

MISTNET

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SPECIAL ISSUE
BIRD TOURISM CHARTER
FOR ASIA



IBCN
Bring people for birds

Indian Bird Conservation Network



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Mission Statement

'Conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity through action, based on research, education and public awareness.'

BNHS is BirdLife International partner designate



BirdLife International is a global partnership of conservation organisations, represented in over 100 countries, working for the diversity of all life through the conservation of birds and their habitats.

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Nirmal Shah of Nature-Seychelles (BirdLife Partner) with Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* in Bird Island, Seychelles
Pic by: Manisha Shah

Views expressed by the contributors in the MISTNET are not necessarily those of the IBCN/BNHS.

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EDITORIAL**Bird tourism as a conservation tool**

Lack of funds and lack or inadequate involvement of local communities are some of the biggest problems of conservation. This can change if we can develop bird tourism as an industry, which it is in many countries already. Millions of people travel for birdwatching every year, and sale of birdwatching equipment and books is a multi-billion dollar business. For example, in the USA, birdwatching industry involves 40 to 50 billion US dollars direct business every year. If we calculate the indirect business of travel, hotels, food etc, it will be ten times more. There is an enormous market for birdwatching guide books, binoculars, spotting-scopes, and cameras even in a country like India where birdwatching is catching up. As India develops, more and more people will be traveling, many to natural areas like IBAs. Bird tourism can also bring political and administrative support for site protection, as we see in Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan or Ranganathitoo Bird Sanctuary in Karnataka.

However, like any industry, bird tourism needs resources on a long-term sustainable basis. Our 'resources' are adequately protected birdwatching sites (IBAs) and humans (local communities). If not done properly, bird tourism can easily ruin or over-exploit the 'resource'.

The Bird Tourism Charter for Asia, developed after numerous discussions and field visits by Asia Partners of BirdLife International is a useful guideline for bird tourism. We are reprinting it here, with some changes in the photographs, for our IBCN members. I request you to imbibe and spread the philosophy and principles of bird tourism given in this *Charter*.

We want to thank Japan Fund for Global Environment for funding the publication of the original *Charter* and BirdLife International and BirdLife Asia for allowing us to reproduce it in the *Mistnet* so it can reach a larger audience in India. Our personal thank to Ms Cristi Nozawa, Head, BirdLife Asia and Mrs Keiko Suzue, Head of Programme Development, BirdLife Asia for their support.

Happy birding!

