

Rajasthan Asian Waterbird Census 2026

Summary Report



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I, on the behalf of all volunteers, sincerely acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the frontline forest staff, Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) members, AWC volunteers, civil society groups, and non-profit organizations and volunteers who actively contributed to the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2026. Their role in field observations and in the preparation of this report has been invaluable. We also extend our gratitude to the National AWC coordinator and experts for providing guidance on waterbird monitoring protocols, wetland assessment, and overall participation in the census.

We extend heartfelt gratitude to all wetland and protected area managers whose dedication, time, and unwavering commitment played a vital role in the successful completion of the AWC at their respective sites.

We deeply appreciate the officials of Rajasthan State Biodiversity Board and AWC India Desk at Wetlands International for their thoughtful planning and efficient execution of the program in the entire state. This collective effort of waterbird monitoring and report preparation would not have been achievable without their consistent guidance and support throughout the process.



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Background

Wetlands are vital ecosystems that provide a wide range of ecological, economic, and cultural benefits. They support rich biodiversity, regulate water cycles, recharge groundwater, store carbon, and serve as crucial habitats for numerous species, especially waterbirds. Among these, waterbirds act as key indicators of wetland health due to their sensitivity to changes in habitat conditions. Recognizing the importance of monitoring waterbird populations to better understand and conserve wetlands, the International Waterbird Census (IWC) was initiated in 1967. Coordinated globally by Wetlands International, the IWC is a long-running, volunteer-based monitoring program that operates in over 100 countries across Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

To address the specific needs of the Asian region, the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) was launched in 1987 as the Asian component of the IWC. Conducted every year during the month of January, the AWC provides a coordinated platform for counting waterbirds and assessing the status of wetlands across more than 25 countries in South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. The census is implemented through the efforts of a vast network of participants, including birdwatchers, researchers, students, forest departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities. It is one of the largest citizen science initiatives in Asia, built on the principles of volunteer engagement, long-term ecological monitoring, and community-based conservation.

The primary aim of the AWC is to collect information on the numbers and distribution of waterbirds, as well as to document the condition of their wetland habitats. The data generated through the census plays a vital role in identifying Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), supporting the designation of Ramsar Sites, and informing national and international conservation strategies such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) Action Plan. In India, the AWC also contributes significantly to the country's National Biodiversity Action Plan and the National Action Plan for the Conservation of Migratory Birds and their Habitats.

India has emerged as one of the most active contributors to the AWC, with thousands of wetlands being monitored annually. Among Indian states, Rajasthan holds a unique position due to its geographical diversity, which includes freshwater lakes, saline lagoons, reservoirs, and man-made tanks. Despite being predominantly arid and semi-arid, Rajasthan hosts a rich mosaic of wetlands that serve as critical stopover and wintering sites for migratory birds flying along the Central Asian Flyway. These include globally significant species such as Greater Flamingo, Bar-headed Goose, Common Crane, and various species of ducks, waders, and storks.

In recent decades, many of these wetlands have come under increasing pressure from human activities such as unregulated tourism, urban development, water diversion, pollution, and unsustainable salt extraction. In this context, the AWC serves as a vital monitoring tool that helps track changes in waterbird populations and wetland conditions over time. It also promotes awareness among local communities and stakeholders about the ecological value of wetlands,



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encouraging their participation in conservation efforts. As environmental challenges intensify in the region, the role of the AWC becomes ever more critical—not only as a data-gathering exercise but also as a unifying platform for wetland conservation across Asia.

Ecological Significance of Rajasthan and the Role of Wetlands International

Rajasthan, the largest state in India by area, is often perceived as a land dominated by deserts and arid landscapes. However, beyond its dry terrain and sand dunes, Rajasthan hosts a surprising diversity of wetland ecosystems that are critically important both ecologically and hydrologically. From freshwater lakes and seasonal marshes to saline pans, irrigation tanks, and reservoirs, these wetlands provide essential services such as water storage, flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, and support for agriculture and local livelihoods. Importantly, they serve as vital habitats for a wide variety of resident and migratory waterbirds, placing Rajasthan firmly on the map of global bird migration routes, particularly along the Central Asian Flyway (CAF).

