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The Nalsarovar lake in Gujarat is probably the largest water bird sanctuary in the country. It has been identified as one of the 15 important wetlands of India by the National Committee on Wetlands, for intensive conservation.

Nalsarovar harbours one of the highest populations of waterfowl anywhere in India. It supports a variety of other resident bird species, and it also attracts several migrants. Here *Padhars*, very talented artisans are known for their folk dances also double as boatmen touring visitors around the lake.

Flora and fauna

The marshes do not support much vegetation although the lake is surrounded by grasslands and

open fields. Reeds and aquatic plants may be found around the lake whereas trees are practically absent. The surrounding Gir forests are rich in teak, *jamun*, *acacia* and banyan trees.

Although few animals are seen in the open expanse of the lake, the Nalsarovar lake lies in the Gir forest area, well-known for the Asiatic lion. Leopards, jackals, hyenas and ratels also inhabit these forests. But the fauna is mostly of avian habit and Nalsarovar is predominantly a birdwatcher's paradise. About 250 species of birds may be seen here, including a mind blowing 158 species of waterfowl!

Flamingos, pelicans, storks, ducks, egrets and herons flock at the lake in winter. Kingfishers and darters are found here in plenty. You may come across cormorants fishing in the lake with their dagger-like beaks or snipes and godwits probing in the mud for food.

Best season

Migratory birds start arriving around October so the period between November and February sees a wide variety of winter migrants.

Accommodation

You can stay at the Forest Department Rest House at Nalsarovar. Contact the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat. Palace Utelia, 10 km. away from the lake at Utelia is another option. Tel. 02714 295001. Bookings can be done from Ahmedabad. Tel. 079 26569937/26445700. Day trips from Ahmedabad are another viable option.

How to get there

By Air: Ahmedabad (60 km.) is the nearest airport.

By Rail: Ahmedabad (60 km.) is the nearest railhead.

By Road: State Transport buses ply to and fro between Ahmedabad and Nalsarovar, a journey of about an hour.

The Nalsarovar *jheel* attracts perhaps the most diverse species of waterfowl in the country. Hundreds of feathered bipeds, like these cormorants, are seen vying for fish food.