

Koonthankulam sanctuary to get a leg up on conservation efforts

Nature lovers' delight: The great cormorant, the purple heron, the comb duck, the northern shoveller and the common teal are among the rare bird species recorded in Koonthankulam.

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is proposing an 'eco-sensitive zone' (ESZ) around the Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary in Tirunelveli district, to complement the efforts being taken to conserve the birds in the sanctuary.

Once the proposal goes through, any commercial or major construction activity in the ESZ would be prohibited in the notified area of 9.74 sq. km. around the sanctuary.

A monitoring committee would be constituted to review whether all provisions of the ESZ are being implemented from time to time.

Koonthankulam in Nanguneri Taluk was declared as a sanctuary in 1994 and is an important protected area known for the congregation of migratory and local water birds – the grey pelican, the painted stork, the greater flamingo, the bar-headed goose, the open bill stork, the black ibis and other common species like egrets, cormorants and herons, among others.

"Tamil Nadu is the only State where all the three ibis [long-legged wading birds] species nest together, and all the three species have been recorded from Koonthankulam Sanctuary. At Koonthankulam, birds used to nest traditionally on trees growing amidst habitation even before 1903," the draft notification of the Ministry issued on June 22 stated.

Exotic visitors

The great cormorant, the purple heron, the comb duck, the northern shoveller and the common teal are among the rare bird species recorded in Koonthankulam, while the spot-billed pelican and the painted stork, which are threatened species, have been found in the protected area.

The State government is to prepare a zonal master plan in consultation with the local people and in adherence to the stipulations laid out in the notification for approval of the competent authority in the State government. The plan would also regulate development in the ESZ and adhere to norms on prohibited and regulated activities.

Queries welcomed

All activities in the ESZ would be governed by the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), 2011; the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006; the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980; the Indian Forest Act, 1927; and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Any objections or suggestions on the proposal can be raised with the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in Delhi at: esz-mef@nic.in

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