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Point for discussion this month ---

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Eternal Words

Acquiring the trick of listening to birds will teach you how better to enjoy life and how better to endure it

- Simon Barnes, Wild Notebook, The Times (31.12.2011)

There is nothing softer and weaker than water, And yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things. For this reason there is no substitute for it.

-Lao-Tzu (c. B.C. 550)

A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song

- Lou Holz

Dear Readers,

It is projected that, by 2050 the global urban population will be doubled as of present. In India itself, the urban population would reach 800 million. Are our cities ready to withstand this pressure? Large fraction of the nation's economy is contributed by urban cities. To let our cities hospitable and contribute for the sustainable economic growth, we need to focus on water-sector management as it is a pivotal necessity of any human settlement. This rapid urbanization will impose unprecedented challenges for the water sector. Depleting water table and limited water resources are rendering water quality issues critical. This will increase the conflict between the water uses and the users. In highly industrialized countries, 82% of entire consumed water resources are used for Industrial sector whereas in India, Agricultural sector leads the consuming fraction and the Domestic use tread behind at 80% of this value. In order to tackle this water challenge and develop smart cities' urban water cycle, management and governance should be thoroughly studied.

Indian cities produce 40,000 million liters a day, of sewage water and as per CPCB 2011 report with only 2% of these cities having sewage treatment facilities, thus contaminating the surface water resources with domestic discharges. Unless and until we stand up to our responsibility and take priority actions in sewage treatment, recycle and reuse we won't be able to address the challenges of the drinking water supply for our ever demanding cities.

All these issues with their adaptable solutions are discussed in the paper, "Urban Water in India: A Way Forward" by Dr. Mihir Shah, Former Member (Water Resources, from 2009 to 2014), Planning Commission of India. By dedicating this paper to Late Shri. Sandeep Joshi, founder Director of SERI, Dr. Shah has given real honour to the 25 years of relentless work of Mr. Joshi in river and lake restoration. We, at SERI are very grateful to Dr. Shah for this noble gesture of his. The detailed report on the national workshop organized by ICRIER on this paper is included in this issue. It was an honouring moment for me to present SERI's technologies on this platform.

You will also read about the alleged extinct species of owl recently spotted near Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, India. The depleting flora and fauna is a sign of unplanned urbanization at the cost of ecology. Plenty case studies direct that if we are able to take care of ecology, it will spine the economy and livelihood of the people.

Thank you,
Chief Editor

From SERI'S Desk

National Workshop by ICRIER on Urban Water in India: A Way Forward

Dr. Mihir Shah, Former Member (Water Resources, from 2009 to 2014), Planning Commission of India, recently completed paper, "Urban Water in India: A Way Forward". This is the first of its kind study that has been prepared on the urban water in India. It provides a framework of addressing the challenges of urban water, within an integrated approach, taking account of the rural urban linkages. This is a paper written for the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). This is a scoping paper that seeks to review available literature to present state-of-the-art knowledge and on that basis make a statement of the problem and propose possible hypotheses and suggest plausible solutions and a framework to understand urban water issues in India.

Dr. Mihir Shah has dedicated this paper to Late Shri. Sandeep Joshi of Shrishti Eco-Research Institute. In the acknowledgements, Dr. Shah has said," My most heartfelt thanks go out to late Sandeep Joshi, whose extraordinary work on urban water and wastewater treatment has been an inspiration and great source of learning for me. His sudden demise, also as he was providing crucial inputs into this paper, has left all water workers of India much the poorer in his absence. I dedicate this paper to his memory". He also thanked Isher Ahluwalia, Sunita Narain and Himanshu Kulkarni for their valuable insights and inputs.

ICRIER organised a National Workshop on this above said paper on **Monday, February 23, 2015** at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

The project is funded by Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI). The workshop was aimed to bring together government officials, municipal commissioners, and urban experts. The discussion was focused on challenges of urban water supply in Indian cities and strengthening the capacities of existing ULBs.

Mr. Nitin Gadkari, Hon. Minister, Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways, GOI, inaugurated the workshop. In his speech, he emphasized the need of low cost treatment technologies for the treatment of waste water in India. He also discussed the public-private-partnership need for the success of the project.