Despite receiving limited and irregular rainfall—averaging just 450–500 mm annually, primarily during the monsoon—Rajasthan sustains several significant wetlands. Among these, Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a designated Ramsar Site, is internationally renowned for hosting over 370 bird species, including threatened and migratory species. Sambhar Lake, India's largest inland saline wetland, is another vital site, attracting large flocks of Greater Flamingos and other waterbirds each year. Additional important wetlands such as Mansagar (Jal Mahal) Lake in Jaipur, the interconnected lakes of Udaipur, Tal Chhappar Sanctuary, Pachpadra Lake, Didwana Lake, and Jawai Dam, all contribute to the ecological richness of the region.

These wetlands act as crucial wintering and stopover sites for migratory birds that travel thousands of kilometers from Central Asia, Mongolia, Russia, and Eastern Europe. Many of these species are globally threatened or near-threatened, underscoring the importance of regular monitoring and conservation of their habitats. Rajasthan's wetlands not only support avian biodiversity but also serve as indicators of broader ecological health and water availability in this semi-arid region.

The global significance of these wetlands is supported by the work of Wetlands International, a leading global non-profit organization committed to the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. Established in 1954 and originally known as the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), Wetlands International now operates in over 100 countries. The organization plays a key role in shaping wetland policy, conducting ecological research, and supporting the implementation of international agreements such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

As part of its global work, Wetlands International coordinates the International Waterbird Census (IWC), a large-scale annual survey initiated in 1967. Recognizing the specific needs of the Asian region, it launched the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) in 1987 to focus on wetland and waterbird monitoring across South, Southeast, and East Asia, as well as Australasia. In India, the AWC is



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supported by Wetlands International South Asia (WISA), based in New Delhi, which collaborates with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), scientific bodies such as BNHS and SACON, and state forest departments.

The AWC has become one of Asia's largest citizen science programs, enabling thousands of volunteers, researchers, and conservationists to monitor bird populations and wetland health in a standardized and coordinated manner. The data collected contributes to the identification of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and Ramsar Sites, informs national wetland policies, and supports the development of effective conservation strategies.

In Rajasthan, the support of Wetlands International through the AWC has been instrumental in highlighting the ecological value of the state's wetlands and the threats they face, such as pollution, unregulated development, water diversion, and salt mining. The collaborative framework of the AWC not only provides critical ecological data but also fosters community awareness and local stewardship of wetland ecosystems. As environmental pressures grow, such long-term monitoring efforts are essential for safeguarding the ecological integrity of Rajasthan's wetlands and ensuring the survival of the waterbirds that depend on them.

Objectives of the Asian Waterbird Census

The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) is designed as a region-wide initiative to support the long-term monitoring and conservation of waterbirds and wetland ecosystems. As part of the International Waterbird Census (IWC), the AWC contributes valuable data for national, regional, and global biodiversity conservation efforts. The following are the key objectives of the AWC:

1. Monitor Waterbird Population

To collect consistent and long-term data on the population size, distribution, and diversity of waterbird species, with particular emphasis on identifying trends and changes over time.

2. Assess the status and health of wetlands

To evaluate the ecological condition of wetlands based on the presence, abundance, and behavior of waterbirds, which serve as bio-indicators of wetland health.

3. Identify and Prioritize Key Wetland Sites

To recognize and document important waterbird habitats, including potential Ramsar Sites, Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), and protected areas, to inform site-specific conservation actions.



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4. Support International Conservation Frameworks

To contribute data that supports international environmental agreements and conservation strategies, such as:

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- The Central Asian Flyway (CAF) Action Plan

5. Raise Awareness and Promote Community Participation

To enhance public understanding of the ecological importance of wetlands and waterbirds, and to encourage citizen participation in wetland conservation through a community-based, citizen science approach.

6. Build Capacity and Strengthen Partnerships

To support the development of technical skills, local networks, and institutional partnerships for wetland and waterbird monitoring, especially at the grassroots and regional levels.

7. Detect emerging threats

To identify potential threats such as habitat degradation, water scarcity, pollution, invasive species, and human disturbances, and provide data-driven insights to support evidence-based policy and management decisions.

