

Now you can be the eyes and ears of a unique project that seeks to monitor the common birds found throughout the country. The Common Bird Monitoring of India programme will monitor 18 common birds across the country and you too can join in.

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Common Bird Monitoring of India

A Novel Citizen Science Programme

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, India's maiden Common Bird monitoring programme was launched on the occasion of the World Sparrow Day on 20 March 2012 in Mumbai. The Common Bird Monitoring of India (CBMI – www.cbmi.in) is an initiative of the Nature Forever Society (NFS) located in Nashik.

Common birds have tremendous ecological and economical value as many of them are important pest controllers, pollinating agents and scavengers. Frugivores or fruit eaters help in forest regeneration and in maintaining the genetic mix of fruit trees. The Bulbul is an important disperser of seeds as its digestive juices give a trigger for the seeds to germinate better.

CBMI aims to monitor the eighteen common birds across the

country. These include well-known birds like the house sparrow, house crow, rock pigeon, rose ringed parakeets, and also lesser known ones like Ashy Prinia and Hoopoe. Its goal is to generate region-specific mapping of these bird species. Such a mapping effort will help in filling up critical gaps, according to Dilawar Mohammed, the founder of Nature Forever Society. "Over a period of time interesting data will be generated which can be statistically analysed," he said, adding that every year they would release a report with key findings.

Many countries in the West have had similar bird monitoring programmes involving citizens since a long time. The oldest such programme is the Christmas Bird Count in America, which has been running since 1900. Bird monitoring systems act as early warning systems for bird decline giving time for remedial measures before it is too late.

In India, there is a lack of area-wise data on common birds. Perhaps if there had been a common bird monitoring system in India earlier, vulture decline would have come to notice in the early stages. Vulture was once the common raptor found in the country. Similarly, although it is common knowledge that the population of house sparrows is declining, there are no figures to map the distribution of decline and understand its causes.

Dilawar has requested organisations, institutes, educational institutes at national, regional and local level to get people involved in the project and contribute towards the welfare of the birds. "This is a kind of citizens' initiative...the data of

SALIENT FEATURES OF CBMI

1. One doesn't need special skills to participate in monitoring the birds.
2. One needs to spend only fifteen minutes to observe the birds found where they live.
3. Data can be easily entered in the CBMI system using the Internet.
4. Participants can see the data entered by them as well as other participants from across the country.
5. Effort will give a major boost to the conservation of urban flora and fauna.
6. Effort will help in generation of important statistical data on common bird populations in India.
7. Effort will help in devising long-term conservation plans for the common birds.
8. Effort will act as an early warning system.
9. Effort will help policy makers, town planners, researchers.
10. Citizen participation will help in increasing science literacy and also help involve the citizens in the conservation movement.

Ornithologist and founder of Nature Forever Society Mohammed Dilawar at the launch of India's first-ever Internet-based Common Birds monitoring programme in Mumbai on the eve of World Sparrow Day. Seen here Dilawar with bird-feeder.



common birds is not there.... we know the figures related to tiger, vultures, elephants, but what about sparrows, which too are in decline?" he asks. CBMI is the first Citizen Science Project to monitor the common birds of the country where citizens from all walks of life will be engaged in research.

Nature Forever Society hopes to get help and support from Government agencies like the Ministry of Environment and Forests both at the national and state level to generate greater awareness and proper implementation. NFS also calls for volunteers to help it in creating awareness.

The format of the whole programme has been kept simple so as not to intimidate citizens. Selection of the birds has been done keeping in mind that they represent various families found across the country and at the same time are easily recognised by the lay people.

CITIZEN SPARROW INITIATIVE

The decline of the House sparrow has been noticed both by experts as well as by the general public. Although it is among the most widely distributed birds in the world, its numbers in many places have dropped sharply in the last several decades.

To document the current population and distribution of sparrows and compare this with the situation in the past, nature and conservation organisations across India have joined efforts with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) to launch an online survey called Citizen Sparrow (www.citizensparrow.in). Some organisations partnering/collaborating on this project are Aaranyak, Bird Conservation Society, Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning, Indian Bird Conservation Network, Kalpavriksh, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, Maharashtra Pakshi Mitra, National Centre for Biological Sciences and Nature Conservation Foundation.

Anyone with past or present information about House Sparrows is encouraged to participate. An interesting aspect of this survey is that it even seeks information about the *absence* of sparrows. Because sparrows live side by side with people, the *lack* of sparrows in any place is of particular interest.

Dr Raju Kasambe, Head-Important Bird Areas Programme of BNHS and Indian Bird Conservation Network, adds, "There is an urgent need to understand the status of our commonest bird, the ubiquitous House Sparrow. Only a citizen science programme with mass participation can help in collecting information about it on a pan-India scale."

