

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
Original Application No. 1339/2024**

IN THE MATTER OF:-

News item titled "Ladakh bird life comprising 430 species in dire need of protection" appearing in ETV Bharat dated 16.11.2024

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1	REPLY BY WAY OF AFFIDAVIT FOR AND BY THE DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE PROTECTION, UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH	

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INDIA NON JUDICIAL



THE ADMINISTRATION OF UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

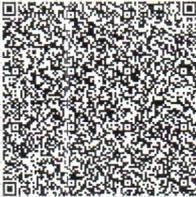
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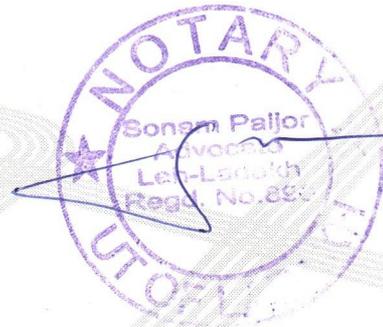
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Certificate Issued Date : 23-Sep-2025 11:02 AM
Account Reference : NONACC (SV)/ la12101104/ LEH/ LA-LEH
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Purchased by : RAJESH S IFS CHIEF WILDLIFE WARDEN
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THE ADMINISTRATION OF UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
Original Application No. 1339/2024**



IN THE MATTER OF:-

News item titled "Ladakh bird life comprising 430 species in dire need of protection" appearing in ETV Bharat dated 16.11.2024

**REPLY BY WAY OF AFFIDAVIT FOR AND BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE PROTECTION, UNION
TERRITORY OF LADAKH—i.e. R-5**

AFFIDAVIT

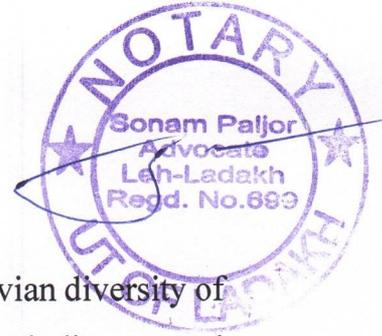
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I, Rajesh S, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden, Ladakh, duly authorised on behalf of the Department of Wildlife Protection, UT of Ladakh, do hereby solemnly affirm and respectfully submitted as under:

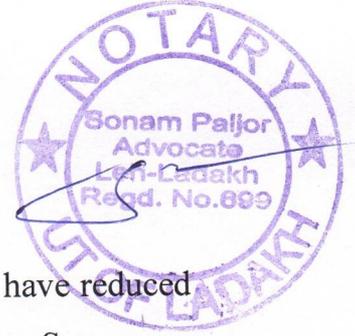
1. Introduction

- A. The present affidavit is being filed in response to the directions of the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal in Original Application No. 1339/2024, wherein the Hon'ble Tribunal has sought the Department's response in view of the news article titled "*Ladakh Birdlife Comprising 430 Species in Dire Need of Protection*" published by ETV Bharat.

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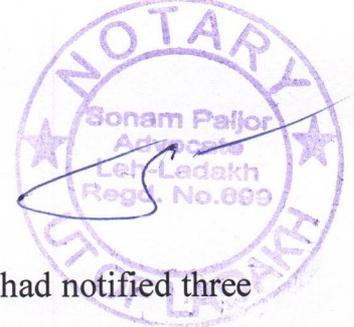


- B. The article draws attention to the exceptional avian diversity of Ladakh, recording over 430 species of birds, including several rare, threatened, and migratory species of global significance. It highlights iconic species such as the Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*), Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), and Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), as well as other resident, migratory, passage migrant, and vagrant species. The article also notes observations by local experts on shifts in migration timing and distribution patterns, which they partly attribute to climate change, as well as isolated sightings of species unusual for the region, possibly linked to changing weather and habitat conditions.
- C. The article raises certain unsubstantiated conservation concerns, which it broadly categorised under climate-related changes, tourism-related pressures, and other anthropogenic impacts. Under the first category, it is claimed that there have been alterations in migratory patterns, arrival and departure timings, and the sporadic appearance of non-native bird species. With regard to tourism, it is alleged that unregulated visitation to sensitive habitats can lead to disturbance during critical breeding seasons. In terms of anthropogenic pressures, the article refers to the degradation of habitats due to urban expansion and associated infrastructure, the proliferation of feral and free-ranging dogs which are said to pose a predation threat to nesting birds like the Black-necked Crane, and

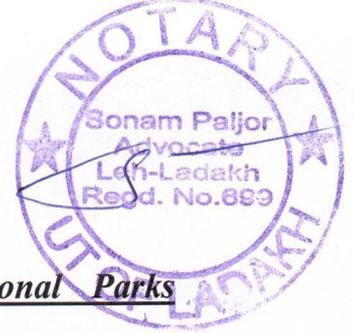


changes in urban construction patterns that may have reduced nesting opportunities for species such as the House Sparrow.