Asad R. Rahmani

BIRD TOURISM CHARTER FOR ASIA



BirdLife International Asia Partnership Bird Tourism Charter for Asia

Supported by Japan Fund for Global Environment



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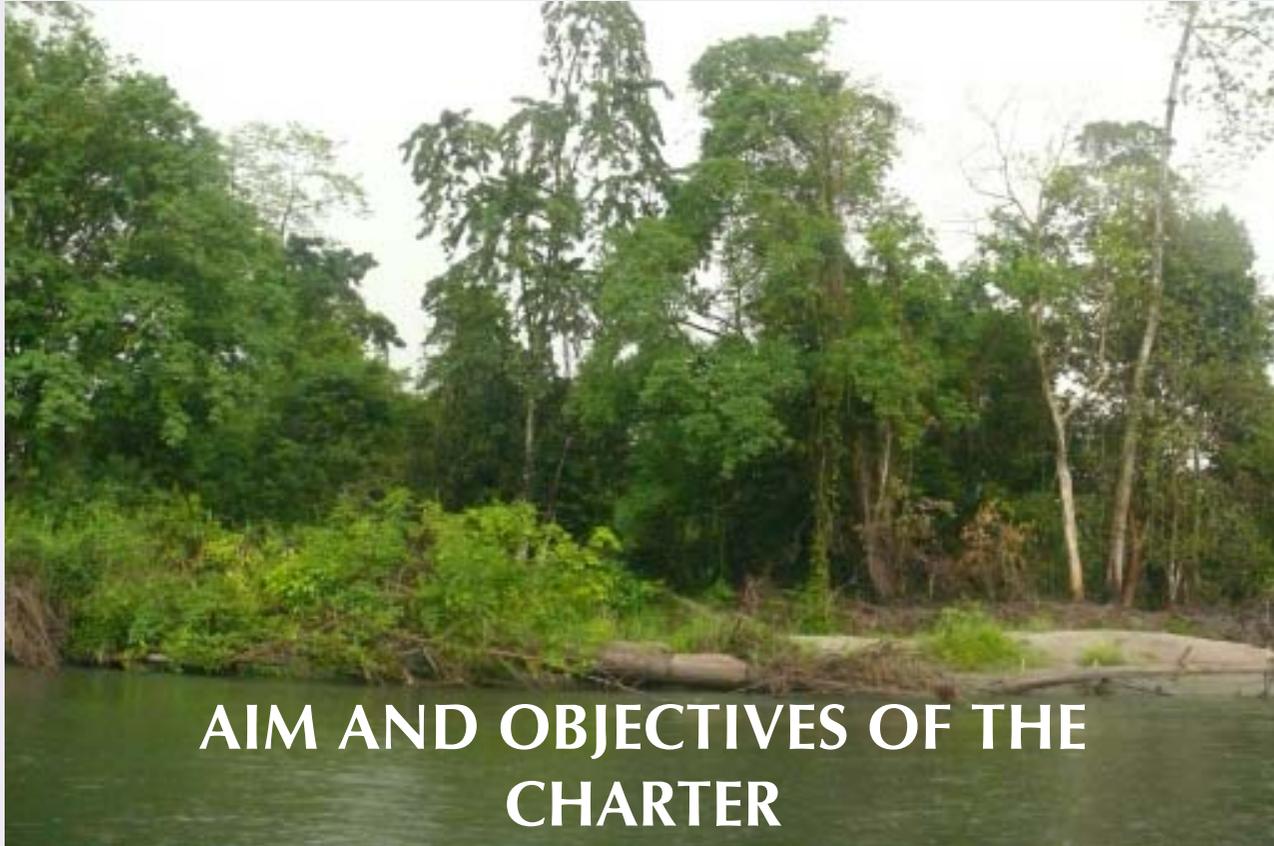
Field Ornithology
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Taiwan

PREAMBLE

- We, the Partners, Affiliates and Country Programmes of BirdLife International in Asia (the BirdLife International Asia Partnership):
- *Observing* that tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world and that nature tourism is one of its fastest growing sectors;
- *Recognising* that the potential benefits of tourism for birds, people and the environment present opportunities;
- *Recognising* that the potential negative impacts of tourism on birds, people and the environment present challenges;
- *Committed* to helping visitors, tourism operators, host communities and governments realise these opportunities and overcome these challenges;
- *Guided* by BirdLife International's vision of a world rich in biodiversity, with people and nature living in harmony, equitably and sustainably, and, in particular, its commitment to empower people, contribute to the alleviation of poverty and strive to ensure sustainability in the use of natural resources;
- *Mindful* of previous international declarations on tourism, including the World Tourism Organisation's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, the Convention on Biological Diversity Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development, and the APEC Tourism Charter, which aim to promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable tourism;
- *Informed* by the results of workshops on bird tourism in Bogor, Indonesia, in 2003, Durban, South Africa, in 2004, Taipei, Taiwan, in 2004, and Tokyo, Japan, in 2005;
- *Harnessing* the wealth of relevant experience within the BirdLife International Asia Partnership and the wider Global Partnership;
- Hereby present the **philosophy** and **principles** of bird tourism, to guide our own activities and to promote to our members and other audiences, including: birdwatchers, bird photographers and other nature tourists; tourism operators; host communities; NGOs; local and national governments; financial institutions; and donor agencies.



Asad R. Rahmani

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CHARTER

The Bird Tourism Charter for Asia aims to harness the potential of bird-focused nature tourism as a positive force for biodiversity conservation that brings benefits to visitors and hosts alike. To this end, it has the following objectives:

ENVIRONMENTAL

1. To increase awareness among visitors and hosts of the conservation issues facing birds and their habitats.
2. To generate support among decision-makers for the conservation of Important Bird Areas and other natural areas.
3. To provide opportunities for active involvement in bird conservation by local and indigenous communities, private businesses and other stakeholders.
4. To promote best practice that reduces the negative social and environmental impacts of bird-focused nature tourism.
5. To promote birds as flagships for biodiversity conservation.

SOCIAL

6. To enhance fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of bird-focused nature tourism with host communities.
7. To promote activities that maintain and enhance the quality of the visitor experience.
8. To promote birdwatching as a leisure activity among all sections of society.

