

Wildlife of Odisha

The State of Odisha has a geographical area of 155,707 sq km. The recorded forest area is 52,472 sq.km. but the actual forest cover is 47,033 sq.km. as per the State of Forest Report (SFR 1999) of Forest Survey of India. In order to provide proper protection to the wildlife and their habitat, a total of 18 sanctuaries (Protected Areas) including Gahirmatha (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary, one National Park (Bhitarkanika), one proposed National Park have been notified under the provisions of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. These Protected Areas constitute 10.37% of the total forest area and 4.1% of the total geographical area of the state. Besides, one Tiger Reserve (Similipal), one Biosphere Reserve (Similipal), one closed area (Chilika), one Game/Wildlife Reserve (Balipadar - Bhetnoi), one Zoological Park and 8 Deer Parks (mini zoos) have been notified for both in-situ and ex-situ conservation and management of wildlife. The state has the singular distinction of having 3 mass nesting beaches of endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles including world's largest nesting ground of olive ridley sea turtle, *Lepidochelys olivacea*. It has many natural wetlands including largest wetland of Asia (Chilika) now designated as a Ramsar site. A total of 19 species of amphibians, 110 species of reptiles including three crocodilian

species, 473 species of birds and 86 species of mammals have so far been recorded in the state which include 54 species of threatened animals (17 species of reptiles, 15 species of birds and 22 species of mammals) as per the definition of IUCN Red Data Book. The state is implementing several research and conservation projects viz; the Project Tiger (1972-73), Integrated Crocodile and Sea Turtle Project (1975-76), Project Elephant (1991-92), Aquatic Bird Project (1992-93) and Blackbuck Project (1994-95).

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES OF ODISHA

Similipal Wildlife Sanctuary

Located in the Mayurbhanj district Similipal with its dense green forests, hilly terrain, broad open valleys, plateaus, grass lands and rich bio-diversity has the unique distinction of being a Tiger Reserve, a National Park (proposed), a Wildlife Sanctuary, an Elephant Reserve and a Biosphere Reserve. Semi-evergreen to dry deciduous forest types (1076 species of plants including 94 varieties of orchids) provide suitable home for a variety of fauna (42 species of mammals, 231 species of birds and 29 species of reptiles). Important and rare wildlife include tigers (98 nos.) against the total nos. of 194 tigers

in the entire state as per 1998 census), elephants (565 as per 1999 census), leopard, sambar, spotted deer, barking deer, mouse deer, gaur, hill myna, hornbills, peacock, python, cobra, lizards etc. Similipal is the richest watershed in Odisha feeding several perennial rivers such as Budhabalanga, Khadkei, Khairi-Bhandan, Westdeo, Salandi etc. Gorgeous Barheipani (400 mt.) and Joranda (150 mt.) waterfalls are of great attractions. The rich bio-diversity, the physical and topographical features of Similipal constitute a unique and delightful destination for scientists, nature lovers, students and tourists.

Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary

Located in the district of Kendrapada, Bhitarkanika harbours rich and unique bio-diversity which has been declared as a wildlife sanctuary and also a National Park. The area is surrounded by rivers such as Brahmani, Baitarani and Dhamara and is criss-crossed by several creeks and creeklets. The area supports rich bio-diversity including dense mangroves (63 species), largest population of estuarine crocodiles (1098 as per 2000 census), the rare white crocodile (sankhua), largest Indian lizards (water monitor), poisonous and non-poisonous snakes like king cobra and python, varieties of resident and migratory birds (217 species) and a number of mammalian species (spotted deer, sambar, wildboar, fishing cat, jungle cat, otter etc). The sea beach, bordering the sanctuary attracts thousands of olive ridley sea turtles for mass nesting/egg laying during the winter months (January to April). Bhitarkanika mangrove ecosystem is unique of its kind and it is a best reptile refuge in the entire country.