- D. It is important to emphasise that while these concerns remain unsubstantiated and require further scientific validation, the Department has nonetheless initiated and strengthened a range of regulatory, protective, and awareness measures to address them. Moreover, several of the observed changes in bird presence and distribution can also be attributed to natural ecological variations and improved documentation efforts by a growing network of skilled local birders using advanced observation technology.
- E. That Ladakh, located in the trans-Himalayan region, is an ecologically fragile and unique high-altitude cold desert ecosystem, characterised by extreme climatic conditions, sparse vegetation, and a short growing season. This distinct environment supports a variety of specialised flora and fauna adapted to survive in conditions of low oxygen, intense ultraviolet radiation, and prolonged winters.
- F. It is home to several rare and endangered species, including the Black-necked Crane, Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*), Tibetan Antelope (*Pantholops hodgsonii*), and numerous migratory waterfowl, raptors, and passerines that use Ladakh as a breeding ground, staging site, or winter refuge along the Central Asian Flyway.

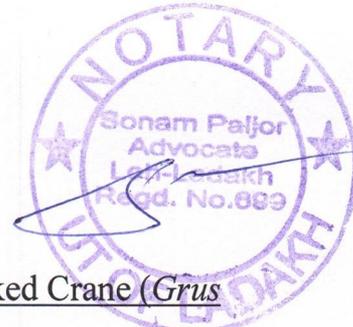


- G. The erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir had notified three Protected Areas in Ladakh viz. the Hemis High Altitude National Park, Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary, and Karakoram (Nubra-Shyok) Wildlife Sanctuary, under Section 35 (National Parks) and Section 17 (Wildlife Sanctuaries) of the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Protection Act, 1978.
- H. That U/s 17 of the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Protection Act, 1978 any area may be notified by the Government as a Wildlife Sanctuary if that area is considered to have significant ecological, faunal, floral, or geomorphological value, with the objective of protecting, propagating, or developing wildlife and its environment. The Act provided robust safeguards, including prohibitions on hunting, capturing, or disturbing wildlife; bans on extraction of forest produce or alteration of habitats without permission; restrictions on grazing; and regulated entry. Activities within a sanctuary were permitted only with authorisation from the Chief Wildlife Warden for specific purposes such as research or habitat improvement, and violations attract strict penalties.
- I. That the National Parks, notified under section 35 of the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Protection Act, 1978, received an even higher level of protection. These were areas of exceptional ecological, faunal, floral, or geomorphological importance, notified for the purpose of protecting, propagating, or developing wildlife and its environment. *In addition to the*



restrictions applicable in sanctuaries, National Parks prohibited all forms of hunting, grazing, removal of forest produce, or alteration of habitat, unless specifically approved by the Chief Wildlife Warden for purposes such as wildlife management. Entry and activities were strictly regulated, and boundaries could not be altered without legislative approval.

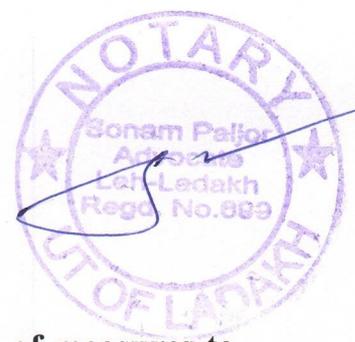
- J. That following the bifurcation of the erstwhile State into the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is now applicable to Ladakh, under which the existing Protected Areas continue to enjoy similar legal safeguards.
- K. The Union Territory of Ladakh thus has three designated Protected Areas, Hemis High-Altitude National Park, Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary, and Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuary, covering vast tracts of high-altitude habitats, from rugged alpine landscapes and mountain valleys to wetlands of international importance.
- L. That Ladakh is also home to two Ramsar sites - Tsomoriri Wetland and Tsokar Wetland Complex - both situated in the Changthang region of Eastern Ladakh. These wetlands are globally recognised for their crucial role in sustaining a rich diversity of migratory and endemic species. They provide breeding and stopover habitats for several important bird species, including the Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Brown-headed Gull, and various species of ducks and waders.



Of particular pride to Ladakh is the Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*), a vulnerable species with a highly restricted breeding range in India, which has been declared the State Bird of Ladakh. The Ramsar sites serve as key nesting grounds for this iconic bird, making their conservation a matter of both ecological and cultural significance

Name of the Wetland	Tsomoriri Wetland	Tsokar Wetland Complex
Year of RAMSAR declaration	2002	2020
Area (ha)	12000 ha	9577 ha

M. The Department of Wildlife Protection, Union Territory of Ladakh, remains firmly committed to the preservation, protection, and sustainable management of its biodiversity as the departmental actions are carried out in strict compliance with the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and other relevant national and international conservation frameworks. Guided by these mandates, the Department strives to ensure that conservation imperatives remain central to every decision, safeguarding Ladakh's fragile ecosystems for present and future generations.



