

# Fauna returns to Ameenpur lake

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Saving a lake - Ameenpur lake is one of the favourite spots for bird watchers in the city | Photo Credit: K.V.S. Giri

## The big picture might look bleak for Hyderabad's water bodies, but the sustained efforts to clean up Ameenpur lake spells hope

Early this year, members of Telangana State Special Protection Force (TSSPF), Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) and Friends of Flora and Fauna Society (FoFF) gathered at Ameenpur lake, a favourite spot for bird lovers. Their task was to clean-up the lake precincts. The teams gathered weekend after weekend, spent hours removing water bottles, plastic bags and even remains of makeshift barbecues put up by revellers. "Gated communities, apartment blocks and temples in the vicinity contributed to the trash," says Tejdeep Kaur Menon, Director-General, TSSPF. The lake has now been adopted by TSSPF Training Academy. According to a report by Telangana State Biodiversity Board, the lake attracts 222 species of birds, 250 plant species, nine fish species, 26 aquatic beetles, 41 butterfly species, 33 species of invertebrates, 12 amphibian species, 33 reptile species and nine species of wild animals. Encroachments, illegal borewells, use of dried patches in the upper reaches of the lake as motorcycle and car tracks, running of power lines, sand and granite quarrying, and scaring the birds with fire crackers threatened the lake's biodiversity. "The only way out was to clean up the lake environs. TSSPF men, who are deployed to guard and secure strategic installations and entities, had to be motivated to forego some of their holidays to remove the litter," says Tejdeep. They soon joined volunteers of HBP and FoFF, cleaned the surroundings and educated apartment dwellers, temple authorities and villagers. A team from the State's Fisheries Department conducted an orientation on safe fishing methods, villagers were urged to stop dumping trash and immersing Ganesh idols, illegal borewells were shut down. "Ameenpur lake is not an irrigation project, but there is a proposal to bring the lake under Mission Kakatiya, the State's flagship project to save water bodies," says Tejdeep. Ameenpur lake was recognised as a Biodiversity Heritage Site in November. This, Tejdeep hopes, will help in further protecting the lake. **The alternative approach** Lubna Sarwath of SOUL calls for citizen participation to ensure a system overhaul. An interactive session with Lubna Sarwath is enough to enlighten anyone about Hyderabad's water bodies, their history and present condition. An economist, ecological activist and a visiting lecturer at Trisakti University, Jakarta, Lubna is co-convenor Save Our Urban Lakes (SOUL). SOUL was formed in 2010 and Lubna joined the team in 2012. At first an active member and then a vociferous campaigner to raise awareness of shrinking water bodies, she states that her methods may not find appreciation from authorities. "I don't believe that citizens cleaning up a lake body can solve the problem. Their efforts are to be appreciated, but we need a system overhaul. As citizens, we pay taxes and have the right to demand that the government take measures to curb pollution and encroachments," she says. S.Chakradhar, convenor, SOUL, designed a detailed digital map using the 1975 Survey Of India digital topographic sheet to mark existing and extinct water bodies. The map also points out prominent water bodies that don't find a mention in the list put out by Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation and Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority. These, says SOUL, include Hussainsagar, the lake in Vengalrao Nagar and Masab tank among others. "Our lakes are stinking and shrinking," says Lubna, as she rues the sewage and industrial pollution that passes through inflow and outflow channels of water bodies. This monsoon, some areas in Hyderabad saw heavy inundation and fingers were pointed at encroachments. A Biodiversity Heritage tag for lakes, she believes, isn't enough. "Every water body from the past should be treated as a heritage body. The Hussainsagar has shrunk over the decades. So have the Masab tank, Public Gardens lake and several others. Put up signboards detailing area of each lake, mark inflow and outflow channels, protect the feeder channels from pollution and stop encroachments," she says. Lubna believes in citizen participation to force authorities take proactive measures. "Wherever I hold panel discussions or address students, I tell them to stand up for water bodies in their vicinity. A large group of residents coming together and making a representation to the authorities cannot be ignored. We've helped students file RTIs for lakes in the vicinity of their campuses," she says. SOUL has also identified historic wells in the city and proposes to submit a list to the government, to get them notified. "If we have to save water bodies for posterity, we at least need to get it notified so that they are protected," she sums up.

### Historic wells

At the moment, the heritage list of GHMC and HMDA doesn't include wells. SOUL feels it's imperative to get historic wells notified to protect them. Some of them are: **Rajanna Bowli at Falaknuma Singhum Bavi near Devuni Kunta, Serilingampally Neher-e-Hussaini, the Urdu 'bay' shaped well near National Police Academy The well inside Unani Hospital, Old City. Historic well inside EFLU campus.**

First published by The Hindu