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MONSOON IN SUNDERBANS LIKELY TO GET LONGER, WARN CLIMATE EXPERTS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

Mounting concern:The paper also highlights a rising threat to the habitat of the Bengal tiger.File photo

The monsoon in Sunderbans is likely to last longer and get more intense, according to a fact sheet titled *The Sunderbans and Climate Change* , which was made public during the ongoing Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

“Climate specialists have predicted that as climate change progresses, monsoon seasons in the Sundarbans will become longer and more intense. Conversely, drought conditions will also become more pronounced, presenting further challenges for agricultural producers in particular and ecosystems in general,” said the document released during the Conference of Parties being held at Gujarat.

Natural habitats

The document highlights the need for "long term coastal planning to ensure that these critically important intertidal habitats with their unique flora and fauna and local inhabitants have a space to retreat inland". The paper also points out that the habitat of the Bengal tiger *(Panthera tigris tigris)* in the Sunderbans is also affected by the storm due to a decline in the availability of prey.

While the fact sheet puts the rise in the sea level at 3.2 mm per year currently, it states that an estimated rise of 28 cm above the sea levels registered in the year 2000 would result in a 96 % decline of the habitat of the Bengal tiger in Bangladesh.

Discussions were also held on the Transboundary Conservation of Threatened Freshwater Fauna, including species like Indian River Terrapin (*Batagur baska*), Hilsa *(Tenualosa ilisha)* and Ganges River Dolphin *(Platanista gangetica),.*

The forum comprised scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India, World Wildlife Fund for Nature, Wildlife Trust of India, Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) and the member secretary of Central Zoo Authority.

Risk of flooding

“There is clear evidence of the habitat of all the three species extending to the Sunderbans in both India and Bangladesh. We are hopeful that the points that were raised are going to be well received by the CMS and there will be some concerted action for the conservation of the freshwater species that migrate across the Sunderbans,” said Shailendra Singh, director, TSA.

The fact sheet points out that large parts of Sunderbans, which are designated as ‘Ramsar Sites’, are highly susceptible to flooding.

“Due to this, any swelling of ocean water is going to dramatically affect the area. Alhough mangroves are somewhat resistant to submersion in water, they can die when tidal inundation occurs too frequently or lasts too long,” the document stated.

Apart from the frequent storms and the rise of sea level, another concern is the rise of salinity both in water and soil. “Excess levels of soil salinity can be incredibly damaging to ecosystems as salts can accumulate in the soil and hinder plant growth. It also threatens the health of freshwater aquatic life such as fish and giant prawns,” the document adds.

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