Powai lake in the Mumbai Suburbs is an important resting, feeding, and breeding site of several bird species, resident and migratory. A combination of common urban birds as well as shy, rare and even threatened species characterize Powai lake. Some like Oriental Darter and Black-headed Ibis are listed as threatened species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which need to be conserved.

Life on Powai lake is always busy. You can catch an Oriental Darter darting its snakehead out of the water for a quick breath. Or endlessly fail to guess which side a fishing cormorant may jut out of the water as it plays peek-a-boo. As the Bronze-winged Jacana wades through the aquatic vegetation, led by its long feet, you will surely marvel at its catwalk on the floating matter. The sight of a Gray-headed Swamphen bending over its small black chick dotingly is enough to brim you with emotions. A sight to behold is the sure confidence of a Great Egret standing only inches away from a basking crocodile.

A small puddle amid the lake’s vegetation is all it takes for a lesson in the art of coexistence. Egrets, sandpipers, herons, ducks, an occasional bluethroat, prinias, a solitary snipe, lapwings, mynas, starlings, crows, bee-eaters and waterfowls can all be seen around these puddles going about their business, occasionally dispersing in chorus at the arrival of a harrier.

Among some of the lake’s rare and distinguished residents and visitors are the Watercock, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Slaty-legged Crake, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Woolly-necked Stork, Caspian Tern, and Peregrine Falcon. There are birds that catch insects in the air, that dive for fish, that depend on the vegetation for plant and animal food. Some cannot be seen out of the Powai lake limits, like Gray-faced Swamphen, Bronze-winged Jacana, and Pheasant-tailed Jacana.

No part of the lake is unused or unimportant. The aquatic/semi-aquatic plants that form the vegetation cover of Powai lake offer various edible sources like shoots, leaves, roots, stems, flowers and seeds. They act as home to many bird species, or foster-home in the case of migrants.

It is a microcosm of life that Powai lake shelters; crabs, insects, worms, fish and their eggs, lizards, snakes, frogs and their eggs, birds and their eggs and nestlings, molluscs, and rodents, crocodiles – all form part of the intricate food chain. It will be a mistake to view this vegetation homogeneously as ‘weeds’ that need to be weeded out, for the act will only spell doom to scores of species that depend on it.

Thanks to its proximity to Powai lake, IIT Bombay, a premier institution that hosts a rich biodiversity within its campus, is listed in eBird (an online database of bird observations) as the third biggest hotspot for birds in Mumbai Suburban, after Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and Bhandup Pumping Station (BPS). The institute has been mindful in protecting its wooded patches like Kol Dongri and Soneri Baug, that act as embankments to the lake.

Here is a peek into some birds recorded resting, feeding and breeding at Powai lake (this is not an exhaustive list). In some cases, hyphens between names have been ignored to make it easy while indexing. For instance, Asian Palm-Swift is written as Swift, Asian Palm and Black-crowned Night-Heron as Heron, Black-crowned Night. We have followed this style as it helps to club together species belonging to same groups like babblers, gulls, and drongos.
**Avadavat, Red:**
Resident around Mumbai; probably breeding visitor to Powai lake; mostly seen around December trying to build nest in the tall grasses; nesting success unsure; the male (right) and female (left) seen here were recorded in December 2020.

![Avadavat, Red bird](image)

**Babbler, Tawny-bellied:**
Resident; hangs out in groups of 5–6 around small shrubs; individuals can be spotted using the vegetation cover on Powai lake.

![Babbler, Tawny-bellied bird](image)

**Babbler, Yellow-eyed:**
Resident; uncommonly sighted singly or in pairs using the fringe vegetation of Powai lake.

![Babbler, Yellow-eyed bird](image)

**Bee-eater, Blue-cheeked:**
Migratory; rare to Powai lake; a group recorded in 2021 around the May cyclone.

![Bee-eater, Blue-cheeked bird](image)
**Bee-eater, Blue-tailed:**
Migratory; recorded at Powai lake from around October to end March; seen hanging out in groups, either perched on reeds or overarching branches or making quick sallies in the air for insects.