ECONOMIC

9. To increase understanding among tourism operators of the business case for bird tourism.
10. To increase the economic benefits that bird-focused nature tourism brings to tourism operators, and local and national economies.
11. To strengthen fund flows for bird conservation from governments, donors and the private sector.



Asad R. Rahmani

PHILOSOPHY OF BIRD TOURISM

India is one of the major bird tourism destinations in Asia despite nascent bird tourism industry and poor infra-structure

Nature tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global tourism industry: in the 1990s, nature tourism grew by 20-30% per annum, compared with only 4% per annum for the industry as a whole. For many forms of nature tourism, such as birdwatching, bird photography and general wildlife viewing, wild birds form a key part of the visitor experience. BirdLife International believes that bird-focused nature tourism can be harnessed as a positive force for biodiversity conservation that brings benefits to visitors and hosts alike.

Nature tourism is widely promoted as one solution to the pressures that natural ecosystems face as a result of the development process. If it is not carefully regulated and managed, however, nature tourism can place pressure on the wildlife and places that visitors come to see, through, for instance, disturbance, pollution or incompatible infrastructure development. It can also have negative

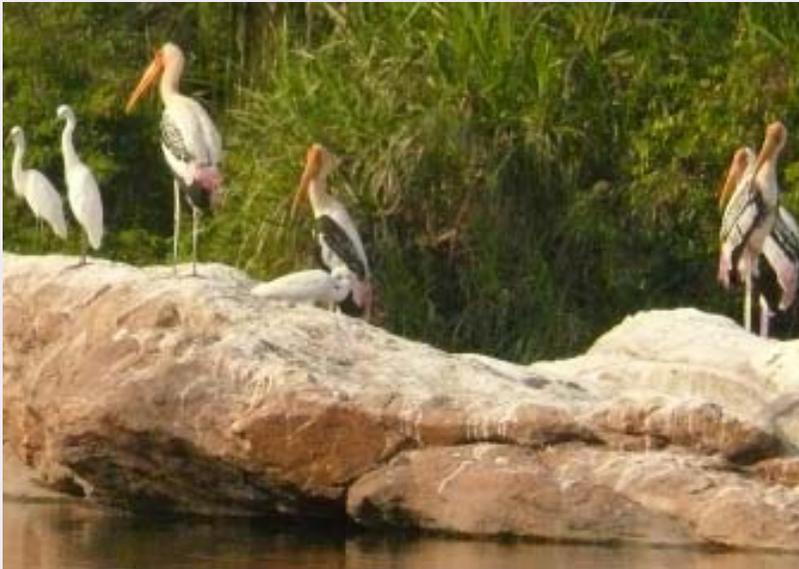
social, cultural and economic impacts on local communities.

The philosophy of bird tourism is that bird-focused nature tourism should be developed in such a way that it does not adversely affect birds or their habitats but, rather, contributes to biodiversity conservation, delivers benefits to host communities, and provides a rewarding and enriching experience to visitors.

Adhering to the philosophy of bird tourism means being **considerate**, **sensitive** and **respectful** to nature and people. It means involving host communities in planning and delivery so that tourism is **beneficial** and **participatory**. It means enhancing the visitor experience so that it is **enjoyable**, **educational** and **inclusive**. It also means developing high quality tourism products that are **exceptional**, **sustainable** and **profitable**. Bird tourism brings benefits to birds and people but it is also **good business sense**.



India has many spectacular bird sanctuaries where birds can be seen at close range



This section presents the eight principles of bird tourism, grouped under four themes: species; sites; habitats and people. For each principle, examples are given of how the principle could be applied by visitors, tourism operators, site managers, NGOs and/or governments.

SPECIES

1. Put birds first

Wherever wild birds form part of a tourism product, there is always a desire on the part of visitors to see them, and an incentive for tourism operators to show

them to visitors. This is particularly the case for rare birds, which are often threatened with extinction. If uncontrolled, these motivations can lead to severe disturbance to birds and their habitats, affecting their breeding success or survival chances, and, in extreme cases, resulting in their disappearance from sites. Putting birds first means reducing to a minimum any disturbance to birds or their habitats, even if this may result in not seeing them.