Explaining why the survey involves ordinary citizens rather than experts alone, Dr Suhel Quader of the Nature Conservation Foundation says, "Almost everyone knows about House sparrows, so there is a vast store of information available with citizens all across the country. We are trying to document this store of information. In addition, we see this as a way to reach out to people from all walks of life – asking them to share their stories and their understanding about these birds."

Participants in the survey are asked to mark locations on a map and give simple information about their sparrow sightings from those locations, including sightings from past years and decades. With such information it is possible to compare population changes of sparrows in different places, and this is expected to point to particular threats or problems. Findings from the project are intended to feed into more detailed studies investigating causes of decline, and potential measures for the recovery of sparrow populations.

The public involvement approach has other important benefits as well, points out Dr. Asad Rahmani, Director, BNHS. "We are trying to generate good information on all-India level on House sparrow and involve citizens to make them more interested and concerned on conservation issues. The House sparrow can become an example species of the conservation problems faced by other species."

The project was launched on 1st April 2012, and will run for two months before closing. All information collected through the project will remain in public domain for anyone to access and use.



COMMON BIRDS TO BE MONITORED

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	Short truncated tail looks distinctly triangular in flight-silhouette; Fruit-eater and can be encountered on fruiting trees like figs
	Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	About the size of a Myna; Found in lawns, gardens, groves and lightly wooded open country, often in neighbourhood of towns and villages
	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	Perches on trees, wires or other suitable material; Hunts large crustaceans, insects, earthworms, rodents, snakes, fish and frogs; Can be seen far away from water in gardens, cultivations, groves and lightly wooded areas
	Green Bee-eater flying insects	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	About the size of a sparrow; Feeds mainly on and often hunts from low perches; Readily makes use of fence wires and electric wires
	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	About the size of a Jungle crow; Poor flyer and walks on the ground searching for its food which includes insects, eggs and nestlings of other birds; Found mainly in gardens, cultivations and wooded areas Rose-ringed
	Parakeet collar but	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	Slightly larger than a myna; Female lacks the otherwise is like the male; Found in gardens, groves and wooded open country and in the neighbourhood of towns and villages
	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Very common bird found in human inhabited areas
	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Often seen soaring on thermals over cities; Scavenger, will readily swoop to take food held in the hands by humans
	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	Usually follows cattle while feeding; Feeds on a wide range of prey, particularly insects, comprising grasshoppers, crickets, flies adults and maggots, and moths, as well as spiders, frogs, and earthworms; More gregarious than all egrets

How To Participate

It is almost impossible for a handful of scientists to map the entire bird population across the country, hence the need to involve the citizens. Citizen Science projects are relatively inexpensive and help gather data from across the length and breadth of the nation in a short span

of time. Some examples of Citizen Science projects are Migrant Watch and Jackal Survey.

All you need to do is spend a minimum of fifteen minutes to observe the common birds around you either from your balcony or windows and enter the data in the simple form on the website

www.cbmi.in. One can record the data from any location, even during visits to other towns or villages; multiple locations can be entered by the participants.

A bird guide will be provided to help you identify the birds. The process entails a one-time registration and participants can enter data either daily, weekly, monthly or

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	Very common bird in human inhabited areas
	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	Slimmer than a myna; Mainly found in open country; Aerial predators of insects but also glean from the ground or off vegetation
	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>	Males in south India are all black in colour (in other parts bird looks as in picture); Female is ashy brown with paler chestnut under the like wised cocked tailed; Found in open and scrub areas and often forages along the ground and perches on low shrubs and rocks
	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Size is between a bulbul and a pigeon; Omnivorous open woodland bird with a strong territorial instinct; Has adapted well to urban environments
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Seen perched on overhanging electric wires
	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	Common in gardens, light scrub jungles, both near and away from human habitations
	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	Carries its tail partially cocked-up and constantly shaking up and down; Common bird in urban gardens and farmland
	Purple Sunbird purple	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	Smaller than a sparrow; Female is similar to that of the sunbird but with greyish white chin and throat, and paler yellow underparts; Found in gardens and wooded areas
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Very common bird in human inhabited areas; Female differs from the male in being earthy brown, streaked with blackish and fulvous above and with whitish underparts

CBMI aims to monitor the eighteen common birds across the country.

annually. The entire process is transparent and data collected as part of the survey will be made accessible to the people, and the participants who have registered

for the programme will be able to view all the data entries. People will also get credit for bird sightings.

By becoming a citizen scientist, you become a pioneer in India's environmental voluntarism movement. You are providing vital information to the baseline data in our country, which will

help fill a huge gap: the lack of information on distribution patterns of birds.

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