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This urban forest in Kolkata is a haven for bird watchers

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More than five years ago, HIDCO had set up the Pakhibitan at Eco Park with the help of an NGO. Now, the park, which has two water bodies and mature indigenous trees of several species, has developed a beautiful ecosystem and turned into a safe haven for several species of birds, insects, mammals and reptiles. No wonder, the three-acre urban forest has become a go-to place for Kolkata's environmentalists and birdwatchers.



Environmentalist Arjan Basu Roy, who has been taking care of the park for the past two years, said their work started with an elaborate survey of the Rajarhat area to know which bird, insect and reptile species were native to the area. “Rajarhat was an area with a rich biodiversity. But with rapid urbanisation, the number of insects and birds started to decrease. So, at the beginning, our primary aim was to create a natural and safe environment for those species,” Arjan said.

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Arjan's assistant Leena Chatterjee said their second step was to plant trees in the area. "Trees are at the centre of any ecosystem. So, if we know which bird or insect depends on which tree, we plant those trees to attract the birds. That is exactly what happened here," she said, adding that more than five types of cuckoo birds can be spotted in the park. "We knew cuckoos feed on caterpillars and so, we planted trees in which caterpillars are known to nest. As a result, cuckoos soon started visiting the park," she said.



There are also several species of birds like Munia that don't stay in the park but visit it for food and to collect nesting material. On the other hand, Lesser whistling ducks stay here throughout the year. Along with the 160 species of birds, the park is currently home to more than 100 types of butterflies, seven species of mammals and several species of reptiles, creating a balanced ecosystem. "What I like about the park is the peaceful habitat it provides to every animal amid a concrete forest. With two water bodies and indigenous trees, the park has created the ideal environment for birds. I've visited it several times and photographed several species of birds and mammals. As winter is here, the season of bird watching has also begun. I'm sure I'll get some great photos this year too," Saikat Roy, a bird watcher.