

## **Celebration of World Wetland Day and Launch of Asian Waterbird Census-2026 in UT Ladakh**

Leh, February 02, 2026: The Department of Forest, Ecology and Environment, UT Ladakh, today celebrated the World Wetland Day-2026 and launched of Asian Waterbird Census-2026 in collaboration with Wetlands International South Asia- Delhi in UT Ladakh with a one-day seminar on "Wetland and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage" at DIHAR Auditorium, Leh.

The event was inaugurated by Shri Rajesh S., IFS, APCCF/Chief Wildlife Warden, Department of Forest, Ecology and Environment, UT Ladakh, as the Chief Guest and it was graced by Smt. Bhanu Prabha, IAS, Administrative Secretary (Education), Administration of UT Ladakh, as the Guest of Honour.

The World Wetland Day celebration commenced with the launch of Asian Waterbird Census-2026 and a cleanliness drive at Spituk Marshes in the early morning. The inaugural session featured a welcome address by Shri Vishal V. Surve, IFS, DCF (Headquarters), followed by screening of a documentary on "Wetland – Our Carbon Keeper" by the Wetland International South Asia, New Delhi.

The event also witnessed the release of a documentary film on the enchanting pristine biodiversity of Kargil- produced by the Kargil Wildlife Protection Division with funding from the Ladakh CAMAPA. In the UT level event, a comprehensive documentary film on " Kargil Mountains of Biodiversity" produced by the Department was also released.

A photo exhibition by the Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh, in the event, showcased the rich biodiversity and cultural significance of regional wetlands and bird diversity supported by the pristine wetlands of Ladakh.

The technical sessions of the seminar brought together leading wetland and biodiversity experts including Dr. Pankaj Chandan, Senior Wildlife Scientist & Regional Coordinator AWC, who presented on wetlands supporting migratory waterbirds along the Central Asian Flyway; Dr. Tsewang Namgail, Director, Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, highlighted importance, challenges, and threats facing migratory birds of Ladakh; and Shri Arif Ahmad, State Programme Associate, Himalayas, Wetlands International South Asia, who elaborated on wetlands of Ladakh and their importance. Dr. Aijaz Hussain from the EY Project Management Unit, Department of Tourism, Leh, provided insights on key species and conservation challenges.

The seminar featured presentations on traditional knowledge systems of herder communities in traditional wetland management, by Shri Karma Sonam, Field Manager, Nature Conservation Foundation. The seminar was enriched with the technical presentations of Dr. Ajay Kumar Gupta from G.B. Pant, LRC-NIHE, on Ramsar sites in the Indian Himalayan Region, and Shri Raza Ali Abidi, Wildlife Warden, Kargil, on wetlands of Kargil.

The seminar concluded with a panel discussion chaired by Shri Rajesh S., IFS leading to the identification of recommendations and way forward. The panellists included Shri Raza Ali Abidi, Shri Padma Gyalpo, eBird Project Regional Coordinator Ladakh, Shri Arif Ahmad and Dr. Pankaj Chandan.

The seminar emphasized the integration of traditional knowledge with modern conservation practices for sustainable wetland management and highlighted the crucial role of wetlands in supporting biodiversity and the need for community based monitoring of wetlands, integration of local ecological knowledge in the conservation.

The day long event concluded with a flag-off ceremony of the Teams detailed for Asian Waterbird Census 2026 for survey locations at Changthang and Nubra, marking the beginning of comprehensive waterbird monitoring across the region.

Dr. O P Chaurasia, Director DIHAR-DRDO Leh, Shri Vishal V. Surve, IFS, Deputy Chief Conservator of Forests (Headquarters), Shri Mohd. Ali, SFS, Divisional Forest Officer, Leh, Shri Raza Ali Abidi, Wildlife Warden Kargil, Shri Karma Sonam, Director, Nature Conservation Foundation, Dr. Tsewang Namgyal, Director, Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, Dr. Pankaj Chandan, Asian Waterbird Census- J&K State Coordinator, Dr. Ajay Kumar Gupta, GB Pant LRC-NIHE, Members of Biodiversity Management Committee, Spituk, Leh, Cadets of NCC, pupils from different schools, attended the day long event.