![Bee-eater, Blue-tailed](Photo Credit: Ikshan Ganpathi)

**Bee-eater, Green:**
Resident; breeds at Powai lake; over 2–3 individuals at a time seen making sallies in the air for a quick catch.

![Bee-eater, Green](Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir)

**Bittern, Cinnamon:**
Resident; in 2021, up to 3 individuals recorded together flying over Powai lake; the bird, relatively shy, hides well in the reeds and grasses.

![Bittern, Cinnamon](Photo Credit: Kabir Rao Deb)

**Bittern, Yellow:**
Migratory; recorded in 2021 at Powai lake, in the reeds.

![Bittern, Yellow](Photo Credit: Chintamani Prabhakar Joglekar)
Bluethroat: Migratory; recorded at Powai lake foraging on the ground around a small water inlet sheltered by long reeds.

Bulbul, Red-whiskered: Resident; land bird but often seen making trips to the long reeds in Powai lake; recorded in large numbers around the lake.

Cisticola, Zitting: Resident; uses the grass bed to forage and breed; small like Ashy Prinia; first heard then seen as it takes an undulating flight over the Powai lake bed making a zitting sound.

Coot, Eurasian: Resident to India; seen on Powai lake in the winter months, mostly swimming; single or a few individuals.
**Cormorant, Indian:**
Resident; not as common as Little Cormorant; seen resting on trees, long reeds or diving into Powai lake to fish.

**Cormorant, Little:**
Resident; seen throughout the year at Powai lake, mostly diving into the water to fish or drying its feathers in the sun.

**Coucal, Greater:**
Resident; seen using the long, dense shrubs in the lake bed, especially in monsoon.

**Crake, Ruddy-breasted:**
Resident; very shy bird; more heard than seen; recorded mostly when jumping from one spot in the reeds and grasses to another; at least a pair resides at Powai lake.
**Crake, Slaty-legged:**
Resident and migrant; shy bird, rarely spotted; recorded scurrying across the patches in the lake.

**Crow, House:**
Resident; seen in large numbers flying over Powai lake or on the vegetation bed or by the small puddles hunting, stealing, scavenging.

**Crow, Large-billed:**
Resident; similar to House Crow in behaviour; seen in large numbers at Powai lake.

**Darter, Oriental:**
Resident to India; migratory to Powai lake; uncommonly recorded; at least one individual recorded in 2021 from winter to early monsoon months; IUCN status – Near Threatened.
Drongo, Ashy:
Resident to Northeast and the Himalayas; winter visitor to Mumbai; similar to Black Drongo, seen giving the resident a competition in catching insects over Powai lake.

Drongo, Black:
Resident; roosts and breeds around the lake; recorded commonly flying over the vegetation in search of insects.

Duck, Indian Spot-billed:
Resident; uses Powai lake and its vegetation to roost, forage and breed; seen in one or two pairs.

Duck, Knob-billed:
Resident to India, recorded at Powai lake during the winter migratory season; occasionally sighted in pairs or singly; presence restricted to brief stopovers.
Eagle, White-bellied Sea:
Resident along the Indian coastline; recorded in 2021 flying over Powai lake.

Duck, Lesser Whistling:
Resident; hangs out in groups; uses the marshy habitat of Powai lake to roost and forage.

Egret, Cattle:
Resident; roosts, forages and breeds at Powai lake; seen in good numbers throughout the year, especially around cattle.

Egret, Great:
Resident; seen throughout the year at Powai lake, foraging individually.
**Egret, Intermediate:**
Resident; occurs in greater numbers than Great Egret; seen at Powai lake actively foraging, especially at small pools between vegetation.

![Egret, Intermediate](Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir)

**Egret, Little:**
Resident; slightly smaller than Intermediate Egret with similar foraging habits; occurs in good numbers at Powai lake.

![Egret, Little](Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir)

**Falcon, Peregrine:**
Migratory; dubbed the fastest animal on the earth; seen flying and hunting across Powai lake.

![Falcon, Peregrine](Photo Credit: Rakesh Das)

**Flamingo, Greater:**
Migratory to north, west and south India; a population breeds in Gujarat; occasional records of a few individuals using Powai lake for a brief stopover.

