

Salim Ali Biodiversity Park: Growing anthropogenic pressure chokes this green belt in Pune

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Few cities in the country can boast of having migratory birds visiting it from regions as far away as Europe, Siberia, China and Mongolia. Pune happens to be one such city. The 22-acre Dr Salim Ali Biodiversity Park in the city, named after the 'Birdman of India', lies along the Mula-Mutha river and is a paradise both for bird watchers and nature lovers as it attracts 130 different species of birds. At a time when the city is witnessing rapid urbanisation, this green belt offers a respite from the pollution and noise that otherwise drowns Pune.

The site, however, has been struggling against growing anthropogenic pressure, especially the dumping of huge amounts of garbage and construction debris as well as illegal encroachment which is made worse by the lack of a clear boundary.

The issue came to the fore in a recent meeting between Maharashtra's Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray with the members of the Save Salim Ali Sanctuary Action Group (SSASAG) in the presence of MLA Sunil Tingre, Pune Municipal Commissioner Vikram Kumar and Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF) Rahul Patil among other officials. During the meeting, it was decided to find a way to transfer the land to the Forest Department. Possible solutions to the issues will be discussed with the minister in a follow-up meeting soon.



DCF Rahul Patil told [The Indian Express](#), "The forest department is very willing to take over the land for wildlife conservation. However, there is status quo over the land in the High Court and until it is resolved, we can't take the ownership."

On the illegal garbage dumping and encroachment at the park, Additional Municipal Commissioner (Estate) Dr Kunal Khemnar said, "Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has already registered an FIR against the person accused of dumping construction and demolition waste. Apart from that, we have increased our security, put up a gate, and are installing CCTV. We have already started removing the

C&D (construction and demolition) waste but since the amount is huge, it will take time. However, we will try to do it as fast as we can.”

According to ornithologist Dharmaraj Patil who is a coordinator of SSASAG, the only solution to saving the park is to hand over the entire land to the Forest Department and convert it into a bird sanctuary. “If this happens, it will be first of a kind and a milestone in city wildlife conservation in India.”

He added, “Many bird species like Grey francolin, baya weaver, citrine wagtail and pied kingfisher have lost their habitat due to the illegal dumping. These are very sensitive birds and they leave a site even with a slight disturbance.” He also compared the local authorities’ “lack of sensitivity towards a sanctuary” with the situation in the USA where the renovation of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge in California was put on hold in 2017 after a hummingbird nest was found at the site.

Calling the park a “mini-corridor”, Dharmaraj emphasises how the park allows the 90-odd local bird species to breed across different ecosystems ensuring a healthy genetic pool. Poornima Joshi, an SSASAG volunteer, highlighted how the park is a ‘stopover site’ for migratory birds which rest during and before their journey. “Many of these birds then move on to the Bhigwan bird sanctuary,” she said.

While one can expect the pace of urbanisation in Pune to continue to grow, city officials need to ensure that this growth is sustainable and inclusive along the lines of the UN’s sustainable development goals. With Pune currently ranked second in India in ‘Ease of Living Index 2020’, the preservation of green patches like this becomes all the more significant.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/pune-conservation-forest-dept-salim-ali-park-7726887/>