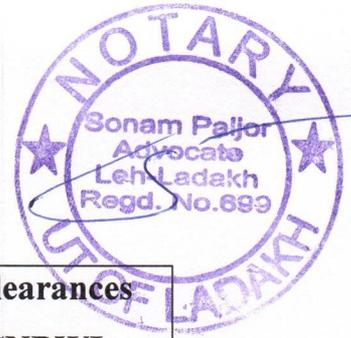
2. Departmental Measures and Activities

The Department has been undertaking a range of measures to ensure the long-term protection of Ladakh's biodiversity. These include:

A. Regulated Infrastructure Development in Protected Areas

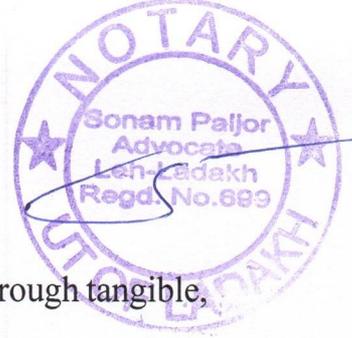
- i. In Ladakh, a significant portion of the notified Protected Areas lie within border areas, where user agencies are predominantly the Indian Army and other security forces. The infrastructure proposals from such agencies are often linked to national security and strategic requirements. While these needs are fully acknowledged, the Department ensures that any development or infrastructure activities within Protected Areas are undertaken strictly in accordance with applicable laws and regulatory procedures, and only after obtaining prior approval from the competent authority, including clearance from the State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) and Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL) wherever mandated. The members of these Boards comprise a balanced mix of government officials, subject-matter experts, local representatives familiar with the region's ecology, and conservationists dedicated to environmental protection. This diverse composition ensures that decision-making is both fair and informed, with due consideration given to the ecological sensitivity of the area alongside developmental and strategic needs.

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S. No.	Year	Number of Clearances Given by SCNBWL
1	2021	44 cases
2	2022	25 cases
3	2023	15 cases
4	2024	28 cases
5	2025	27 cases

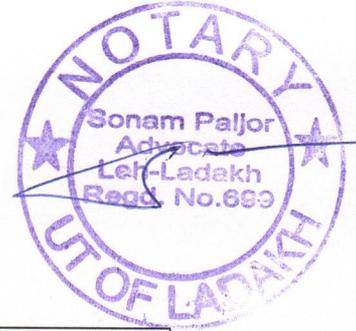
- ii. All proposals are subjected to rigorous scrutiny to ensure that they are ecologically just
- iii. ified and consistent with the primary objectives of wildlife protection and habitat conservation. Prior to the grant of permissions, detailed Biodiversity Impact Assessments (BIA) are conducted as per given provisions to evaluate potential impacts on Ladakh's fragile high-altitude ecosystems. The findings of these assessments guide the incorporation of specific mitigation measures to minimise ecological disturbance and ensure that development activities remain compatible with conservation goals.
- iv. Additionally, as a part of the regulatory framework, user agencies are required to deposit the Net Present Value (NPV) along with an additional 2% amount of the project cost as compensation for any residual loss that may occur despite the implementation of all prescribed safeguards. This NPV, which is deposited as CAMPA fund, is channelled into activities aimed at the conservation and development of biodiversity and the improvement of wildlife habitats, thereby ensuring



that any unavoidable ecological cost is offset through tangible, long-term environmental benefits.

B. Rescue and Rehabilitation

- i. The Department of Wildlife Protection, Union Territory of Ladakh, maintains a dedicated and equipped rescue and rehabilitation system to respond promptly to wildlife emergencies across the region. A trained rescue team is available 24 hours a day to handle cases involving injured, distressed, or displaced wild animals, including avian species.
- ii. To ensure rapid and effective response, the Department is equipped with essential infrastructure such as wildlife ambulances, transit rescue centres, veterinary medicines, animal feeds, tranquillising guns, and capture equipment. The rescue team includes an in-house veterinary doctor who provides veterinary care and oversees the treatment process.
- iii. Whenever possible, in cases of minor injuries, necessary medical attention is provided immediately, and the animals are released back into their natural habitat at an earliest opportunity to minimise stress and human interaction. For cases involving serious injuries or prolonged recovery, the animals are transported to the nearest rescue centre, where they are kept under observation, provided with appropriate diet and medical treatment, and monitored closely until they are deemed fit for release back into their habitats.
- iv. The Year wise details on Rescue and Rehabilitation of injured and distressed wildlife is as below:



