

Indian Kashmir begins bird census at Himalayan wetlands

February 16 2016



Migratory birds fly above wetlands in Hokersar, 16 kilometers (10 miles) north of Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2016. Waterbirds cover tens of thousands of kilometers every year during their annual migratory cycle. Every year International Waterbird Census (IWC) is conducted to monitor the population of these birds around the world. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)

A meticulous counting of waterbirds began Tuesday in the wetlands and marshes of India's portion of the Himalayan region of Kashmir, which

attracts species migrating from as far as northern Europe and Japan.

More than 100 wildlife officials and volunteers were performing the region's second formal census, after scientists for years criticized less formal counts as unreliable.

Since last year, however, Kashmir's [wildlife officials](#) have been working as part of the global effort led by environment groups in accounting for the world's [waterbirds](#).

"In earlier years, let's admit, it was always an estimation, a guess work," wildlife warden Imtiyaz Lone said. "Now we're counting birds in a proper scientific way according to the internationally accepted guidelines."

Last year's census counted over half a million waterbirds visiting 13 wetlands in Kashmir. This year's two-day count includes up to 21 wetlands. The results will be released in about a month.



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Experts have said they expect the total number of birds visiting is declining because of habitat degradation and climate changes including more erratic rainfall.

"We're already witnessing substantial decline in the numbers. Unfavorable climate coupled with lesser precipitation this year are the major factors to this declining trend," Lone said.



Volunteers and officials participate in the monitoring of waterbird population at Hokersar, 16 kilometers (10 miles) north of Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2016. Waterbirds cover tens of thousands of kilometers every year during their annual migratory cycle. Every year International Waterbird Census (IWC) is conducted to monitor the population of wetland and waterbirds around the world. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)



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