

# More than 100 bird species take flight from EKW

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**Kolkata:** The East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW) — under threat from encroachment — could be fast losing its birds as well. More than a hundred species have disappeared from the wetlands in the last four decades, according to a recent survey. Experts believe the number of birds could dwindle further if vegetation loss is not checked in the area.

According to the only authentic bird survey done at EKW in 1965, the wetlands had 248 species. Less than 150 now frequent the area, claims the study conducted by the Centre for Environment and Development (CED). Experts pointed out that species started disappearing from the Eighties when encroachment and vegetation loss started altering the ecology of EKW. Birds like gray pelican, spoonbill, mallard, comb duck, black eagle, king vulture, peregrine falcon and red-headed martin are among those which are no longer seen at the wetlands. Other species like chestnut bittner, spotted eagle, water rail and lesser pied kingfisher have not been sighted either since 1983, the survey reveals.

“Human interference increased manifold during the Seventies when Salt Lake was expanding fast. It was complete by the Eighties by which time the EKW had suffered



significant losses in terms of its area and vegetation. Naturally, the number of birds had to dwindle,” said AK Ghosh, director of CED.

Ornithologists and experts corroborated the finding. Other than encroachment, indiscriminate fishing activities were also responsible for the disappearance of birds, they argued. “Rampant fishing have increased human interference. It has also led to the loss of vegetation around the waterbodies with the result that birds have got fewer places to nest. The vegetation also acts as a shelter and protection for them,” said Kushal Mukherjee of Prakriti Samsad, an NGO that has extensively studied the EKW

bird population. He added that boat movement along the waterbodies has seriously disrupted the flight of birds.

The EKW topography has undergone a complete transformation since the Seventies making comparisons futile, said ornithologist Sumit Sen. “It used to be a huge marsh, dotted with waterbodies and vast expanse of open lands. There would be elephant grass that attracted birds and offered them shelter. It was a remote, largely uninhabited area which served as a free zone for birds. Now, we have the entire Salt Lake city there. While surveys are difficult to conduct, I don’t think the area attracts even a hundred species now,” said Sen.