BUT have you ever seen a lake that floats? There is one such natural wonder in Manipur.

The Loktak Lake is situated in the Bishnupur district, about 53 km distant from Imphal, the capital of Manipur. It is the largest freshwater lake in northeast India and also the only floating lake in the world.

Now, why is it called a floating lake? It is named after circular floating swamps, locally termed as Phumdis or Phumshongs. Phumdis are heterogeneous masses of vegetation, soil and organic matter with varying degree of decomposition. These masses have thickened and solidified, forming mini islands.

Apart from being unique in its occurrence, this lake is the lifeline of the people of the area. Covering an area of about 300 sq km, this lake has been feeding and nourishing people of Manipur since time immemorial. The lake provides water for irrigation, hydropower generation and drinking purposes. The fishermen living around and on the phumdis rely on the lake for their earnings. The traditional fishermen stay on these phumdis by constructing khanapok (huts). The famous Sendra tourist house is itself located on a large phumdi in the lake.

The lake is divided into three zones – northern, central and southern – on the basis of the distribution of phumdis and human activities. The northern part is populated with phumdis while the central zone is the main open water zone of the lake.
Boats float on lakes, ever seen a lake that floats? There is one such natural wonder in Manipur.

The Keibul Lamjao national park, the world’s largest and only floating national park lies in the southern zone, situated on the largest single mass of phumdi spread across an area of about 40 sq km. This national park is famous as the home of the endangered Brow-antlered deer (Sangai), some other animals found in the national park are the Hog deer, Wild boar, Large Indian civet, fox, jungle cat, golden cat, bay bamboo rat, musk shrew, keel back tortoise, Viper, Krait, Cobra, Asian rat snake, Burmese sarus Sarus Crane, etc.

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The lake also holds a rich biodiversity, providing home to about 233 species of aquatic plants, more than 100 species of birds and 425 species of animals including Indian Python and Sambhar. Apart from the Brow-antlered deer (Sangai), some other animals found in the national park are the Hog deer, Wild boar, Large Indian civet, fox, jungle cat, golden cat, bay bamboo rat, musk shrew, keel back tortoise, Viper, Krait, Cobra, Asian rat snake, Burmese sarus Sarus Crane, etc.

Loktak is also a birder’s paradise. The most commonly sighted birds in the region include black kite, northern hill myna, East Himalayan pied kingfisher, lesser skylark, lesser eastern jungle crow, Burmese pied myna, and many more.

Unfortunately, however, the unique lake is today facing degradation due to human activities. The diversity of the lake is under threat due to increasing pollution. The vegetation cover of the catchment area has been destroyed due to constructions at the outlet of the lake for multipurpose development of water resources. This has led to siltation in the lake and consequently rise in the water level. As a result, many cultivable lands and grazing fields have been submerged.

The natural habitat of Sangai deer has shrunk and this animal is on the verge of extinction. Discharge of municipal waste from the city and eutrophication in the lake is posing a threat to aquatic flora and fauna. These major issues need to be immediately addressed and proper management measures executed to conserve the natural beauty and ecology of the lake.

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