

INDIA IS HOST TO 457 MIGRATORY FAUNA, SHOWS LATEST CMS LIST

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With new additions to the wildlife list put out by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), scientists say that the total number of migratory fauna from India comes to 457 species. Birds comprise 83% (380 species) of this figure.

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) had for the first time compiled the list of migratory species of India under the CMS before the Conference of Parties (COP 13) held in Gujarat recently. It had put the number at 451. Six species were added later. They are the Asian elephant, great Indian bustard, Bengal florican, oceanic white-tip shark, urial and smooth hammerhead shark.

India's role

"We had compiled a list of the 451 species of migratory animals found in India. With the addition of new species to the CMS Appendices, the number is now 457," said Kailash Chandra, ZSI director.

Globally, more than 650 species are listed under the CMS appendices and India, with over 450 species, plays a very important role in their conservation, Mr. Chandra said.

Gopinathan Maheshwaran, who heads the avian section of the ZSI, said that birds make up the bulk of migratory species. Before COP 13, the number of migratory bird species stood at 378 and now it has reached 380.

According to Mr. Maheshwaran, the bird family Muscicapidae has the highest number of migratory species. "The next highest group of migratory birds is raptors or birds of prey, such as eagles, owls, vultures and kites which are from the family Accipitridae," he added.

Mr. Maheshwaran said that the country has three flyways (flight paths used by birds): the Central Asian flyway, East Asian flyway and East Asian–Australasian flyway. Another group of birds that migrate in large numbers are waders or shore birds. In India, their migratory species number 41, followed by ducks (38) belonging to the family Anatidae.

The estimate of 44 migratory mammal species in India has risen to 46 after COP 13, said Lalit Sharma, who heads the wildlife section of the ZSI. The Asian elephant was added to Appendix I and the urial to Appendix II.

"The largest group of mammals is definitely bats belonging to the family Vespertilionidae. Dolphins are the second highest group of mammals with nine migratory species of dolphins listed," he added.

Mr. Sharma pointed out that COP 13 has focussed on transboundary species and corridor conservation.

Fish make up another important group of migratory species. Before COP 13, the ZSI had compiled 22 species, including 12 sharks and 10 ray fish. The oceanic white-tip shark and smooth hammerhead shark were then added, said K.K. Bineesh, a ZSI scientist. The total number of migratory fish species from India under CMS now stands at 24.

Seven reptiles, which include five species of turtles and the Indian gharial and salt water crocodile, are among the CMS species found in India. There was no addition to the reptiles list.

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