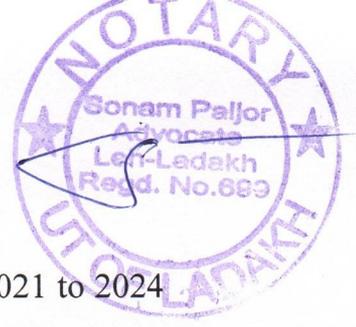
Year	No. of Rescued Wildlife			
	Snow Leopard	Birds	Other animals	Total
2019-2020	4	1	5	10
2020-2021	7	9	14	30
2021-2022	4	15	18	37
2022-2023	8	28	19	55
2023-2024	13	30	24	67
2024-2025	3	5	15	23

Recognising the growing need for modern facilities, the Department is now set to construct two fully equipped, large-scale rescue centres, one in each district, featuring state-of-the-art infrastructure for the treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term care of injured or displaced wildlife. These centres will further strengthen the UT's capacity to safeguard its rich and unique biodiversity.

C. Management and Regulation of Eco-tourism

- i. The article raises concerns regarding an increasing human footprint in Ladakh. However, available demographic and tourism data indicate that such a claim may be overstated. The average annual population growth rate between 1981 and 2001 was only 2.75% in Leh District and 2.83% in Kargil District, reflecting relatively slow demographic change over two decades.

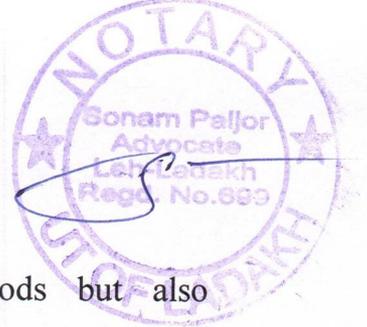
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- ii. Similarly, tourism trends (as shown below) from 2021 to 2024 do not show a consistent pattern of growth:-

Year	Tourist Influx in Ladakh
2021	3,14,077
2022	5,31,396
2023	5,25,374
2024	3,76,386

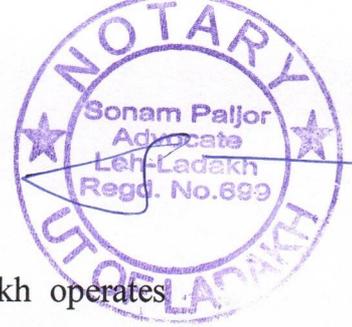
- iii. In 2021, Ladakh received 3,14,077 tourists; in 2022, the number rose to 5,31,396; in 2023, it slightly declined to 5,25,374; and in 2024, arrivals further decreased to 3,76,386. These fluctuations suggest that a steadily increasing human footprint cannot be conclusively inferred from recent tourism data.
- iv. Nonetheless, recognising the ecological sensitivity of Ladakh's high-altitude landscapes, tourism within Protected Areas is strictly regulated to ensure that visitor activities do not adversely affect fragile ecosystems and rare wildlife species. Given that most Protected Areas are strategically located along international borders, entry is permitted only after obtaining an Inner Line Permit from the UT Administration. This system allows for careful monitoring of visitor inflow while preventing unauthorised access to ecologically and strategically sensitive zones.
- v. **To balance conservation with community welfare, the UT Administration and the Department of Wildlife Protection have implemented a Homestay Policy, encouraging local residents to provide eco-friendly accommodation.** This



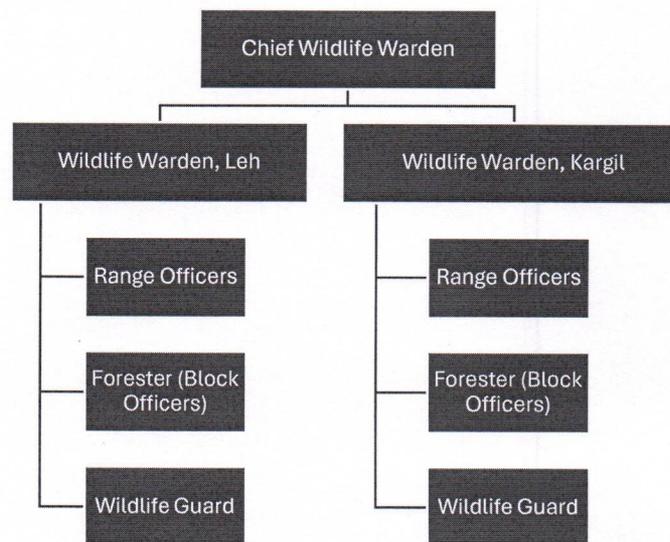
initiative not only supports rural livelihoods but also strengthens local stewardship of biodiversity. The Department also promotes eco-tourism by training local youth as nature guides, creating livelihood opportunities that are intrinsically linked to conservation. **Additionally, alternative tourism sites have been identified outside high-disturbance zones, offering visitors equally enriching cultural and natural experiences while safeguarding the ecological integrity of core wildlife habitats.**