Dr. Isher Judge Ahluwalia, chairperson, ICRIER introduced the work domain of ICRIER. She explained the idea behind preparing such paper on urban waters is to bring together the information about the sources, distribution framework, waste water treatment, reuse, recycle and more importantly, an overlook on pricing. Our cities are our growth engines. To make them hospitable, we should develop vigilance for sustainable growth. She emphasized the need of sewage treatment as a priority so that drinking water challenges can be better addressed.

Dr. Mihir Shah in brief highlighted, the important points about urban waters considered in the paper and need to look at the ground water in different manner. He also explained why two cities, Indore and Nagpur, are selected for case studies.

Mrs. Sayali Joshi, CEO, SERI, presented the waste water treatment scenario in urban India and the need to look for alternative technologies for the treatment of domestic waste which has large impact on urban economy and development.

For more details please visit the URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EEsefIq4Ps

Glimpses of Workshop

News Review

Elusive Forest Owlet spotted in Western Ghats for the first time

So, the story starts with two ornithologists Sunil Laad and Rohidas Dagale finding an owlet in Tansa wildlife Sanctuary and feeling as if they have won a lottery. Naturally, anyone would ask as to what was so important about this owlet for two men to go gaga over it? Well, the Owlet in question isn't any ordinary birdie. The owlet they spotted is known as "forest owlet", a presumed extinct species spotted in the Western Ghats for the first time since it was discovered back in 1872.

Picture courtesy: Internet

The forest owlet (*Athene blewitti*) is an owl that is endemic to the forests of central India. This bird is on the verge of extinction (It is believed that the entire population of these owlets lies somewhere between 75 to mere 500).This species belongs to the typical owls family, 'Strigidae'. After it was last described in 1873 and was not even spotted after 1884 and thus considered extinct, it was rediscovered 113 years later in 1997 by an American ornithologist, Pamela Rasmussen. It hails from a small number of habitats and the populations are very low within the fragmented and shrinking forests of central India, rendering the species critically endangered.

The forest owlet is a small (23 cm long) and stocky bird. It is a typical owlet with a rather unspotted crown and heavily banded wings and tail. They have a relatively large skull and beak. Unlike the spotted owlet, the forest owlet has the fewer and fainter spots on the crown and back. The upperparts are dark greyish-brown. The upper breast is almost solid brown and the sides are barred with a white central wedge in the lower breast that is sometimes unmarked, especially in males. The primaries are darker and distinct. The wings and tail are banded with white trailing edges. A dark carpal patch on the underwing is clearly visible during flight. The facial disc is pale and the eyes, yellow.

Mr. Laad and Mr. Dangle spotted a Forest Owlet perched on a tree at the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary — over 250km southwards of its last known habitat. The bird, sighted in October this year, was clearly different from the more commonly found Spotted Owlet due to its unspotted crown, a complete collar on breast, dark primaries and broadly banded tail. In the course of subsequent visits to the sanctuary, calls of the Forest Owlet were also heard at a location 7km away from this spot, a press release issued by BNHS stated. "I am delighted about the discovery of this extremely rare bird so close to Mumbai."

"I hope…," Mr. Asad Rahmani, Director, BNHS, raised his concern about the current scenario of the ecosystem around this sanctuary hoping that authorities will take proper steps to protect the Forest Owlet in Tansa, in light of this uncommon spotting. The discovery, while promising, will require further research. According to Mr. Atul Sathe, Manager- Communications, BNHS, since the bird has been found significantly outside its earlier known range, a reassessment of its distribution range is necessary and it will be important to verify its possible presence in the intermittent habitats ranging from Satpuda ranges to northern Western Ghats.

The place where the bird was spotted is a dry deciduous forest with open patches— very similar to the typical Forest Owlet habitat in the Satpuda ranges. However, according to Mr. Laad the habitat of the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary has been continuously deteriorating. In support of his query he also pointed out that how over the past six years, he has personally not spotted a single vulture in the area.

This phenomenon described above doesn't limit itself to the discovery of a bird, but further it underlines the significance of Tansa wildlife Sanctuary. There certainly exists a continuum in rapid urbanization and human encroachment in the very eco-system in and around the Tansa Sanctuary. This discovery not only widens the scope for further investigation on seriously endangered to presume extinct fauna, but also underlines the need to introspect human development.

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