



Blue Jay : The State Bird of Orissa

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Wildlife and Forest of Orissa

Forest is the lung or respiratory center of environment and cockpit of wildlife. Forest plays a pivotal role in maintaining ecological stability. It provides protection and reduces impact of natural calamities like drought, flood and cyclone. However, one of the significant contributions of the forest is the nucleus of the natural faunal diversity. Orissa with its diversified topography and climate, has been the abode of varieties of wildlife species. But due to inadequate protection measures and dwindling forest cover with various anthropogenic activities, there has been a rapid decline in the wildlife population in Orissa. In order to protect and preserve these natural biodiversity; sanctuaries, parks and bio-sphere reserve have been created (Table-I). In fact, Orissa is proud of having Royal Bengal tiger, elephant, salt water crocodile, migratory and resident birds, olive ridley turtle, dolphin, black buck, mugger, gharial and others. Orissa is unique for its Gahiramatha Marine Sanctuary which is the largest nesting ground for olive ridley turtles in the world. Another unique feature of this state is the Similipal Biosphere Reserve which is very famous for the habitat of Royal Bengal tigers. Orissa, in fact, enjoys various faunal diversity in the country including white tigers.

Protected Areas for Wildlife in Orissa

Realizing the gradual depletion of wildlife, the government has set up certain protected areas, sanctuaries, national parks, zoological gardens and safety environment for their better survival and growth. The important protected areas are as follows. Similipal National Park, which is one of the Project Tiger areas, has been notified as a Biosphere Reserve by the Government of India. It covers an area of 2,750 sq km with a core area of 845.7 sq km. The Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary and the Bhitarkanika National Park are spread over an area of 672 sq km and 145 sq km respectively. The Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is covering an area of 15.58 sq km. It is an ideal ground for migratory birds and also for the endangered Irrawady dolphins.

Chandaka-Dampara Sanctuary with 175.79 sq km of area was set up in 1982 to protect and conserve elephants and their habitation. The Nandankanan Zoological Park, one of the premier zoological parks of the country was established in 1960. The park spreads over an area of 14.1689 sq km and has the distinction of being the first zoo in the world for captive breeding of white tigers out of normal coloured parents as well as for first ever, captive breeding of gharial crocodile

since 1980. A white tiger safari and a lion safari are the added attraction of this zoo.

State Flora and Fauna : The Pride of Orissa

India is proud of having the National Flag, (the Tricolour), the National Animal (Royal Bengal Tiger), the National Bird (Peacock) and the National Flower (Lotus). Similarly, State like Orissa has given importance and weightage to certain plants and animals (Flora and Fauna) by realizing their importance. The State tree is the majestic "Aswattha" (*Ficus religiosa*, Linn.) which has a special place in the religious tradition of India. The State flower is "Asoka" [*Saraca asoca* (Roxb.) Dewilde]. The State animal is the large deer found in the State, the "Sambar" (*Cervus unicolor*, Kerr.). The interesting part is the "State Bird" which is "Blue Jay" (*Coracias benghalensis*, Linn.) commonly called "Bhadabhadalia" in Oriya, which is supposed to be an auspicious bird. Because of their spectacular contribution, State has recognized, identified and placed them in a proper position.

Blue Jay : The State Bird

The blue jay is commonly known as Roller under the family *Coraciidae*. India is famous for a single type of blue jay which is popularly called "Indian Roller Bird". In Hindi its popular name is 'Nilkanth' or "Sabzak". This is an attractive Oxford-and-Cambridge blue bird about the size of a pigeon. They are believed to be near relatives of bee-eaters and kingfishers. They are strongly-built and jay-like. They are characterized by a big head, heavy bill, rufous brown breast, pale blue abdomen and blunt tail.

The tail is square. The dark and pale blue colours in the wings show up as brilliant

shining bands in flight. Blue jay prefers open cultivated green country and avoids dense forests. It is normally seen perched on an exposed tree-stump or telegraph wire. From such posts, it swoops down on the ground now and then, and again to pick up its food in life form. It prefers to take insects like crickets, beetles, grasshoppers and various pests. It also prefers to eat large vertebrates such as frogs, mice, lizards and rats.

Blue jay is very unique in its flight style. It has a variety of loud raucous calls and is particularly noisy and demonstrative during its aerial courtship display. During courtship the male exhibits a series of attractive aerobatics like circus. Blue jays or rollers get their name from the magnificent tumbling and rolling flight. They rocket into the air, somersaulting, rolling from side to side to the accompaniment of harsh grating screams and nose-diving with his brilliant plumage flashing in the sun. The rollers' acrobatic skill is also shown when they chase other birds that come near their nests.

Blue jay builds its nest in hollow trunk tree. It collect sticks, straws, feathers and rubbish and put in tree hollows for building the nest. The female lay eggs which may be four to five in number. Eggs are white, roundish oval and glossy to handle. After hatching of eggs youngs come out, spend few days inside the nest, finally come out and lead independent life. They are usually solitary in nature. It is called *Nilkanth* because of the brilliant blue colour of its body. It is taken to be an auspicious bird by the people of Orissa. During "Dusshera" [Durgapuja] bird catchers catch these birds and show them to the people in various parts of the state.

Blue Jay and its Significance

Blue jay is considered as the "State Bird" of Orissa because of its brilliant colour, attractive rolling behaviour and strong auspicious belief of Orissan people, but unfortunately many students and people are ignorant about this. It may be kept in Regional Science Center, Bhubaneswar and other Science Centers like Dhenkanal to which students and others visit. Display with description of this bird would educate people. No doubt, an eco-tourism scheme has been introduced in Orissa since 1995-96 to provide transport and accommodation facilities for tourists in sanctuaries and national parks. Of course, in the first phase Similipal, Chilika, Bhitarkanika and Nandankanan have been selected to maintain and keep some Blue Jays and Sambars to apprise people about the "State Bird" and "State Animal".

Since the Environment wing of the Forest and Environment Department, Government of Orissa has an objective to promote research, education and training on environmental conservation and protection, the government may take an initiative to propagate the message about the state flora and fauna. This would generate consciousness on our state bird and state animal. However, blue jay as the "State Bird" is justified and we all should try to observe this bird in nature to know its behaviour and feature. Thanks to our biologists and scientists to consider such a bird as the State Bird of Orissa.

Table 1 : Important Protected areas of animals in Orissa .

Sl. No.	Name of the area	Area (Sq Km)	speciality for specific faunal distribution
1.	Similipal Biosphere Reserve	2,750	Tiger

2.	Bhitarkanika Sanctuary	672	Python, King cobra
3.	Bhitarkanika National Park	145	Bird, Crocodile
4.	Chilika Nalaban Sanctuary [1987]	15.58	Migratory birds Dolphin
5.	Chandaka - Dampara Sanctuary [1982]	175.79	Elephant, Sambar and Deer
6.	Nandankanan Zoological Park [1960]	14.1689	White tiger, and Crocodiles
7.	Gahiramatha Marine Sanctuary	1435	Olive Ridley Turtle

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