

Celebration of World Wetlands Day in East Kolkata Wetlands on 2nd February, 2023

Wetlands Restoration

Venue: Bantala lockgate area, East Kolkata Wetlands

In 2023, East Kolkata Wetlands Management Authority (EKWMA) celebrated the World Wetlands Day (WWD) along with People United for Better Living in Calcutta (PUBLIC, an NGO) wherein students from La Martiniere for Girls school and National Institute of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), West Bengal took part. The programme was organized at Bantala lockgate area of East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW).

The attendance sheet is annexed in **Annexure A**. The students were apprised of the importance of EKW and its rich biodiversity. Unlike other metropolitan cities of India, Kolkata has got this wetlands complex which naturally purifies around 910 MLD of sewage water generated by the city and its surroundings through a resource recovery



Students were apprised of the importance of EKW

mechanism. This extensive natural wastewater purification system not only saves the river Ganga from being polluted with the city's sewage, but also alleviates the need for setting up of a Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) and it saves the State exchequer from a capital expenditure of approximately Rs. 460 crore annually. The entire process of natural filtration of the sewage water was described to them. The students took a note of how the sewage water is entered the primary water bodies, then it is passed to the successive water bodies and gradually being filtered, and finally the filtered water is channelized to the river Ganga.

In the year 2023, the theme for the WWD was “wetland restoration”. Due to proximity to the metropolitan city, EKW receives several anthropogenic threats including the pressure of human settlements. In the light of this, the students were described the steps taken by East Kolkata Wetlands Management Authority (EKWMA) to protect

and restore the water bodies of this wetlands area. The students were told how EKWMA implements the provisions of East Kolkata Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Act, 2006 and Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 notified by the Ministry of



Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India to restrict land use change in the EKW. Throughout the year the EKWMA keeps strict vigil on the unauthorized change of land character or land use by filling up water bodies, making illegal constructions, and erecting illegal boundary walls and other structures. The pupils were told how EKWMA has restored several water bodies and has foiled attempts of unauthorized change of land character and destruction of water bodies in East Kolkata Wetlands.

Furthermore, East Kolkata Wetlands is rich with its biodiversity. The human settlement pressure affects not only the water bodies of the EKW, but also its unique biodiversity. Importance of maintenance of this unique ecosystem was described to the students. There are several endangered faunal and floral species which are unique to this area. For example, fishing cat, the State animal of West Bengal, is found in this area. Another



Walking along the banks of water bodies

animal that is Marsh Mongoose is also endemic to this region. Besides these, there are several birds which are endangered species available in the EKW. The students were described about the following birds:

1. Lesser sand plover (a local bird).
2. Jungle cat.
3. Common teal.
4. Tufted duck.
5. Lesser whistling duck.
6. Black winged stilt.
7. Little ringed plover.
8. Green bee eater.
9. Gadwall.
10. Red shank.
11. Greater painted snipe.
12. Marsh Mongoose.
13. Asian palm civet.
14. Fishing cat (State animal of West Bengal)



Clockwise from top left: Lesser sand plover, Marsh mongoose, Green bee eater, Fishing cat

The students were also informed that unlike other metropolitan cities Kolkata has got this wetland complex which acts a flood buffer zone. They were described how Chennai was inundated in 2015 due to lack of presence of a flood buffer zone like EKW. So, it is the duty of the future generation also to work hand in glove with the present generation in order to maintain this unique flood buffer zone of the city.

At the end of the event, the students were taken to walk along the bheries of Bantala area. The students interacted with the local fishermen and came to know about different species of fish which are available in the East Kolkata Wetlands area. They interacted with the fishermen and asked them several questions about the traditional pisciculture system, and took notes of the event.