Satkosia Gorge Wildlife Sanctuary

Satkosia gorge is a unique feature in geomorphology in India. Here Mahanadi has cut

right across the Eastern Ghats and has formed a magnificent gorge. Located in the districts of Angul, Cuttack, Nayagarh and Boudh, Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary (795.52 sq. km.) with sylvan beauty and excellent natural features is an attractive destination for scientist and nature lovers. The major attraction of the area is 22 km. long gorge (known as Satkosia Gorge) of the river Mahanadi which divides the area into a two distinct parts accessible respectively from Angul and Nayagarh or Boudh. The area supports moist deciduous forest, dry deciduous forests and moist peninsular sal forests and is stronghold of tiger, leopard, elephant, gaur, sambar, spotted deer, mouse deer, nilgai, chousingha, sloth bear, wild dog etc., varieties of resident and migratory birds and reptilian species (gharial, mugger crocodile, fresh water turtle, poisonous and non-poisonous snakes etc.). Major attraction of the sanctuary is the gorge, river Mahanadi, the Gharial Research and Conservation Unit at Tikrapada, hill slopes, various tracking routes and boating.

Hadagarh Wildlife Sanctuary

Hadagarh sanctuary in the district of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj is close to Hadagarh reservoir of Salandi dam. The area is rich in mixed deciduous forests and wildlife which includes tiger, leopard, fishing cat, jungle cat, hyena, elephant, langur, pangolin, a variety of birds and reptiles. The Baula hill range lying on the east and west of Salandi river, the valley occupied by the reservoir and its catchment are the main features.

Nandankanan Wildlife Sanctuary

Amidst lush green forest along the banks of Kanjia lake, lies Nandankanan Zoological Park which together with lake and Botanical garden is declared as sanctuary (4.4 sq. km.). The park is set in a beautiful natural setting and is one of the

finest parks in the country with natural enclosures unlike other conventional zoos. It has an open Lion Safari and first zoo in the world, where gharials have bred in captivity, it boasts of a beautiful botanical garden too. Other items of tourists attractions, nocturnal animal house, reptile toy train ride, rope-way ride across a natural lake and facilities for boating in the lake. As it is located in just 15 km. away from Bhubaneswar, it remains crowded throughout the year.

Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary

Adjacent to Satkosia gorge and located in the Nayagarh district, the Baisipalli wildlife sanctuary is having similar and contiguous habitat features as the Satkosia gorge sanctuary. The panoramic view of the Satkosia gorge along with the forests is most scenic.

Kotagarh Wildlife Sanctuary

Kotagarh wildlife sanctuary located in the Baliguda subdivision of Kandhamal district is rich in bio-diversity. Major wildlife species are tiger, elephant, gaur, sambar, spotted deer, peafowl, red jungle fowl and a variety of reptiles. The dense lush green forests with sylvan and serene picturesque beauty is the major attraction. A wooden bungalow at Belghar attracts many nature loving visitors.

Chandka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary

Twenty kilometers from the centre of temple city of Bhubaneswar lies Chandka-Dampara Sanctuary (175,79 sq.km.). This small and attractive sanctuary with undulating topography presents a fascinating rejuvenated forest and rich bio-diversity. The mixed tropical dry deciduous and moist deciduous forests with miscellaneous species, bamboo and planted teak provide ideal habitat for elephant (83 nos.),

leopard, hyena, spotted deer, wild dog, wild boar, ratel, pangolin, pea fowl, red jungle fowl, white ibis, dab chicks, open bill stork, egret, python, monitor lizard etc. The natural water body and forests provide suitable nesting ground for 82 species of migratory and resident birds.

Khalasuni Wildlife Sanctuary

Khalasuni's undulating topography ranging from 223 mt. to 750 mt. offers a wide ranging scenic beauty of wild virgin forests. There are a variety of wildlife like tiger, leopard, elephant, gaur, sambar, spotted deer, barking deer, pea fowl, horn bill and a number of reptilian species. It is an ideal place for nature lovers and tourists.

Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary

This sanctuary is situated at convenient location along sea coast between Puri and Konark. The flora of the area includes casuarina, anacardium, neem, tamarind, karanja, etc. The prominent fauna includes blackbuck, spotted deer, monkey, squirrel, jungle cat, hyena, jackal, mongoose and variety of birds and reptiles. Puri is located just 3 km. from entry point of the sanctuary and the Puri-Konark marine drive passes through it.

Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary

This sanctuary is located in the district of Balasore and is blessed with a charming forest and a variety of wildlife such as tiger, leopard, elephant, gaur, sambar, giant squirrel, a number of bird species like hill myna, peafowl, hornbills and various reptiles. The sanctuary is linked with Similipal through Sukhupada hills and Nato hill ranges. A trek from Nilgiri amidst Kuldiha forests is worth enjoying. Two rest houses at Kuldiha and Jadachuan and the perennial streams are treat for the visitors.

Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary

The combination of dry deciduous mixed forests with rich wildlife, Hirakud reservoir, attractive topographical features are the important features of Debrigarh wildlife sanctuary. The Hirakud reservoir attracts large number of migratory birds during winter. The forest area is ideal habitat for Chousingha. Other prominent fauna includes tiger, leopard, gaur, sambar, spotted deer, sloth bear, resident and migratory birds, monitor lizards, chameleon etc. The sanctuary entry point at Dhodrokusum adjoining Hirakud reservoir is 40 km. from Sambalpur and 60 km. from Baragarh.

Lakhari Valley Wildlife Sanctuary

This sanctuary, located in the district of Gajapati is rich with tropical mixed deciduous forest, hills, perennial water sources and a variety of wildlife such as tiger, hyena, elephant, deer, sambar and a variety of birds and reptiles. This sanctuary can be approached from Berhampur, Taptapani (famous for its hot water spring) and Chandragiri.

Chilika (Nalaban) Wildlife Sanctuary

Chilika, the largest brackish water wetland (1000 sq. km approx.) in the country is situated in the east coast of the state in the district of Puri, Ganjam and Khurda. A vast and picturesque lagoon/lake is famous for rich biodiversity including the migratory birds and has been acknowledged as a "Ramsar site". This vast lagoon studded with small fascinating islands and sandy beaches interspersed with casuarina grooves along the Bay of Bengal. Over 167 species of resident and migratory (94 species) birds including flamingo, white bellied sea eagle, brahminy kite, spotbilled pelican, barheaded goose, openbilled stork, spoonbill, brahminy

duck, wigeon, pintail, shoveller, ibis, stilt, heron, egret, avocet, gull, tern, kingfisher etc. find their winter abode in this wetland. Besides this wetland provides home for endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin but their population is under much pressure. The sunrise and sunset in Chilika are unforgettable scenes.

Badarama Wildlife Sanctuary

Badarama sanctuary also popularly known as Usakothi, located in the district of Sambalpur, 48 km. from Sambalpur on the NH-6 under Bamra Forest Division. Its prominent and attractive location in western Odisha with hilly undulating areas and rich dry deciduous mixed forests and wide variety of fauna including tiger, leopard, elephant, hyena, wildboar, spotted deer, sambar, bear, porcupine and a number of birds, reptiles etc. make it very beautiful.

Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary

Located close to the boundary of Chhatisgarh state on the western fringe of Odisha in the newly created Nuapada district, this sanctuary covers 600 sq. km. of dry deciduous forests. The plateau on the hill top holds a slightly undulating flat land with good edible grass. Eleven beautiful waterfalls and seasonal streams which dry out during summer leaving few deep pools of water. These are very fascinating attractions. Major wildlife species are : tiger, leopard, hyena, barking deer, chital, gaur, sambar, sloth bear, varieties of birds such as hill myna, pea fowl, partridge and a number of reptilian species. This sanctuary is considered as an ideal habitat for Barasingha (locally extinct).

Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary

This small but beautiful sanctuary is located close to and about 12 km. from the district

town of Bhawanipatna in Kalahandi district covering a dense patch of lush green dry deciduous forest. A beautiful waterfall near this river on the outskirts of this sanctuary called Phulljharan has been developed as a picnic spot for the local visitors and draws large number of visitors from far off places. The undulated topography of the sanctuary, with hills, valley, perennial streams and deep water pools give it an unique charm. This sanctuary is rich in wildlife such as tiger, leopard, gaur, sambar, nilgai, barking deer, mouse deer, a wide variety of birds and reptiles.

Gahirmatha (Marine) Wildlife Sanctuary

Gahirmatha is the only marine sanctuary of Odisha adjoining Mahanadi delta which extends from Ekakula Nasi Islands in the N.E. to Telanga Muhan in the SW. The sanctuary limits extend 20 km. into the sea. It has been created to protect the endangered olive ridley sea turtles, dolphins and other marine fauna. Gahirmatha is known in the world oven as a unique mass-nesting site (rookery) of the olive ridley on the calm sandy shores of the Bay of Bengal.