

Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary

Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary, located in Himachal Pradesh, India, is an important staging site for migratory species such as waterfowl and shorebirds. It is listed as one of the **Ramsar sites** in the year **2002**. The Government of Himachal Pradesh declared the Pong reservoir as a Pong Dam sanctuary under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 for the propagation and protection of the Wildlife.

About Pong Dam Lake

- Pong wetland, situated in the **Kangra** District of Himachal Pradesh.
- It is one of the largest man-made wetlands of Northern India, formed by the construction of the Pong Dam in 1974 across the **Beas River**.
- This wetland is the first major wetland that potentially offers a transitory resting reserve for the migratory birds coming from the Trans Himalayan zone in winter, when the wetlands in Europe and North and Central Asia become frozen due to the onset of winters.
- Flocks of waterfowl that breed in these areas in summer undertake migration to Pong to spend winter in more congenial climatic conditions every year during winter from October to March.
- The total catchment area extends in Kangra, Mandi and Kullu Districts.
- Dhauladhar Mountains are feeders of water supply to Pong Lake.
- Numerous major and minor tributaries – some perennial and some seasonal, such as Dehar, Bhul, Gaj, Baner, Nekar, etc. from the Dhauladhar ranges - directly drain into Pong Dam.
- The Pong reservoir has four major islands, which include:
 - Rancer,
 - Karu,
 - Kajal-ka-tapu and
 - Jattaan da Kual.

Conservation Status

- The Government of Himachal Pradesh proclaimed Pong wetland as a Wildlife (Bird) sanctuary in **1983**.
- Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary was declared a wetland of National Importance by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India in **1994**.

- The wetland earned the distinction of being among the global class of selected Sites.
- This is the first wetland of the state to have got the global arm of protection and declared a “RAMSAR SITE” in the year **2002**.

Climate

- The climate of the region is subtropical.
- Summer extends from mid-March to mid-July, and the monsoon season is from early July to mid-September.
- Winters are mild, starting in early December and lasting till mid-March.
- The temperature ranges from a maximum of 47 °C in summer to a low of 3.5 °C in winter.
- The rainfall is generally heavy and continuous from July to September.

Fauna and Flora

- The main forest type is Northern Dry Mixed Deciduous forests in and around the Pong wetland bird sanctuary.
- The area surrounding the Pong reservoir is most extensively occupied by shrubs and small trees.
- The Pong wetland harbours more than 420 species of birds belonging to about 56 bird families out of 77 families of the birds recorded in India.
- A total of 27 fish species belonging to five families have been recorded.
- 24 species of Mammals have been recorded in Pong.
- Pong reservoir may be categorized as a cat fish reservoir.
- Mahsheer is highly precious and the most sought after fish of Pong reservoir.
- 85 species of butterflies have been identified in Pong Lake.

Zones of the Sanctuary

The sanctuary area is divided into different zones keeping in view the objectives of the management plan such as:

1. Core zone - Conservation zone
2. Rehabilitation zone
3. Multiple Use zone - Buffer zone

4. Tourism zone - Overlapping zone

Significance of Pong Dam Lake

- The wetland has immense untapped potential for bird watching, camping, water sports, nature/heritage tourism and other multifarious recreational activities.
- Rare species like Vultures, Falcons, Indian Skimmer, Red Necked Grebes, White Fronted Geese and many Waders have been recorded in the wetland.
- Bar Headed Geese visiting pong in large number constitutes more than 40% of the world population.
- This makes the Pong wetland, the largest single congregation destination for Bar Headed Geese not only in India but also in the world.
- Places of cultural and mythological importance in and around pong add significant and spiritual value to the wetland.
- Pong Dam is probably the only reservoir in the country, which provides an opportunity for Mahsheer angling.
- The location of Pong Dam Lake is highly suited for ecotourism. The natural grandeur of the Lake with its magnificent backdrop invites ecotourists.

Concerns

- The temperature of the lake sometimes rises up to 47 °C during summer, and that may also reduce the oxygen concentration in the water body.
- As this wetland is glacier-fed, the impact of global warming on the wetland has to be considered and the effects of construction of new dams above streams, diversion of water for drinking, irrigation and hydropower, etc., have to be analysed.