

Mela Kothi – Chambal Safari Lodge, National Chambal Sanctuary Conservation Flying Alongside Eco-tourism



Indian Skimmer, one of over 300 species of bird documented in the Chambal Valley.

Habitat Restoration

Mela Kothi is an outstanding example of wildlife conservation working hand in hand with sustainable tourism. Lodge owners Ram Pratap Singh and Anu Dhillon are helping to protect and regenerate the natural and cultural heritage of a previously little-known area through the [Chambal Conservation Foundation](#), set up with their own funds.

Six acres of land at their lodge was set aside for a forest nursery to supply indigenous shrubs and trees for a planting drive between 2006-2015. In July 2007 alone, 10,000 saplings were planted with the help of over 100 local participants. The lodge now boasts a checklist of over 198 species of birds, reptiles and mammals. Water bodies and check-dams in nearby ravines harvest rainwater and recharge groundwater. The team's expertise has been shared with forest range offices to benefit local people and reduce their dependence on the Sanctuary.

Conserving Endangered Species

The Foundation has been actively assisting the [Gharial Crisis Management](#) and [WWF](#) at a field level since a crisis in December 2007 saw massive deaths of this critically endangered species in the Chambal River, home to half of the world's population. Every year, it identifies and provides protective covers for gharial and mugger nesting sites. It is also working with WWF on a Chambal river basin management plan.



Participating in the Gharial crisis in 2007.



Children taking part in Wildlife Week celebrations.

Nature Education

It plays an impressive role in nature education and conservation awareness. Nearly 20,000 children from Agra and local rural schools have participated in the Foundation's annual Wildlife Conservation Week which involves talks, competitions and visits to Protected Areas near Agra including the National Chambal Sanctuary. Awareness camps and interactive meetings are organised in partnership with the Forest Department for local communities to strike a balance between divergent needs.

Two Uttar Pradesh International Bird Festivals organised at the lodge in 2015 and 2016 in partnership with the UP Forest Department raised the profile of this little-known valley to help secure its continuing protection. Over 200 experts from 29 countries were involved in 2016 including representatives from [WWF](#), [Bombay Natural History Society](#), [Bird Life International](#), [Wildlife SOS](#) and the [Nature Conservation Foundation](#). Interactive workshops and talks were complemented by bird-ringing demonstrations and an exhibition of more than 200 photographs and paintings. Over 2000 people attended in 2015 and 2016 including over 400 school children in 2015 and 500 in 2016.



International Bird Festivals with speakers from 29 countries in 2016.

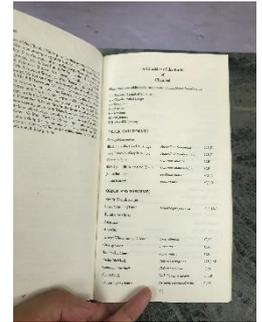


Participating in the state-wide Dolphin Census in 2006, 2012 and 2015.

Wildlife Intelligence

Intelligence on wildlife is regularly provided to national and international conservation organisations. The Foundation worked with the US Peregrine Fund in 2006 to identify vulture nests in the Chambal Valley and contributed to the state-wide WWF, Forest Department Dolphin Census in 2006, 2012 and 2015. It participates in and hosts the team for the National Chambal Sanctuary's annual census carried out by the Forest Department and WWF. Detailed scientific

listings of bird, mammal and reptile sightings have been compiled which are revised and updated each year. Listing of flora has also been initiated.



Checklists of birds, mammals and reptiles are provided to guests to look out for.

Anti-Poaching Support and Sustainable Livelihoods

The Foundation supports and contributes to the Forest Department's anti-poaching activities and efforts to eliminate illegal sand-mining operations. The lodge's boats are used for patrolling and a check-post has been created at a vital junction reducing the incidence of both these threats. Central to the lodge's approach is also helping establish and revive eco-development activities bringing new employment and economic benefit for the local population to ensure their participation in conservation and protection efforts (see Local Economy profile). The foundation is actively involved in eco-tourism policy and setting guidelines for carrying capacity in the Sanctuaries and National Parks of Uttar Pradesh to ensure sustainable development.



Ongoing support for gharial conservation is helping to ensure this critically endangered species continues to thrive after the Gharial crisis of 2007.



2015, 2016 - International Bird Festival success story.