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Draft Birdwatching Policy
For
Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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A. OBJECTIVE FOR BIRDWATCHING POLICY FOR ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

The objective for a bird watching policy for Andaman and Nicobar Islands is to promote sustainable bird watching activities that benefit both the birds and the local communities, while also preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage of the islands. Some specific goals and objectives include:

- i. Promoting bird watching as an eco-friendly and sustainable activity that generates income and employment opportunities for local communities, especially those living in and around protected areas.
- ii. Establishing guidelines for bird watching activities that ensure minimal disturbance to bird habitats and minimize the risk of endangering bird species.
- iii. Developing bird watching infrastructure such as bird hides, trails, and observation towers that are designed to minimize the impact on bird habitats and enhance the bird watching experience.
- iv. Conducting regular bird surveys and monitoring programs to track bird populations, migration patterns, and habitat use to inform conservation and management decisions.
- v. Developing educational programs that raise awareness about the importance of bird conservation and the role of birdwatchers in promoting conservation efforts.
- vi. Promoting the use of local guides and ecotourism companies that adhere to the principles of sustainable tourism and conservation.
- vii. Encouraging research and collaboration among birdwatchers, local communities, and scientific institutions to enhance knowledge about the bird species and their habitats in the islands.
- viii. Incorporating bird watching into the overall tourism strategy for the islands, with the aim of increasing the economic benefits of tourism while minimizing its impact on the environment and cultural heritage of the islands.

B. THE NEED FOR A BIRDWATCHING POLICY FOR ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

There are several reasons why there is a need for a bird watching policy in Andaman and Nicobar Islands:

- i. Protection of bird species: Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to a diverse range of bird species, many of which are endemic to the region. A bird watching policy can help protect these bird species and their habitats by regulating bird watching activities, minimizing disturbance to their habitats, and preventing any harmful practices that can endanger their populations.

- ii. Sustainable tourism: Bird watching has become a popular activity among tourists visiting the islands. A well-designed bird watching policy can help promote sustainable tourism that generates income for local communities and businesses, while also preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage of the islands.
- iii. Research and conservation: Bird watching can also contribute to scientific research and conservation efforts. By collecting data on bird populations, migration patterns, and habitat use, bird watchers can help inform conservation and management decisions, and contribute to our understanding of the islands' biodiversity.
- iv. Community involvement: A bird watching policy can involve local communities in the management and conservation of bird habitats, and provide opportunities for their participation in ecotourism activities.

A bird watching policy can help balance the economic benefits of bird watching with the need to protect the islands' biodiversity and cultural heritage. It can also contribute to sustainable development and conservation efforts, while promoting responsible tourism practices that benefit local communities.

C. STATUS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BIRDWATCHING POLICY

Currently in India while no state has a dedicated bird watching policy, some states have ecotourism policies that include bird watching as a component.

For example, the state of Kerala has an ecotourism policy that includes bird watching as one of its key activities. The policy aims to promote sustainable tourism that benefits local communities and wildlife conservation while providing visitors with a unique and authentic experience.

Similarly, the state of Karnataka has an ecotourism policy that includes bird watching as one of its activities. The policy aims to promote responsible tourism practices that conserve the environment, support local communities, and promote awareness and appreciation of nature and wildlife.

Other states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand also have ecotourism policies that promote nature-based tourism activities, including bird watching. However, it is important to note that these policies may not specifically address birdwatching, but rather include it as one of the activities under the larger umbrella of ecotourism.

Internationally, UK has a Birdwatching Ethics code. The UK birdwatching ethics code, also known as the Birdwatchers' Code of Conduct, is a set of guidelines and best practices designed to ensure that birdwatchers behave in a responsible and ethical manner while observing birds. The code was developed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in partnership with other birdwatching organizations and has been widely adopted by birdwatchers in the UK.

D. PROVISIONS FOR BIRDPWATCHING IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

- 1. Registration of Birders**– An online portal will collect information and a Registration number will be issued for a fixed.
- 2. Status of Birders** – Any person will be able to be a Registered Birder by registering for following self-reported categories
 - a. Newbie Birder : Just starting off
 - b. Experienced Birder : Has been birding, does not require basic guidance or help.
- 3. Proposal of Birding Trail** – Any registered Birder may propose a birding trail in a prescribed format online and may be submitted to the appropriate department.
- 4. Registration of Birding Trail** – The appropriate department may formally register as following :

The department will identify and register basic bird trails along with species likely to be found, for the convenience of tourists and Newbie birders. The trails will be as follows :

- a. As **Amateur Birding Trail** – Anyone can visit without fear of falls etc.
 - b. As **Guided Birding Trails** – Requires some guidance
 - c. Any birding Trail will also be identified as “**(Accessible)**” if the Trail is accessible by a wheelchair and is identified as such by XXX
- 5. Naming of Birding Trails** – Names of Birding trails may be designated to be as per the first proposal that is received for that trail to encourage birdwatchers to propose trails. In case of dispute however the trail will be named after the Ending point of the trail.
- 6. Facilities at Amateur and Guided Bird Trails :**
- a. A trained guide shall be available if booked with payment in advance for taking tourists. The relevant number shall be widely publicized
 - b. The guide shall carry two extra pair of binoculars if the party size is 3 or over and one if less.
 - c. In addition, the guide shall also carry an online or hard copy of a birding guide book as well as a pointer light.
 - d. No calls will be played back to attract any bird.