- vi. **As part of this initiative, a one-month Nature Guide Training Programme was organized in 2020-21 for 25 youth,** in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh, covering both classroom and extensive field sessions across Changthang and Hemis National Park. In 2022, Hospitality and Capacity-Building Trainings were conducted in the villages of Tarchit, Khatpu, and Himya for around 40 beneficiaries under the eco-tourism initiative in Rong Valley, led by experienced tourism professionals.
- vii. **More recently, in 2024, hospitality training was imparted to 2,300 homestay operators across protected areas of Ladakh** in collaboration with the State Institute of Hotel Management, with a focus on sustainable practices to ensure that tourism growth does not cause environmental damage.

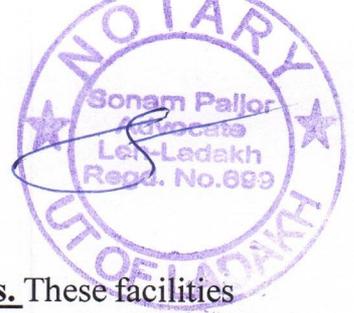
D. Regular Patrolling and Enforcement



- i. The Department of Wildlife Protection in Ladakh operates through a well-defined administrative structure comprising two districts, each headed by a Wildlife Warden. Under them, various Ranges are managed by Range Officers, which are further divided into Blocks headed by Block Officers (Foresters). At the grassroots level, Beats are manned by Beat Guards, who carry out routine patrolling, monitoring, and enforcement duties on the ground.



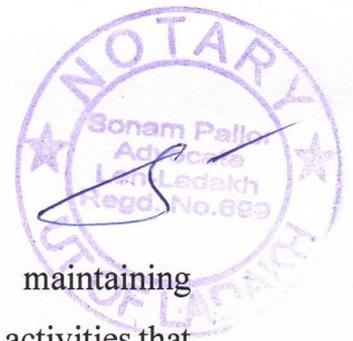
- ii. The frontline staff of the Department conducts regular and intensive patrolling across Protected Areas to deter illegal hunting, poaching, and habitat encroachment. To ensure effective coverage of Ladakh's vast and often inaccessible high-altitude landscapes, staff are equipped with 4×4 vehicles for navigating rugged terrain, as well as trekking gear for foot patrols in remote areas where vehicular access is impossible. Strategic anti-poaching camps, check posts, and inspection huts are established in far-flung areas, enabling continuous monitoring and a strong deterrent



presence even in extreme weather conditions. These facilities not only aid in law enforcement but also provide resting and operational base for staff during extended patrol duties. However, in certain locations where continuous presence of staff is not feasible, the Department engages trusted community informants. This network of informants act as the Department's eyes and ears on the ground, reporting suspicious activities, wildlife sightings, or signs of habitat disturbance in real time.

E. Habitat Restoration

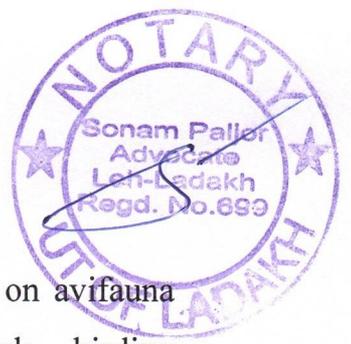
- i. Under CAMPA APO for the FY 2025–26, the Department has proposed certain habitat restoration interventions, with a **key focus on the construction of a water channel to feed water into the drying Ja Tso Lake in Chushul.** This intervention is aimed at rejuvenating the lake ecosystem, ensuring the sustenance of its unique biodiversity and supporting migratory birds that rely on it as a critical stopover site.
- ii. In addition, natural patches of Juniper, the State Tree of Ladakh, are being protected through the provision of chain-link fencing, which prevents anthropogenic disturbances, thereby aiding the regeneration of the species and enhancing overall habitat quality.
- iii. In addition, the Department continues to strengthen on-ground protection through hiring of watch and ward staff in avi-fauna rich areas. Their role goes beyond safeguarding birds; they also



actively contribute to habitat restoration by maintaining cleanliness, preventing littering, and discouraging activities that degrade the natural environment. Together, these efforts are designed to contribute towards a healthier and more resilient habitat that supports both resident and migratory wildlife.

