



P.C. DHIR/SANCTUARY

Locked between the waters of the Bay of Bengal and the dense forests of Orissa is one of the largest, brackish lakes in the country – Chilika. Kalijai Nalaban is the most prominent of islands strewn in the massive expanse of the Chilika lake, which lies shielded from the Bay of Bengal by sand bars. Once open to the sea, a break in the rocky, coastal lineaments is said to have given birth to the lake some 5,000 years ago.

Flora and fauna

The shallow waters of the massive lake gets an abundant supply of water from several rivers – Daya, Kusumi, Salia and Nuna. The unique ecology is ideal for a number of lifeforms... Sparse grass and shrubs along the sandy bars play host to a number of species such as spotted deer, jackals, jungle cats, hyenas and hares. Gangetic dolphins are often seen suddenly breaking the surface of the lake. And as many as

150 species of fish can be found here. The abundance of fish provides a feast for the birds and naturally, attracts the avians. Large congregations of birds are seen here. Geese and ducks come here in large numbers as do thousands of gulls and terns. But these are mostly winter migrants. Resident species such as waders – sandpipers, plovers and storks are seen here in plenty. Raptors such as White-bellied Sea Eagles swoop down to carry fish off in their talons. Ospreys, Short-toed Eagles, Steppe Eagles and Peregrine Falcons are also spotted here. So rich is the birdlife here that in 2001, it was added to the list of Ramsar sites, making it a site of international repute.

Best season

The temperatures here are pleasant almost throughout the year. To see birds, however, anytime between October and March be ideal.

Accommodation

The Orissa Tourism Development Corporation lodges are good options. Tel. 0674 432515; (Delhi) 011 3364580. Barkul Paranthiwas Tel. 06756 220488.

How to get there

By Air: The Biju Patnaik Airport at Bhubaneswar is the closest airport. By Rail: Balugaon to the west of the lake and Rambha at the southern tip are the nearest railway stations on the southeastern railway line. By Road: From Bhubaneswar, Balugaon (100 km.), Barkul (110 km.) and Rambha (130 km.), are more or less equidistant.

The Chilika lake is the largest, brackish waterbody in Asia, which shelters large congregations of waterfowl such as ducks, geese, gulls and terns.