- Visitors can apply this principle by avoiding flushing birds or damaging habitats, using tape lures responsibly¹, and respecting local regulations and guidelines concerning access to sites. This is particularly important in the case of breeding birds.
- Visitors can also apply this principle by handling information about rare and breeding birds with care. Such information should be submitted to the relevant bodies (site managers, conservation organisations, records committees, etc.) but discretion should be used about revealing such information in public fora, such as the internet.
- Tourism operators can apply this principle by creating realistic expectations among visitors. If visitors come to a site expecting that they *will* see a given species, this can increase the pressure on tour guides and themselves to use intrusive methods to obtain sightings. Visitors' expectations can be managed through marketing, visitor centres and well trained guides.
- NGOs can apply this principle by developing training programmes for tourism operators. In particular, training can be given in integrating the principles of bird tourism into product development, marketing and guiding.

¹ Use of tape lures can disturb the behaviour of birds, particularly territorial birds during the breeding season, potentially affecting breeding success. Utmost restraint should be exercised, therefore, and use should be discouraged at sites frequented by many birdwatchers in search of particular rare or threatened birds. If tape lures are used, they should be used sparingly, and continuous playback should be avoided.

- Site managers can apply this principle by developing and enforcing regulations that regulate visitor numbers and access, and encourage sensitive behaviour.

SITES

2. Contribute to the conservation of sites visited

Because of their accessibility, reputation and/or the presence of rare species, many sites attract significant numbers of visitors. Frequently, however, the money these visitors spend is retained by hotels, restaurants, tour companies and other tourism operators, with little or none being used to support the conservation of the sites themselves. Bird-focused nature tourism can contribute to the conservation of sites in a number of ways: by subsidising management costs of protected areas; by supporting the activities of NGOs; or by providing a sustainable financing source for local conservation groups. In addition, development of bird-focused nature tourism can provide an alternative development vision for sites proposed for major infrastructure development or habitat conversion, and help to convince decision-makers to conserve them.

- Visitors can apply this principle by making voluntary contributions to the conservation of the sites they visit, or by choosing tour packages where a proportion of the cost is donated to a conservation project or organisation.
- Tourism operators can apply this principle by developing and/or supporting conservation initiatives at the sites where they operate.
- Site managers can apply this principle by ensuring that a significant proportion of the tourism revenue they generate is allocated to conservation activities, and by advising visitors of this allocation.
- Governments can apply this principle by developing regulatory frameworks that enable and encourage site



IBCN Photo Stock

IBAs such as Gharana Wetland in Jammu can become major tourist attraction

managers to generate and retain tourism revenue, and use it to subsidise management costs.

HABITATS

3. Avoid disturbance to bird habitats

As sites become popular for birdwatching or other forms of nature tourism, tourism facilities, such as guesthouses, restaurants, visitor centres, trails and roads, tend to be developed, with the aim of increasing revenues and/or enhancing the visitor experience. For such facilities to make a positive contribution to the conservation of these sites, it is essential to minimise or avoid potential negative impacts on bird habitats. In particularly sensitive areas, such as bird nesting areas





Madhukar

Like migratory birds, millions of people travel every year for birdwatching in Asia

or strict nature reserves, it may be necessary to avoid development of tourism facilities altogether or, at least, restrict them to an absolute minimum.

- Tourism operators can apply this principle by developing tourism facilities in an environmentally sensitive manner, such that they do not cause the degradation or loss of bird habitats. Where habitat loss is unavoidable, the 'no net loss' principle should be applied, whereby this loss is compensated for by restoration or rehabilitation of natural habitat elsewhere.
- Site managers can apply this principle by preparing tourism development plans, consistent with the management objectives of their sites, that establish limits on visitor numbers, the siting and type of tourism facilities, and the degree and extent of habitat conversion.
- Governments can apply this principle by introducing zoning that restricts tourism development to specified areas, and by ensuring that all tourism

development projects in natural areas are subject to environmental assessment, with special attention given to potential impacts on endemic and threatened species.

