in this area. There is a two-roomed rest house at Balukhand, but is more conveniently visited from Puri itself, which has first class hotels.

BIHAR

Has five sanctuaries totalling about 700 sq.kms, and two National Parks, one each in the Hazaribagh and Palamau districts, having areas of 182 and 166 sq.kms respectively. The Hazaribagh National Park has a Rest House and Tourist Lodge, at both of which bedding is provided and catering arrangements exist in the nearby Island Canteen. In the others, only ordinary Forest Rest Houses are available. Except for the Hazaribagh National Park, no special staff is sanctioned for any of the others. All the sanctuaries and National Parks are in the Chotanagpur Division of the State, and the most convenient centre for visiting them is Ranchi, which has first class hotels, and where taxis can be hired for all journeys. The best time for visiting is March-April and November-December.

I. HAZARIBAGH NATIONAL PARK

Created in 1954 by an executive order of Government, and strictly speaking, is only a sanctuary. It lies astride National Highway 33 which splits the Park into two halves, and itself takes off from National Highway 2 (Grand Trunk Road) at Burhi, 400 kms West of Calcutta. The Rest House and Tourist Lodge is located in the Western half of the Park, at a distance of 32kms from Burhi, and about 10 kms to the West of the National Highway. There is no convenient railhead or airfield for visiting this National Park. The Forest Department keep a station

station wagon at Hazaribagh for hiring by tourists. The distance to the Tourist Lodge is 24 kms from Hazaribagh and 120 kms from Ranchi. Special staff sanctioned comprise one Ranger, one Deputy Ranger, and twenty Game Guards.

Animals in this National Park are still very shy, though the chances of seeing them are better in the Eastern half than in the Western. The Western half is more developed with the Tourist Lodge and Canteen, consequently draws more visitors with an attendant increase in motor traffic and noise. This has made the animals in this half more shy and confined to the deeper recesses of the forests. Sambhar and spotted deer are plentiful, the other ungulates rare. Bison are very rare. Tigers and Leopards are also to be found. For reservation, the authority is the Divisional Forest Officer, Hazaribagh West Division, P.O. HAZARIBAGH.

II. PALAMAU NATIONAL PARK

This National Park embraces the Reserved Forests around Betla in the Palamau district, and was created in 1959 by an executive order of Government. It lies off the main Ranchi-Daltonganj road at a distance of 170 kms from Ranchi and 26 kms from Daltonganj, but road transport is not easily available at Daltonganj, and accommodation is not very good. There are three Forest Rest Houses within the Park, at Betla, Kerh and Kechki. The last named is very picturesque, situated on the confluence of the North Koel and Auranga Rivers.

Bisons abound in this National Park, and during the summer months it is quite easy to come across a herd. In addition, sambhar, spotted deer, mouse deer, four-horned antelope, indian Gazelle, nilgai, hog deer, barking deer, all are found here. Among the carnivores the important species are tiger, leopard, hyena, jackal and mongoose. Bird life also is quite rich. The greatest abundance of animals is during April and May, when due to the presence of water, animals from other parts of the forest gather in it. All in all, the animals here are more plentiful and less shy than in the Hazaribagh National Park. For reservations, contact Divisional Forest Officer, Daltonganj Division, P.O. DALTONGANJ.

III. SASANGDABURU SANCTUARY

Covers an area of 92 sq.kms in the Saranda Forest Division of the Singhbhum district, embracing some of the finest Sal forests in the whole country. It was created in 1936, and has an average elevation of around 650 metres above sea-level. The area is rather inaccessible, being 32 kms away from the nearest railheads, which are all small wayside stations. A convenient point is Chaibassa, the district headquarters, about 130 kms away, where taxis may be available. There are a

are a number of rest houses on the periphery. Chaibassa itself is 140 kms from Ranchi and about 320 kms from Calcutta.

Elephants have benefitted most by this sanctuary, but wild life of all kinds, both herbivorous and carnivorous, was plentiful. It was very rich in bird life as well. Rare species like Black Panthers have been seen in the past. With proper management, it could become one of the best sanctuaries in India. But the whole area has been leased out to the National Minerals Development Corporation for the extraction and export of iron ore. This has played havoc with the sanctuary, and for all practical purposes it can be written off.

IV. BAMLABURU SANCTUARY

Is the oldest sanctuary in Bihar, created in 1932 with an area of 128 sq.kms. It is in the Kolhan Forest Division of the Singhbhum district. The best route is from Ranchi via Chaibassa, the distance being about 190 kms. The rest house at Bamiaburu is in the heart of the sanctuary, and is set amidst sylvan surroundings. Deer are most plentiful in this sanctuary, and can be seen any night. Elephants too have benefitted, as well as tigers. It is quite rich in bird life. Sambhar are the most plentiful, but the spotted deer is conspicuous by its absence.

V. SONGRA SANCTUARY

The other sanctuary in the Singhbhum district is Songra, adjoining National Highway 35 from Ranchi to Jamshedpur. It was created in 1935 with an area of about 145 sq.kms. There are three rest houses within the sanctuary itself; at Rogod, Jate and Tebo, the last one being maintained by the PWD. Tebo lies on the National Highway and is 90 kms from Ranchi.

It is one of the worst situated sanctuaries in the State, and is very prone to poaching. Its value is doubtful, and wild life is neither plentiful nor easily to be seen.

For the Singhbhum Sanctuaries, applications for reservation should be made to the Divisional Forest Officer, Saranda Division, for Sasangdaburu; Kolhan Division for Bamiaburu, and Porahat Division for Songra. All are at P.O. CHAIBASSA.

VI. BARESAND SANCTUARY

In addition to the National Park, the Palamau district has a sanctuary too, comprising the Baresand Block, created in 1946 over an area of 128 sq.kms. The most convenient rest house is at Maromar, beautifully situated on a knoll, 64 kms from Daltonganj, and 218 kms from Ranchi. As you enter this rest house, monkeys will greet you by making faces.

Bison have benefitted the most by this sanctuary, but other forms, both

both herbivorous and carnivorous, including tigers are quite common. Reservations are done by the Divisional Forest Officer, Daltonganj South Division, P.O. DALTONGANJ.

VII. KODARMA SANCTUARY

Is the biggest sanctuary in the State with an area of over 200 sq.kms, and was constituted in 1947. There are two rest houses within the sanctuary, at Kodarma and Meghatary. The railhead is Kodarma, 382 kms from Calcutta, where several Express trains stop. Taxis can be hired at Kodarma. There is no airfield or air service.

This sanctuary is honeycombed with mica mines, and poaching is rife. Though deer and tigers are found within it, seeing them is very difficult. But it is quite rich in bird life, and interesting bird watching can be had from the compounds of the two rest houses. Reservations are done by the Divisional Forest Officer, Kodarma Division, P.O. KODARMA.