![Flamingo, Greater](Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan)
**Goose, Cotton Pygmy:**
Resident to India, recorded at Powai in the winter migratory season; seen in pairs; occasionally sighted.

**Grebe, Little:**
Resident; small bird; up to 4 individuals usually seen at Powai lake, diving in the water.

**Garganey:**
Migratory; a few records from Powai lake. The male (right) and female (left) seen here were captured flying over Powai lake in 2021.

**Goose, Cotton Pygmy:**
Resident to India, recorded at Powai in the winter migratory season; seen in pairs; occasionally sighted.

**Gull, Black-headed:**
Migratory; shorebird but seen once in a while flying over Powai lake during winter.
**Gull, Brown-headed:**
Migratory; shorebird only seen once in a while flying over Powai lake.

**Gull, Pallas’s:**
Migratory; shorebird uncommonly recorded at Powai lake.

**Harrrier, Eurasian Marsh:**
Migratory; at least two individuals seen hovering over Powai lake or resting on the reedbed regularly during the winter migratory season.

**Heron, Black-crowned Night:**
Resident; sets out to hunt after the day sets but active through the day during monsoon, flying from one vegetation patch to another; sometimes seen perched on tree branches skirting Powai lake.
Heron, Gray:
Resident in some parts of India; the stately bird is seen almost throughout the year foraging on the vegetation or roosting on trees.

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan

Heron, Indian Pond:
Resident; commonly recorded foraging on the Powai lake vegetation.

Photo Credit: Jaya Srivastava

Heron, Purple:
Resident; Powai lake hosts a good population especially during monsoon.

Photo Credit: Arghya Sinha

Heron, Western Reef:
Resident to parts of India; recorded at Powai lake a few times, flying from one patch to another.

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir
Ibis, Black-headed:
Resident; IUCN status Near Threatened; seen at Powai lake occasionally but not foraging for long.

Ibis, Glossy:
Resident in parts of India; more commonly seen at Powai lake in the winter months; a large number of the species roost on a tree overlooking the lake, along with cormorants, egrets, herons and crows.

Ibis, Red-naped:
Resident; since 2020, has been using the vegetation cover on the lake extensively for foraging; up to three individuals recorded at a given time.

Jacana, Bronze-winged:
Resident; seen commonly on the vegetation foraging; breeds at Powai lake; juveniles are common sight.
Kingfisher, Common:
Resident; seen more commonly in monsoon zipping past the lake expanse or perched on overhanging eyeing a good hunt.

Kingfisher, Pied:
Resident; uncommonly recorded at Powai lake; seen briefly in 2021 monsoon.

Kingfisher, White-throated:
Resident; not as common as Bronze-winged Jacana, the other Jacana species seen at Powai lake. In monsoon, male in breeding plumage often recorded flying from one patch to another.

Jacana, Pheasant-tailed:
Resident; not as common as Bronze-winged Jacana, the other Jacana species seen at Powai lake. In monsoon, male in breeding plumage often recorded flying from one patch to another.

Kingfisher, Common:
Resident; seen more commonly in monsoon zipping past the lake expanse or perched on overhanging eyeing a good hunt.

Kingfisher, Pied:
Resident; uncommonly recorded at Powai lake; seen briefly in 2021 monsoon.

Kingfisher, White-throated:
Resident; more commonly recorded than Common Kingfisher; a versatile hunter, it is also recorded flying past the vegetation bed to dive into the lake for a good catch.
**Kite, Black:**
Resident; occurs in large numbers; though an efficient scavenger, also seen diving into Powai lake to fish.

**Kite, Black-winged:**
Resident; uncommonly recorded at Powai lake.

**Kite, Brahminy:**
Resident; recorded commonly at Powai lake during winter and monsoon.

**Lapwing, Red-wattled:**
Resident; uses the grasses and reeds to forage and roost; at least a pair heard and seen at Powai lake.
Moorhen, Eurasian:
Resident; juveniles also recorded foraging on the vegetation at Powai lake.