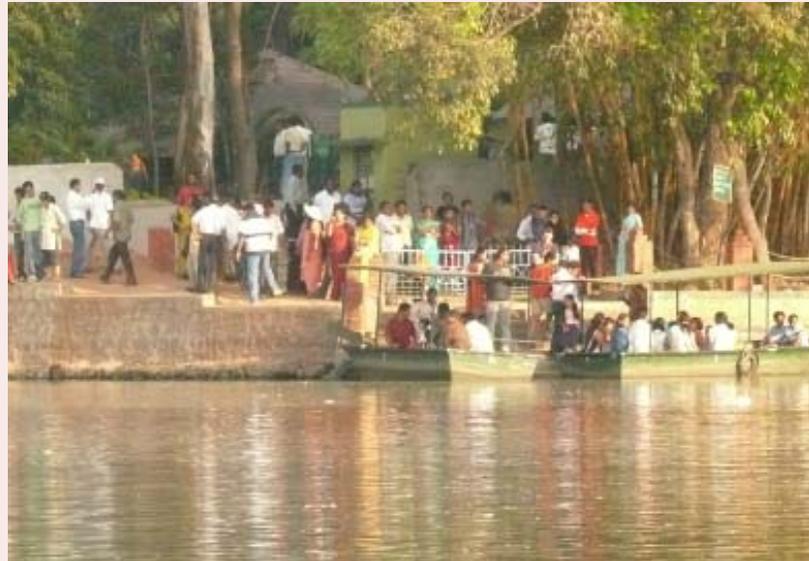
- Tourism operators, site managers and NGOs can apply this principle by monitoring the impacts of tourism on bird populations and habitats, in order to detect problems at an early stage and enable prompt action to minimise further damage.

4. Remember your ecological footprint

Tourism has a significant ecological footprint, particularly when international air travel is involved, and bird-focused nature tourism is no exception. Bird-focused nature tourism can be a rewarding and enriching experience for visitors, which can bring benefits to sites visited and their host populations. However, these benefits need to be balanced against local and global environmental impacts, such as pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation. Remembering your ecological footprint

means conserving water and energy, and reducing waste and pollutants, thereby improving the ecological balance sheet of each trip.

- Visitors can apply this principle by remembering the impact that travel, particularly air travel, has on global warming. This impact can be reduced by using non-motorised and public transport where possible, by visiting birdwatching sites closer to home, or by offsetting personal greenhouse gas emissions by purchasing carbon credits.
- Tourism operators can apply this principle by incorporating renewable energies and materials into the design of tourism facilities, by introducing energy and water-saving measures, and by employing recycling and sound waste management.
- Tourism operators can also apply this principle by adopting the Responsible Tourism guidelines of the Association of Independent Tour Operators, which aim to help operators protect the environment, conserve natural resources and minimise pollution.
- Site managers can apply this principle by developing and enforcing regulations to control pollutants, water use, energy use, noise levels and waste generation and disposal.



Asad R. Rahmani

Tourists in Ranganthitoo Bird Sactuary (IBA) in Karnataka



Asad R. Rahmani

Birdwatchers in Neelapattu Bird Sanctuary (IBA) in Andhra Pradesh

PEOPLE

5. Involve local people in planning and delivering tourism

At most birding sites, there exist opportunities to involve local people in delivering bird-focused nature tourism, as guides, hotel staff, conservation guards, etc. Indeed, because of their knowledge of the area and its wildlife, local people are often particularly well placed to work as bird guides and site interpreters. Bird tourism should deliver benefits to host communities beyond simply providing jobs, however. In particular, host communities should participate in decision

making about tourism development, so that their needs and aspirations are taken account of. Involving local people in planning and delivering tourism can help build local pride, and encourage them to take an active interest in the conservation of birds and the sites at which they occur.

- Visitors can apply this principle by staying in locally owned accommodation, visiting locally owned restaurants and using local bird guides.
- Tourism operators can apply this principle by using local materials, products and services where possible, and by creating full-time employment opportunities for local people. As well as ensuring a more

equitable sharing of benefits, such measures, can also help maintain the overall authenticity of the tourism product.

- NGOs can apply this principle by developing training and education programmes for local people, to make them aware of opportunities and provide them with the necessary skills for a career in the tourism industry. Such training and education programmes can also provide opportunities to promote the philosophy and principles of bird tourism.
- Tourism operators, NGOs, site managers and governments can apply this principle by working together to provide opportunities for host communities to participate in tourism planning, particularly where decisions are being taken that could affect their well being.

6. Respect local customs and rights

experience can also lead to higher returns for tourism operators, which can, in turn, bring greater benefits for conservation and host communities. The quality of the visitor experience can be enhanced in three ways: improved information; improved service; and improved facilities.



