

Printed from

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Nature heals wound, restores Collector Bheri

By *Subhro Niyogi*, TNN | Feb 3, 2013, 03:57 AM IST

KOLKATA: A year after an audacious attempt to encroach upon Collector Bheri - a 43-bighabheri in East Kolkata Wetlands - was foiled by the administration following a sustained campaign by green activists and TOI, nature has made a triumphant comeback, transforming the drained waterbody into a resplendent habitat for birds and reptiles.

"All one has to do is give nature a chance. If we keep our hands off, nature will manage itself and restore what's been lost. Amidst all the gloom over unbridled conversion of wetlands, this stands out as a beacon of hope," said Arjan Basu Roy of Nature Mates, an environment action group that has helped revive waterbodies in Bikramgarh, Santragachi and Purbasthali.

He was there on the invitation of Public, an NGO that had taken a lead role in saving Collector Bheri, as was EKW Management Authority chief technical officer Arijit Banerjee who had led the drive to demolish a wall that had been illegally built around the wetland after water was drained out. Also present were 50 Class IX students of La Martiniere School (girls and boys), all members of the eco-club out on a field visit on the International Wetland Day.

The Collector Bheri, owned by the government, was used as a fish farm before land sharks preyed on it. Located adjacent to Heritage school and college in Chowbagha, the large plot would have yielded crores had a real estate project been developed there. Fortunately, a concerted effort foiled the gameplan and saved the bheri from the brink of conversion.

"Prior to the encroachment, the bheri had sparkling water and the fishermen's cooperative offered joyrides on paddle boats. After the wall was pulled down, skeptics had written off its revival. In the months that followed, local farmers had started growing leafy vegetables on the fertile bed. But nature has clawed back, reclaiming the area," Bonani Kakkar of Public explained to the students.

Collector Bheri has acquired a marshy character with hogla or elephant grass and shola or pith plant providing a dense foliage for mongoose, snakes and monitors to thrive. La Martiniere for Boys student Rishabh Jalan and Prabhav Agarwal spotted a mongoose and a snake. "We had been to the fish farms along the EM Bypass but this is our first exposure to a naturally managed wetland," said Jalan.

Sanskriti Singh of La Martiniere for Girls managed to click a common kingfisher, certainly not very commonly found in the vicinity. Others spotted different varieties of kingfisher (white-breasted, pied, stork-billed), bittern (cinnamon, yellow and black), pond heron, cormorant, egret and zitting cisticola.

Banerjee, who will shortly leave the EKWMA to take over a new assignment, urged students to spare a thought for wetlands when they grew into positions of importance in a few years.

"The lure of turning waterbodies into real estate goldmine is so strong that it is difficult to save them from disappearing unless we all become stakeholders. In the case of Collector Bheri, we could take firm action because it was government-owned. But there are many private bheris that are being filled up despite the presence of enabling laws like the West Bengal Inland Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1993, and National Environmental Policy 2006," he pointed out. A huge wetland in Dankuni is faced with such a predicament.

Even as Banerjee spoke, local toughs who had been coordinating the bheri's encroachment did the rounds in a scooter. The incessant sound of construction activity from all around was a constant reminder of the threat that Collector Bheri still faces. But whenever the noise ceased for a few seconds, sweet sound of chirping birds filled the air.

Share your views**THE TIMES OF INDIA**Powered by **INDIATIMES**[About us](#)[Privacy policy](#)[New sletter](#)[Sitemap](#)[Advertise with us](#)[Feedback](#)[TOI Mobile](#)[Archives](#)[Terms of Use and Grievance Redressal Policy](#)[RSS](#)[ePaper](#)**Other Times Group news sites**[Times Crest](#) | [The Economic Times](#)[इकोनॉमिक टाइम्स](#) | [एकॅनॉमिक टाइम्स](#)[Pune Mirror](#) | [Bangalore Mirror](#)[Ahmedabad Mirror](#) | [ItsMyAscent](#)[Education Times](#) | [Brand Capital](#)[Mumbai Mirror](#) | [Times Now](#)[Indiatimes](#) | [नवभारत टाइम्स](#)[महाराष्ट्र टाइम्स](#) | [ವಿಜಯ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ](#)[Go Green](#)**Living and entertainment**[Timescity](#) | [iDiva](#) | [Bollywood](#) | [Zoom](#)[Healthmeup](#) | [Luxpresso](#) | [Technoholik](#)[Gyulife](#) | [Online Songs](#)**Network**[itimes](#) | [Dating & Chat](#) | [Email](#)**Hot on the Web**[Hotklix](#) | [World](#) | [Politics](#)[Business](#) | [Sports](#)[Entertainment](#)[Science & Tech](#)[New Cars](#)**Services**[Book print ads](#) | [Online shopping](#) | [Free SMS](#) | [Website design](#) | [CRM](#) | [Tenders](#)[Matrimonial](#) | [Ringtones](#) | [Astrology](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Tech Community](#) | [Property](#) | [Buy car](#)[Bikes in India](#) | [Deals](#) | [Free Classifieds](#) | [Send money to India](#) | [Used Cars](#)[Restaurants in Delhi](#) | [Movie Show](#) | [Timings in Mumbai](#) | [Remit to India](#) | [Buy Mobiles](#)[Listen Songs](#) | [New s](#)**Trending Topics**[Yahoo](#) | [Gmail](#) | [You Tube](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Ircrc](#) | [Apple iPhone 5](#) | [Way2SMS](#) |[Aadhar Card](#) | [Facebook](#) | [UID Card](#)Copyright © 2013 Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. All rights reserved. For reprint rights: [Times Syndication Service](#)