Lapwing, Yellow-wattled:
Resident to India; locally migrates but rarely recorded from Powai lake; one individual recorded in 2021 landing on the reedbed.

Munia, Scaly-breasted:
Resident; hangs out in large flocks; uses the vegetation cover at Powai lake to forage; depends on the long grasses to build nests on trees like palm within the lake’s purview.

Munia, Tricolored:
Resident in parts of India; uncommonly recorded in the reeds and grasses of Powai lake.
Myna, Common:
Resident; widespread around Powai; recorded foraging around small puddles and in the grasses of Powai lake.

Openbill, Asian:
Resident to India; mostly seen flying over the lake; earlier records suggest its presence in Powai lake.

Osprey:
Migratory; recorded a few times over the years flying and hunting at Powai lake.

Prinia, Ashy:
Resident; a small, sprightly bird; remains active flying, diving into the grasses; Powai lake supports a good population.
Prinia, Plain:
Resident; not as common as Ashy Prinia; recorded at Powai lake perched on the reed or diving into the grasses.

Rail, Slaty-breasted:
Resident; shy and rarely seen except for a glimpse as it hurries into the reeds on Powai lake.

Roller, Indian:
Resident; recorded commonly in the winter migratory season, solitary, rolling from one green patch skirting Powai lake to another.

Sandpiper, Common:
Migratory; a common wader to these regions, up to 2-3 individuals seen around smaller puddles at Powai lake amidst vegetation.
Sandpiper, Green:
Migratory; a common wader to these regions, up to 1-2 individuals seen around the muddy banks of Powai lake.

Sandpiper, Marsh:
Migratory; seen along with other waders around small puddles at Powai lake; usually singly.

Sandpiper, Wood:
Migratory; smaller than Green Sandpiper, shares similar foraging habit and habitat; regular presence every winter migratory season.

Shelduck, Ruddy:
Migratory; breeds in the Himalayas; rare at Powai lake; a pair was recorded several years ago.
Shoveler, Northern:
Migratory; uncommonly recorded at Powai lake; this group of male and female Northern Shovelers were captured on Powai lake in 2021.

Shrike, Isabelline:
Migratory; a winter visitor not commonly recorded in Mumbai region; one individual recorded at Powai lake.

Shrike, Long-tailed:
Resident in parts of India; seen at Powai lake in the winter migratory season; occurs singly; often seen perched stoically over a long reed eying insects and worms.

Snipe, Common:
Migratory; seen foraging around small puddles amid the vegetation at Powai lake.
**Sparrowhawk, Eurasian:**
Migratory; recorded flying over Powai lake in the winter migratory season.

**Starling, Asian Pied:**
Resident; during winter migratory season, Powai lake witnesses an influx of this species, probably local migrants; recorded hanging out with other starlings on the vegetation cover of the lake; a small breeding population exists around the lake.

**Starling, Brahminy:**
Resident; recorded in small numbers; uses the waterlogged vegetation cover to feed; breeds around Powai lake.

**Starling, Chestnut-tailed:**
Resident in parts of east India; winter visitor to Powai lake; arrives in good numbers and recorded doing murmurations over the lake before they settle down to roost in the evening; use the vegetation cover of Powai lake to forage.
Starling, Malabar:
Resident of Western Ghats and Southern peninsula; recorded at Powai lake especially in monsoon in good numbers; uses the lake vegetation cover for foraging.

Stilt, Black-winged:
Resident; recorded regularly at Powai lake in small numbers; in 2020, an individual was also recorded breeding amidst the grasses in the lake.

Stonechat, Siberian:
Migratory; a pair usually recorded in the reeds and grasses of Powai lake.

Stork, Painted:
Resident in parts of India; recorded at Powai lake, often flying across the waters.
Stork, Woolly-necked:
Resident to India; rare visitor to Powai lake; a pair spotted once in 2021 over the marshes foraging.

Swallow, Barn:
Resident in parts of India; seen at Powai lake during the winter migratory season flying over the lake catching insects in the air.