F. Monitoring of Bird Populations

- iv. **The Department of Wildlife Protection undertakes bird monitoring and census programmes across Ladakh's diverse habitats** ranging from critical wetlands and marshes such as Tsomoriri, Tsokar, Hanle, and Chushul, to grasslands, alpine meadows, river basins, and rocky cliffs that host breeding raptors and high-altitude passerines. These landscapes hold global ecological importance, serving as key nesting and staging grounds for rare and migratory species, including the Black-necked Crane (the State Bird of Ladakh), Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Brown-headed Gull, Golden Eagle, Lammergeier, Horned Lark, and several species of ducks, waders, and finches.
- v. **The Department has conducted annual bird census exercises in the years 2018, 2019, and 2021, generating valuable baseline and trend data. Further, Ladakh's First Bird Festival, organized by the Department of Wildlife Protection with support from the GoI-UNDP-GEF SECURE Himalaya Project, was held from 28–30 October 2021. The three-day festival featured a bird survey in Changthang that recorded nearly 100 species (amongst with *Common Quail* was photographed for the**

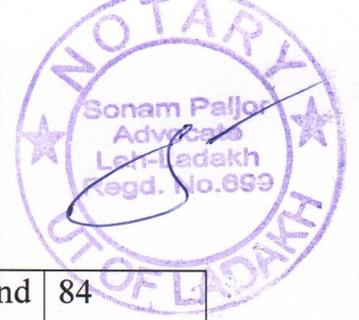


first time in Ladakh), expert panel discussions on avifauna conservation and cultural significance of birds, birding activities at Shey Marshes, student art workshops, and a musical play on Ladakh's birdlife, bringing together officials, experts, students, and local organizations to celebrate and promote bird conservation in the region.

- vi. In addition, targeted bird surveys are carried out during significant environmental observances such as World Wetlands Day, International Day for Biological Diversity, World Migratory Bird Day, and during citizen-science events like the Great Backyard Bird Count. Since 2023, Ladakh has also been part of the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), which is conducted annually in alignment with global waterbird monitoring protocols. During AWC 2025, a bird called *Song Thrush* was **observed in Puga Valley after a gap of four decades.**

Details of some of the above-mentioned Bird Survey and Census are as below:

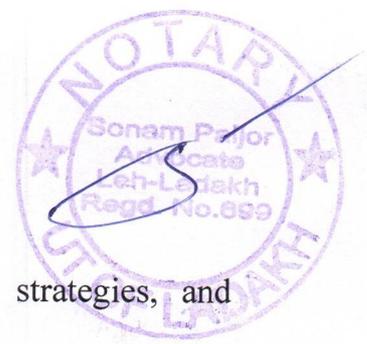
Year	Occasion	Month	Location	No. of species observed
2018	Introductory Training Programme on Bird Monitoring & Bird Ringing	July	Tsokar	12
			Hanle	24
2019	Annual Bird Survey/ Monitoring Programme	October	Tsokar	45
			Hanle	30
2021	Third Annual Bird Survey	September	Tsokar and Tsomoriri	42



			Hanle and Chushul	84
2023	Asian Waterbird Census	January	Chumathang	11
			Puga	10
			Shey	21
			Phey	10
2024	Asian Waterbird Census	January	Changthang	31
			Leh	16
			Nubra	25
			Shey	20
2025	Asian Waterbird Census	February	Leh	19
			Shey	7
			Changthang	38
			Nubra	16
			Kargil	17

vii. Modern citizen science tools such as eBird and Merlin are also being actively promoted for data recording and species identification. Local communities and departmental staff are regularly trained in using these applications, enabling them to contribute bird sightings and photographic records from across Ladakh's varied ecosystems. This grassroots participation expands monitoring coverage, improves data accuracy, and integrates community knowledge into formal conservation databases.

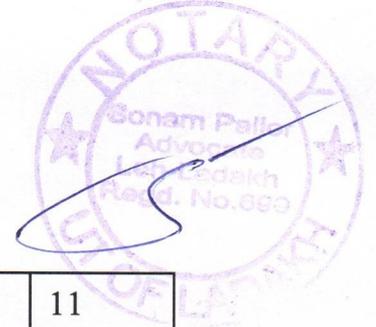
viii. These efforts are often undertaken in collaboration with students, research institutions, conservation-focused NGOs, independent ornithologists, and local community volunteers, thereby combining scientific expertise with traditional ecological insights. The collected data not only helps in tracking population trends and migration patterns but also



supports policy-making, habitat restoration strategies, and species-specific conservation action plans.