Asad R. Rahmani

Wetlands due to their beauty and birdlife attract large number of tourists

- Visitors can apply this principle by finding out more about the sites they visit through background reading, engaging the services of local guides or asking questions of hosts.
- Tourism operators can apply this principle by providing interpretation that facilitates appreciation and understanding among visitors of the significance and sensitivities of the places they visit, their biodiversity and their host communities. Interpretation can be provided through various means, including



Asad R. Rahmani



Asad R. Rahmani

Interpretation Centre such as this in Neelapattu Bird Sanctuary greatly help in creating interest in birds

printed materials, visitors centres and, most effectively of all, trained guides and site interpreters.

- Tourism operators can also apply this principle by developing environmentally sensitive infrastructure that increases the accessibility of sites while reducing disturbance to birds and their habitats. Such infrastructure may include boardwalks, hides, canopy walkways and visitor centres.

7. Enhance the quality of the visitor experience

Bird-focused nature tourism affords an opportunity to generate support and understanding of the need for conservation of birds and their habitats. Making the visitor experience more informative, satisfying and enjoyable can, therefore, help generate support for conservation. Enhancing the quality of the visitor experience can also lead to higher returns for tourism operators, which can, in turn, bring greater benefits for conservation and host communities. The quality of the visitor experience can be enhanced in three ways: improved information; improved service; and improved facilities.

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8. Convert the un-converted: build constituencies for nature conservation

Birdwatching is a healthy and rewarding pastime, enjoyed by a rapidly growing community of people around the world. Birdwatching can act as a vehicle for attracting people to visit natural areas and stimulating a commitment to nature conservation. Promoting birdwatching as a hobby can help create constituencies for the conservation of birds and other



Asad R. Rahmani

Birds and people can co-exist as in Kokkrebellur village of Karnataka

biodiversity. At the same time, it can help expand the market for bird-focused nature tourism, thereby bringing commercial benefits.

- NGOs can apply this principle by organising bird fairs, bird races or other events that encourage people to visit natural areas and experience the joys of birdwatching. Particular attention should be given to marketing such events among novice or uninitiated birdwatchers, and to making them accessible to all sections of society.
- NGOs can also apply this principle by preparing field guides, checklists or other materials that make birdwatching accessible to the general public. Development of websites and newsletters can be other effective means of promoting an interest in the pastime.
- NGOs can further apply this principle by encouraging and empowering people to take action for nature

conservation, for example by becoming a conservation volunteer at a local protected area, or becoming a member of a conservation organisation.

ADOPTION OF THE CHARTER

The Partners, Affiliates and Country Programmes of BirdLife International hereby adopt this Charter and pledge to promote the philosophy and principles of bird tourism in a locally appropriate manner among relevant audiences in their respective countries. This may include preparation of detailed guidelines or country strategies tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the country in question.

The Charter can be adopted on a voluntary basis by visitors, tourism operators, and local and national governments.

By adhering to the philosophy and principles of bird tourism, visitors will be demonstrating their commitment to protecting the sites that they visit, conserving the birds found there and respecting the role of host communities as stewards of these places.

By adhering to the philosophy and principles of bird tourism, tourism operators will be recognising that bird tourism makes good business sense, and demonstrating their commitment to corporate social and environmental responsibility.

By adhering to the philosophy and principles of bird tourism, local and national governments will be acknowledging the contribution that bird-focused nature tourism can make to environmental protection, the well being of human communities, and local and national economic development.



Suresh Choudhury

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To promote conservation of birds and their habitats through the development of a national network of individuals, organisations and the government

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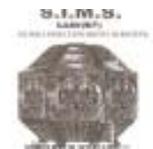
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Maharashtra



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Tamil Nadu



Amrapali Institute, Uttaranchal



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Uttar Pradesh



Turquoise Wildlife Conservation Welfare Society, Uttar Pradesh



Society for Conservation of Nature, Uttar Pradesh



Alipurduar Nature Club, West Bengal



West Bengal



West Bengal



Himalayan Nature & Adventure Foundation, West Bengal



Institute for Cultural & Physical Development Trust, West Bengal



Nandadevi Foundation, West Bengal



West Bengal



ROVERS' & MOUNTAINEERS CLUB ALIPURDUAR

West Bengal



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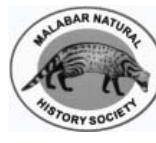
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Green Hearts Nature Club, Assam



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