Swallow, Wire-tailed:
Resident; recorded at Powai lake during the winter migratory season, flying with other swallows and swifts close to the vegetation cover, catching insects in the air.

Swamphen, Gray-headed:
Resident; Powai lake has a good population of these birds; use the vegetation to forage, roost, breed.
Swift, Alpine:
Migratory; seen at Powai lake in the winter months, flying and foraging over the lake, especially late evenings.

Swift, Asian Palm:
Resident; breeds on palm trees skirting Powai lake, seen foraging noisily above the lake in large numbers.

Swift, Little:
Resident; seen flying swiftly a little above the surface of Powai lake foraging in the air; recorded in huge numbers.

Tern, Caspian:
Migratory to the Indian coast; has been recorded flying over the Powai lake, foraging; a rare sight though.
**Tern, Common:**
Resident; seen flying over Powai Lake during the cyclone in May 2021.

**Tern, Gull-billed:**
Resident to India; seen in greater numbers mainly in winter, flying over the Powai lake marshes and foraging.

**Tern, River:**
Resident to India; one or two individuals seen flying over Powai lake, mainly in winter.

**Tern, Whiskered:**
Migratory; though said to be winter migratory bird to these parts, it is seen flying over Powai lake and foraging even in late summer and monsoon; in winter, it hangs over the lake in good numbers.
**Thick-knee, Indian:**
Resident; very few records from Mumbai; seen on the grasses of Powai lake in 2020.

**Wagtail, Citrine:**
Migratory; recorded uncommonly around small puddles in Powai lake foraging with waders and other bird species.

**Wagtail, Grey:**
Migratory; seen alone or in pairs along Powai lake’s drains and small puddles between the vegetation cover.

**Wagtail, Yellow:**
Migratory; not as common as Grey Wagtail; seen around small puddles.
**Warbler, Blyth’s Reed:**
Migratory; forages actively along the vegetation cover or in the long reeds of Powai lake.

**Warbler, Booted:**
Migratory; seen at Powai lake in the winter migratory season mostly by the lake fringes.

**Warbler, Clamorous Reed:**
Migratory; one of the last warblers to leave Powai lake with the onset of summer; the long reeds are its favourite hangout spots.

**Warbler, Common Grasshopper:**
Migratory; uncommonly recorded in Mumbai; regular visitor to Powai lake fringes.
Warbler, Paddyfield:
Migratory; small brown job recorded while perched on the long reeds at Powai lake.

Watercock:
Resident in some parts of India; a pair recorded at Powai lake in monsoon; shy bird, seen (rarely) foraging in the marsh bed or flying past the vegetation bed on the lake.

Waterhen, White-breasted:
Resident; a very common sight around Powai lake; seen foraging on the fringe vegetation; breeds on overarching tree branches.

Weaver, Baya:
Resident; recorded at Powai lake flying between the grasses and the trees on the fringes.
Birds that hang around the fringes of Powai lake

Babller, Jungle

Barbet, Brown-headed

Barbet, Coppersmith

Blackbird, Indian

Photo Credit: Mohul Gandhi

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir
Bulbul, Red-vented

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian

Bulbul, White-browed

Photo Credit: Megha Gupta

Bunting, Red-headed

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan

Buttonquail, Yellow-legged

Photo Credit: Kabir Rao Deb
Flycatcher, Brown-breasted

Flycatcher, Indian Paradise

Flycatcher, Red-breasted

Flycatcher, Taiga
Flycatcher, Tickell’s Blue

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir

Flycatcher, Ultramarine

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir

Flycatcher, Verditer

Photo Credit: Rakesh Das

Hoopoe, Eurasian

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian
Hornbill, Indian Gray

Iora, Common

Koel, Asian (Female)

Koel, Asian (Male)
Monarch, Black-naped

Photo Credit: Rakesh Das

Oriole, Indian Golden

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan

Owl, Barn

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian

Owl, Indian Scops

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir
Owlet, Spotted

Parakeet, Alexandrine

Parakeet, Rose-ringed

Pigeon, Gray-fronted Green

Photo Credit: Kabir Rao Deb

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian
Pigeon, Orange-breasted Green