7. Proposal for Training and certification of Guides

- e. A guide is defined as a person who personally takes birdwatchers out on trails to see birds. 1
- All bird guides must be registered with the appropriate department using the relevant forms
 - While there is no educational qualification for guides, all guides should be certified by passing the course held by the department.
 - The guide training and certification will be a two-tiered one: for first-time or new guides and also for guides with over 4 years of experience.
 - Guides will also be expected to sign the pledge for ethical bird guiding
 - Once a guide
 - All registered
 - Rates for half and full day for both types of guides will be widely displayed
 - Guides will also receive badges and will meet with the concerned department to give feedback or report any concerns including their safety etc.
 - Guides will be encouraged but not compelled to report their sightings on E-Bird and share the link.

8. Documentation – All registered birders will be encouraged to upload their sightings onto E-bird and ideally, share the link.

9. Database – A database of Birdwatching Trails shall be accessible to the public with all information such as the birds likely to be seen in each season, links to e-bird data base, and tips. A database of guides shall be maintained for the purpose of promotion of Birdwatching.

10. Safety of Birders – During all birdwatching activity the safety of the Birders shall be their own responsibility and responsible Birding should be undertaken wherein Birders take into account their own physical limitations, safety from natural and manmade hazards.

11. Safety – Safety of Birders under 18 years of Age shall be the responsibility of their guardians as the Birdwatching Trails being a public space is open to all and minors cannot be barred from them.

12. Conservation of environment – All birders shall promote environmental awareness among all and adhere to the Birdwatcher's Code of Ethics. Any birdwatching in Andaman & Nicobar shall be sustainable and responsible with respect to protect all natural resources whether living or non-living.

13. Birdwatching trails to be independent of land use – Birdwatching trails can be on road/offroad/urban/rural and shall preferably have right of access through any land with appropriate permissions from the recorded tenants/land owner. Any right of access given

by a person/department/organization/entity to allow birdwatching can be withdrawn by them immediately. In case of dispute the Birdwatching trail shall be de-registered immediately.

14. **No change in land use** -Registration of Any Birdwatching Trail shall not change the land use or alter the status of land in any way.
15. **Savings** – This policy will not supersede any policy/law/regulation/rule in force or which may be notified subsequently. This policy shall be void to the extent such policy/law/regulation/rule is in contravention with this policy.
16. **Events** – Appropriate Department shall conduct Birdwatching Conventions/ conferences/ seminars/lectures on periodically and alone or in collaboration with others to promote Andaman & Nicobar as a Birding Destination of International repute as well as for encouraging research on the subject.
17. **Limit on number of people on a Birdwatching trail** – A Birdwatching trail should not have more than 1 person per 20 meter of the total length of trail per day.
18. **Minimum Standards Checklist for Recommended Birding Trailheads and Trails** –

Minimum standards for a birdwatching trail that can enhance the experience for birdwatchers and protect the natural environment.

- i. **Clearly marked trailhead and trail** - The trail should be well marked with clear signs indicating the start and finish points and directions to key birdwatching locations.
- ii. **Map of the trail** – Clear map of the trail should be available online and at the trail head.
- iii. **Trail literature** – Should be available at the trail head. Can be scanned via barcodes
- iv. **Registration of Entry and Exit at the Trail head** - to be done by staff or to be done voluntarily.
- v. **Safe trail**: The trail should be safe and accessible for all visitors. The trail surface should be stable and free from hazards.
- vi. **Accessible Trail** – If trailhead and the trail itself is accessible for specially abled persons it should be stated
- vii. **Parking space** within 500 meter of trail head.
- viii. **Interpretive signage**: Interpretive signs along the trail can provide information about the bird species that can be seen in the area, their habitat, and their behavior.
- ix. **Appropriate habitat management**: The trail should be managed to support the habitat needs of the bird species found in the area, including managing invasive species, avoiding noise from other activities, preventing waste dumping, preventing building on the trail and maintaining healthy ecosystems.

- x. **Minimal disturbance to birds:** The trail should be designed to minimize disturbance to birds and their habitat, with designated viewing areas and protocols for birdwatchers to follow to reduce noise and disruption. Where regular nesting is known to take place, birders should not be allowed at all, preventing any disturbance of the bird.
- xi. **Manning of the trail head** – A designated staff to be present at the trail head during birding season/on call .
- xii. **Safety-** Provision of First Aid Kit at the trailhead with designated staff.

These minimum standards can help create a safe and enjoyable birdwatching experiences while promoting the conservation of bird habitats and species.

19. BIRDWATCHING ETHICS CODE:

To be enforceable on all visitors on Birdwatching Trails-

- i. **Respecting birds and their habitats:** Birdwatchers should not disturb birds or damage their habitats, and should keep a safe distance of 100 meters from nests, roosts, and feeding sites. This is valid even if there is no signage.
- ii. **Avoiding overcrowding:** Birdwatchers should avoid overcrowding, especially during nesting season or when observing rare birds, and should take turns to avoid disturbing birds or blocking other birdwatchers' views.
- iii. **Respecting other wildlife and visitors:** Birdwatchers should respect other wildlife and visitors to the area, and should not damage or disturb other wildlife or interfere with other visitors' enjoyment of the area.
- iv. **Behaving in a responsible and safe manner:** Birdwatchers should obey local laws and regulations, and should be aware of potential hazards such as cliffs, tides, and weather conditions.
- v. **Sharing knowledge and promoting conservation:** Birdwatchers should share their knowledge and enthusiasm for birds with others, and should promote conservation efforts to protect birds and their habitats.
- vi. **Birdwatchers should avoid flash at night, photos of chicks or nesting or eggs and avoid noise, so as not to disturb birds and other wildlife.**