Wetland and Waterbirds reported

During the Asian Waterbird Census, a total of 112 bird species were recorded across 117 wetland sites, offering a glimpse into the remarkable diversity supported by these habitats. The Asian Waterbird Census in Rajasthan covered a wide range of wetlands, including Amleshwar Talab, Anasagar, Bhardha Dam, Chandlai, Degrai Pond, Didwana Pond, Phaesar, Gadola Dam, Gangiyasar Talab, Ghosunda Dam, Gundolav Lake, Jawaja, Jhadol, Jhunjhunu Beed, Kala Danta, Kalakh Sagar, Kalyanipura, Kharda, Lordiya Tatab, Makreda, Menar Wetland Complex, Morel Bund, Naliasar, Nani Bird Park, Pada Pagad Talab, Phool Sagar, Ramsar, Sambhar Lake, Sanod, Sharwan Sagar, Sitarampura Tank and many more.

These observations represent some limited and initial efforts, serving as a foundation for understanding the status of waterbirds in the region. Recognizing the importance of wetlands as vital wintering and stopover grounds, more comprehensive surveys will be carried out in the



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coming year to ensure that the data contributes more effectively to monitoring population trends, guiding conservation actions, and strengthening wetland protection initiatives.

Table: List of species observed and their total count

S. No.	Species Name	Total Count
1.	Little Grebe	908
2.	Great Cormorant	1,942
3.	Little Cormorant	1,860
4.	Indian Cormorant	887
5.	Grey Heron	382
6.	Purple Heron	88
7.	Black-crowned Night-heron	115
8.	Western Spot-billed Duck	234
9.	Northern Shoveler	1,870
10.	Lesser Flamingo	1,46,650
11.	Greater Flamingo	37,368
12.	Black-winged Stilt	641
13.	Great Thick-knee	13
14.	Red-wattled Lapwing	1,030
15.	Common Kingfisher	40
16.	Oriental Darter	27
17.	Dalmatian Pelican	138
18.	Great White Pelican	283
19.	Intermediate Egret	261
20.	Little Egret	803
21.	Cattle Egret	2,200
22.	Indian Pond-heron	196
23.	Painted Stork	245
24.	Eurasian Spoonbill	242
25.	Black-headed Ibis	184
26.	Glossy Ibis	220
27.	Mallard	29
28.	Common Teal	972
29.	Comb Duck	189
30.	Purple Swamphen	134
31.	White-breasted Waterhen	64
32.	Common Moorhen	389
33.	Common Coot	2,280
34.	Spotted Redshank	91
35.	Wood Sandpiper	149
36.	Common Redshank	95
37.	Common Greenshank	18
38.	Common Sandpiper	205



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39.	Little Stint	38
40.	Temminck's Stint	84
41.	Ruff	606
42.	Pallas's Gull	56
43.	Brown-headed Gull	279
44.	Common Gull-billed Tern	28
45.	River Tern	541
46.	White-throated Kingfisher	88
47.	Wire-tailed Swallow	409
48.	White Wagtail	238
49.	White-browed Wagtail	77
50.	Yellow Wagtail	273
51.	Citrine Wagtail	156
52.	Grey Wagtail	190
53.	Ruddy Shelduck	170
54.	Common Shelduck	20
55.	Cotton Pygmy-goose	82
56.	Common Pochard	918
57.	Ferruginous Duck	25
58.	Common Crane	472
59.	Pied Kingfisher	53
60.	Grey Francolin	8
61.	Rock Pigeon	4
62.	Little Swift	4
63.	Grey-headed Swamphen	13
64.	Black-headed Gull	146
65.	Northern Pintail	633
66.	Pied Avocet	247
67.	Red-necked Grebe	8
68.	Greater Flamingo	801
69.	Eurasian Wigeon	187
70.	Caspian gull	25
71.	Streak Throated Swallow	95
72.	Bluethroat	6
73.	Asian Openbill	87
74.	White Stork	7
75.	Woolly-necked Stork	10
76.	Red-naped Ibis	69
77.	Lesser Whistling-duck	146
78.	Bar-headed Goose	248
79.	Greylag Goose	845
80.	Sarus Crane	17
81.	Bronze-winged Jacana	26



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82.	River Lapwing	19
83.	Little Ringed Plover	363
84.	Jack Snipe	12
85.	Western Marsh-harrier	42
86.	Barn Swallow	68
87.	Red-rumped Swallow	34
88.	Greater White-fronted Goose	2
89.	Garganey	27
90.	Tufted Duck	82
91.	Common Goldeneye	26
92.	Gadwall	330
93.	Red-crested Pochard	29
94.	Greater Painted-snipe	14
95.	Small Pratincole	100
96.	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	16
97.	White-tailed Lapwing	5
98.	Black-tailed Godwit	395
99.	Green Sandpiper	45
100.	Common Snipe	178
101.	Curlew Sandpiper	4
102.	Sanderling	15
103.	Dunlin	5
104.	Whiskered Tern	91
105.	Indian Skimmer	35
106.	Eastern Imperial Eagle	5
107.	Greater Spotted Eagle	2
108.	Osprey	19
109.	Brahminy Kite	2
110.	Striated Heron	5
111.	Yellow Bittern	8
112.	Black-necked Stork	8