- ix. One such example of species-focused action is the conservation of the Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*), recognised as the State Bird of Ladakh. Acknowledging its highly restricted breeding range in India, the Department of Wildlife Protection has undertaken dedicated measures to safeguard this iconic species. Its primary breeding grounds in India are located within Ladakh's Changthang region, making local conservation action critical to the species' survival.
- x. **The Department engages stewards from local communities in Changthang to monitor and safeguard nesting sites of the Black-necked Crane during the breeding season.** These stewards play a vital role in preventing nest disturbance, predation by feral dogs, and other threats. During the 2024 breeding season (May–November), the Department engaged 25 seasonal wildlife stewards from surrounding communities across 25 key crane habitats within the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary, including Tsokar, Chushul, Hanle, Rhongo, Staklung, and Puga. These stewards were provided orientation and training on field monitoring techniques, species-specific threats, and habitat protection protocols. The following are the data collected during the 2024 breeding season by the stewards:-

Black Necked	Adults	Chicks	Nest with eggs	No. of eggs	Nest without eggs

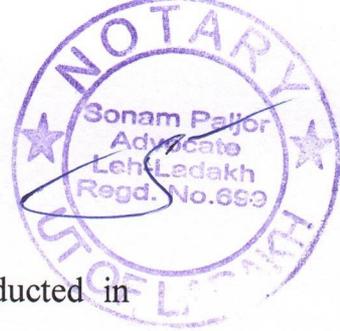


Crane Count	69	20	16	30	11
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- xi. This year, the stewards are being engaged once again, with plans to continue their involvement in the coming years as well, so as to enable consistent monitoring and systematic recording of long-term data and trends.
- xii. **This community-based stewardship model not only provides real-time protection to the Black-necked Crane during its breeding period but also fosters a sense of ownership among local residents,** integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation practices. The information generated from these efforts forms a valuable part of the Department's long-term database, guiding species recovery strategies and habitat management plans.

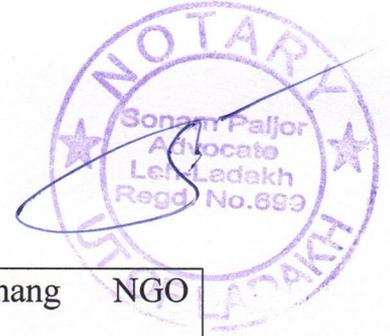
G. Community Engagement and Awareness

- i. The Department of Wildlife Protection places strong emphasis on active involvement of local communities in conservation initiatives, recognising that long-term protection of Ladakh's biodiversity depends on public awareness and stewardship. To institutionalize this involvement, the UT Administration earlier appointed Sarpanches and Army officials as Honorary Wildlife Wardens vide Notifications dated 14th September 2021. This measure ensures that local stakeholders are directly integrated into conservation planning and decision-making processes, thereby fostering stronger collaboration, greater accountability, and community-driven protection of natural resources.



- ii. Further, awareness programmes are regularly conducted in collaboration with schools, local panchayats, and community groups to encourage responsible behaviour among residents and visitors, with particular focus on the ethics of wildlife observation, avoiding disturbance during breeding seasons, and ensuring proper waste management in ecologically sensitive zones.
- iii. Special efforts are made to integrate conservation messages into wildlife and environment-related days such as World Wetlands Day, World Environment Day, World Wildlife Day, International Day for Biological Diversity etc. These events are celebrated in the presence of local communities, often at or near important habitats, to foster a deeper understanding of the local environmental challenges and the need for sustainable practices.
- iv. Some of the key awareness programmes conducted with the involvement of local communities and individuals are highlighted below:

Event	What	When	Where	Who
World Wetlands Day	Cleanliness drive, Painting & Quiz Competition	02 nd Feb. 2024	Korzok, Changthang	Students and community members of Korzok Village
World Wildlife Day	Awareness Programme and	03 rd March 2024	Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitati	Underprivilege d students of Chispay Tolop



	Cleanliness drive		on Centre, Skara	Khang NGO and departmental staff.
International Day for Biological Diversity	Bioresource Exhibition	22 nd May 2024	Rgyal Khatoon Forest Park, Kargil	BMC members and villagers of Minjee, Kanoor, Holiyal, Bodhkarbu and Darchiks panchayat.
World Environment Day	Awareness programme, Quiz, Cleanliness drive	5 th June 2024	Tsokar, Tsomoriri, Pangong, Puga, Khardongla and Thang (Nubra).	Students, Indian Army, Nomads, Villagers
Education and Exposure Tour	Wildlife observation, Interactive Sessions, Nature etc.	3 rd Dec. 2024	Rumbak village in Hemis National Park	Students
International Day for	Award Ceremony to Honour	22 nd May 2025	Leh	Member of Cha Srunskyob Tsogspa, Muth



Biological Diversity	Community Conservation Champions			(Changthang, Member of the Women's Welfare Alliance of Neyraks, Leh BMC Members, Departmental staff, conservation oriented NGOs & institutions.
Pre Campaign to World Environment Day	Cleanliness drive, Plantation, Cyclothon, Student Rally, Quiz, Painting competition	30 th May to 5 th June	In and around ecologically important sites across Ladakh	Students, Community members, Departmental staff etc.

