

4. Sandbar Nesting Birds- Environment

Government approves project to protect breeding habitats of Sandbar-Nesting Birds in Ganga Basin. The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has approved a first-of-its-kind project to conserve endangered sandbar-nesting birds, particularly the Indian Skimmer, in the Ganga basin. The initiative aims to protect breeding habitats from threats like sand mining and human disturbance through long-term monitoring and community engagement.

Introduction- In News

Approval- The Government of India has approved a first-of-its-kind conservation project specifically designed to protect the breeding habitats of sandbar-nesting birds within the Ganga basin.

Authority- This decision was finalized during the 68th Executive Committee meeting of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) held in New Delhi.

Project Overview- Protection of Sandbar-Nesting Birds

Primary Objectives

Habitat Conservation- To protect and conserve breeding grounds, specifically sandbars and islands, which are critical for endangered sandbar-nesting birds.

Scientific Approach- The project emphasizes long-term monitoring and evidence-based conservation strategies.

Community Engagement- It aims to foster community participation to ensure local support for conservation efforts.

Mitigation of Disturbance- A key goal is to significantly reduce human disturbance at sensitive nesting sites during breeding seasons.

Biodiversity Enhancement- The project seeks to enhance the overall river-related faunal biodiversity of the Ganga basin.

Target Species

Primary Focus- Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albigollis*).

Other Key Species- Black-bellied Tern, River Tern, River Lapwing, Great Thick-knee

Project Locations

Existing Sites- Nest monitoring will continue in the Chambal River and Lower Ganga stretches.

New Initiations- Conservation efforts will expand to new sites in Uttar Pradesh, specifically Bijnor, Narora, Prayagraj

Understanding Sandbar-Nesting Birds

Definition & Characteristics

Riverine bird species that lay their eggs and raise chicks on exposed sandbars that form within river channels during low-water seasons.

Nesting Habit- They do not build constructed nests. Instead, eggs are laid directly on open, flat sand deposits.

Habitat Preference- They prefer wide, braided river stretches with minimal vegetation to spot predators easily.

Distribution in India- They are found along major river systems including

1. Ganga
2. Yamuna
3. Chambal
4. Brahmaputra

Species Focus- Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albigollis*)

Physical Characteristics

Distinctive Feature- Known for its bright orange bill where the lower mandible is longer than the upper one.

Feeding Adaptation- This unique bill structure allows them to feed by skimming the water surface in flight to catch small fish—a highly specialized behavior.

Ecological Profile

Habitat- Strongly associated with large river systems like the Ganga, Chambal, Son, and Mahanadi; prefers estuaries and sandbars.

Breeding Season- Nests on exposed river sandbars during the dry season (March–May). This timing makes them highly vulnerable as water levels are low and sandbars are accessible to humans and predators.

Role- Acts as a bio-indicator of healthy river ecosystems and natural flow regimes.

Conservation Status & Threats- IUCN Status- Endangered.

Major Threats

1. River Regulation- Dams and barrages that alter natural water flows and submerge nesting sandbars.
2. Sand Mining- Destruction of physical nesting habitats.
3. Disturbance- Human activities and livestock trampling at nesting sites.
4. Pollution- Reduced water quality leading to lower fish availability (food source).

Implementing Agency- National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

About NMCG

Role- It is the implementation wing of the Namami Gange Programme.

Ministry- Functions under the Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation).

Legal Power- Backed by the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, which grants it statutory powers to enforce river protection measures.

Key Objectives

1. Pollution Abatement- To effectively reduce pollution in the Ganga River.
2. Ecosystem Rejuvenation- Conservation of the riverine ecology.
3. Flow Maintenance- To ensure Aviral Dhara (continuous flow) and Nirmal Dhara (unpolluted flow).

Institutional Structure

Governing Council- Chaired by the Prime Minister of India.

Executive Committee- Chaired by the Director General, NMCG.

Source- <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/government-approves-project-to-protect-breeding-habitats-of-sandbar-nesting-birds-in-ganga-basin/>