Future Pathways

Looking ahead, we plan to expand the scope of the census next year by covering more wetland sites. A strong focus will be placed on increasing participation, encouraging greater involvement from volunteers, local communities, and partner organizations. The lessons learned and challenges faced during this year's census will guide us in refining our approach, allowing us to respond more effectively and carry out the work with improved strategies. With these efforts, the next census will not only be broader in coverage but also more inclusive and impactful in advancing waterbird and wetland conservation.



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Field photos



Latitude: 26.246334
Longitude: 73.394418
Altitude: 206.7±23.4 m
Accuracy: 5.215 m
Time: 10-02-2026 12:01
Note: chandelai

Powered by NoteCam



Latitude: 25.044907
Longitude: 73.160513
Elevation: 311.51±100.0 m
Accuracy: 2.5 m
Time: 01-02-2026 10:16
Note: jawai bandh B Water Body

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Latitude: 26.299034
Longitude: 72.972056
Elevation: 272.85±100.0 m
Accuracy: 6.75 m
Time: 24-01-2026 09:23
Note: takhat sagar

Powered by NoteCam



Latitude: 25.114519
Longitude: 73.186697
Elevation: 320.49±100.0 m
Accuracy: 9.0 m
Time: 04-01-2026 12:29
Note: bisalpur Pond

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Latitude: 25.105277
Longitude: 73.163023
Elevation: 307.51±100.0 m
Accuracy: 4.0 m
Time: 30-01-2026 17:35
Note: jawai forest land

Powered by NoteCam



Latitude: 26.30785
Longitude: 72.978119
Elevation: 275.85±100.0 m
Accuracy: 4.5 m
Time: 03-02-2026 11:11
Note: machiya

Powered by NoteCam



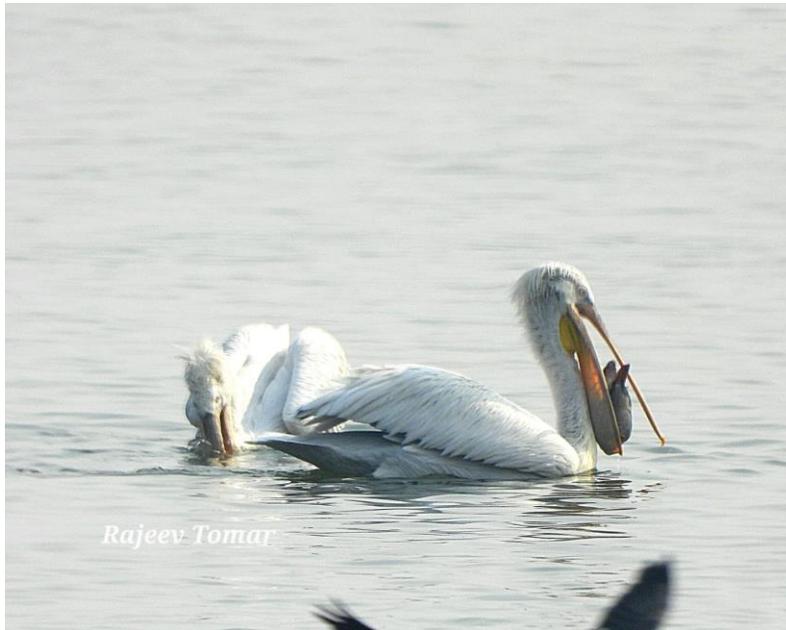
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Latitude: 25.119924
Longitude: 73.18315
Elevation: 311.5±100.0 m
Accuracy: 3.3 m
Time: 31-01-2026 10:59
Note: Bisalpur Water Body

Powered by NoteCam



Latitude: 26.307902
Longitude: 72.978127
Elevation: 274.85±100.0 m
Accuracy: 4.5 m
Time: 03-02-2026 11:10
Note: machiya

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