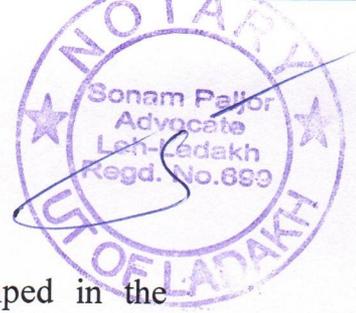
iv. As part of its participatory approach, the Department engages wildlife stewards from within the community, as described above, for on-ground conservation activities such as habitat monitoring, species protection, and data collection. This community-based conservation model not only strengthens



protection efforts but also builds a sense of pride and ownership among local residents, making them partners in safeguarding Ladakh's unique natural heritage.

H. Collaboration with Research and Conservation Agencies

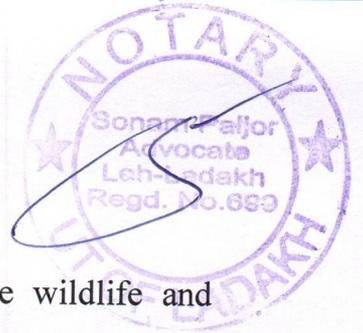
- i. The Department actively collaborates with a wide network of national and international research institutions, conservation-focused NGOs, etc. to deepen the understanding of Ladakh's diverse and fragile ecosystems. Such partnerships enable the integration of advanced scientific methodologies with local ecological knowledge, resulting in robust, evidence-based conservation strategies.
- ii. Addressing specific concerns raised in the article, particularly regarding the growing threat posed by feral dogs to avian species, the Department has engaged with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) to develop a targeted intervention.
- iii. Once approved, the study will not only generate scientifically validated data but will also outline practical and ecologically sound remedial measures to manage feral dog populations, thereby mitigating their impact on wildlife including bird species and improving overall ecosystem balance. By integrating such targeted studies into the broader conservation framework, the Department aims to ensure proactive and informed management of emerging wildlife threats.
- iv. A significant factor for the alarming growth in feral dogs' population is the abundant source of food being made available



through the wet/organic/food waste being dumped in the localities. Recognising that open dumping of food waste significantly contributes to the proliferation of feral dogs, the Department, under the SECURE Himalaya project in collaboration with Ecosage Enviro Pvt. Ltd., piloted a viable solution in the form of the Organic Waste Composting (Biodigester) Machine. The Biodigester uses heat and pressure to dehydrate and break down food and wet waste, converting it into bio-char. The machine, which operates on electricity abundant in armed forces estates and camps, can also be adapted for solar power. A pilot unit was installed at an Indian Army camp in Chushul in February 202. Following its proven success, the UT administration directed the Department to scale up this intervention, and accordingly more such machines are being procured for wider deployment.

3. Commitment to Compliance and Conservation

The Department reiterates that all activities within Protected Areas are carried out strictly in accordance with the applicable laws, rules, and guidelines. The concerns raised in the news article such as pressures from tourism, urbanisation, climate change, threats from feral dogs and other anthropogenic factors are well recognised and are being addressed through a balanced approach that integrates regulation, regular patrolling, scientific monitoring, habitat management, and community participation.



We remain committed to safeguarding Ladakh's unique wildlife and habitats, and to ensuring that any development or tourism activity is compatible with conservation priorities.

In light of the above, it is respectfully submitted that the Department of Wildlife Protection, UT of Ladakh, is fully aware of its statutory responsibilities under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and continues to undertake proactive measures for the protection of Ladakh's rich biodiversity and further undertakes to abide orders of the Hon'ble Tribunal

Department of Wildlife Protection, UT of Ladakh reserves the right to file additional submissions in the interest of justice.

DEPONENT

Verification

Verified at Leh on this 23 day of Sep 2025 that the contents of the above reply by way of affidavit are correct and true on the basis of the records of the case as maintained in the day-to-day affairs of the DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE PROTECTION, UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH. Nothing has been concealed therefrom or mis-stated.

Reg. no. - 1960
Date: 23/09/2025

Certified that the above statement
was declared on oath before me

By Rajesh S

who is identified by Shamein Gyalsan

Junior Assistant Wildlife Dept.

DEPONENT

Sonam Paljor
NOTARY PUBLIC
LEH - LADAKH
23/09/25