Photo Credit: Dhruba Saikia

Pigeon, Rock

Photo Credit: Rakesh Das

Pigeon, Yellow-footed Green

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian

Pitta, Indian

Photo Credit: Megha Gupta
Robin, Oriental Magpie

Shikra

Sparrow, House

Starling, Rosy

Photo Credit: Megha Gupta
Photo Credit: Rakesh Das
Photo Credit: Megha Gupta
Photo Credit: Rakesh Das
Sunbird, Loten’s

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian

Sunbird, Purple

Photo Credit: Rakesh Das

Sunbird, Purple-rumped

Photo Credit: Ikshan Ganpathi

Sunbird, Vigors’s

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan
Tailorbird, Common

Photo Credit: Megha Gupta

Thrush, Orange-headed

Photo Credit: Ikshan Ganpathi

Thrush, Tickell’s

Photo Credit: Rakesh Das

Warbler, Green

Photo Credit: Jaya Srivastava
Warbler, Greenish

Warbler, Sykes’s

Warbler, Western Crowned

Warbler, Yellow-browed

Photo Credit: Usha Viswanathan

Photo Credit: T. R. Shankar Raman Wikimedia Commons

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir

Photo Credit: Sivaramakrishnan Sivasubramanian
Whitethroat, Lesser

Photo Credit: Rakesh Das

Woodpecker, Rufous

Photo Credit: Aniketa Kabir
Powai Lake on eBird

By Arghya Sinha and Krishnendu Sinha

Powai lake, with more than two hundred bird species, and countless other insects, fish, and other forms of life, is an important ecosystem in Mumbai. The IIT Bombay campus also plays a role in this ecosystem by providing tree cover, nesting sites, and feeding areas to the bird life on and around the lake. Ebird is an effective way to quickly and easily see the diversity of birds on the lake.

Ebird is an online database, accessible to anyone and everyone on the internet. It is managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, based in Ithaca, New York. It is one of the world’s largest biodiversity-related databases, with more than 100 million bird sightings recorded annually around the world. The data is used to study bird distribution, abundance, habitat use, and population trends. The data is collected using a scientific approach and is verified by some of the most knowledgeable bird distribution experts in the world.

Ebird stores bird sightings for prominent birding locations around the world that are called hotspots. Powai lake is part of two eBird hotspots — the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB) hotspot, and the Powai lake hotspot. The IITB hotspot lists 224 species (3rd highest in Mumbai Suburban, after Bhandup pumping station and Sanjay Gandhi National Park), and the Powai lake hotspot lists 111 species.

The IIT Bombay Hotspot on eBird is for the birds found in the institute campus as a whole. This includes both birds found on and around the IIT side of the lake (lakeside), as well as other prominent birding locations, such as the hillside area of the campus. From the ebird data for the IITB campus, we identified the bird species that have been observed on and around the lake. The lakeside list comprises of 207 species of birds that are directly dependent on the lake for food, shelter and nesting material.

On the other hand, the Powai lake hotspot on eBird is specifically for the lake. The species recorded in this hotspot are also covered in the IIT Bombay list, except for a few bird species. We compared the two lists of birds for both the hotspots and made a combined one of the bird species that are part of the ecosystem of the lake. A few records in the Powai lake list were found to be unreliable (as those species are unlikely to be found in this habitat) and have not been included in the list.

The final list has as many as 211 species of birds found in and around Powai lake. Compare this to Sanjay Gandhi National Park, another prominent birding location in Mumbai. The National Park hosts 239 species of birds as per the eBird database. In terms of size, it spans a huge area of 87 square kilometres, whereas Powai lake is just 2 square kilometres. The lake hosts almost as much bird life (88%) as SGNP in just over 2% of the National Park’s area. This makes Powai lake an ecologically valuable resource for the city. It should be conserved and maintained for the people of Mumbai.
Front and back cover images: Usha Vishwanathan and Rakesh Das

Reference