

Management of Ecotourism in National Chambal Sanctuary, India

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Introduction

India is a major destination for International Tourists. During the last decade, a trend emerged in India for nature-based tourism and ecotourism. In Central India there are many wildlife sanctuaries, particularly areas like National Chambal Sanctuary in Gwalior region have large attractions for Eco-tourism. This paper is the result of a study conducted in the National Chambal Sanctuary to investigate the potential for integrating crocodile conservation with ecotourism. Its main objective is to identify and where possible assess the potential long-term benefits and opportuni-

ties of strategically integrating crocodile conservation requirements with the future needs of ecotourism industry.

Methods

A survey of ecotourism operators was conducted to know the interests of tourists visiting the Chambal Sanctuary. Interviews were taken with ecotourists at different years while studying the ecology of aquatic animals in the Chambal River. Students were requested to fill the interview schedules on their interests, facilities available for ecotourism and conservation programmes of

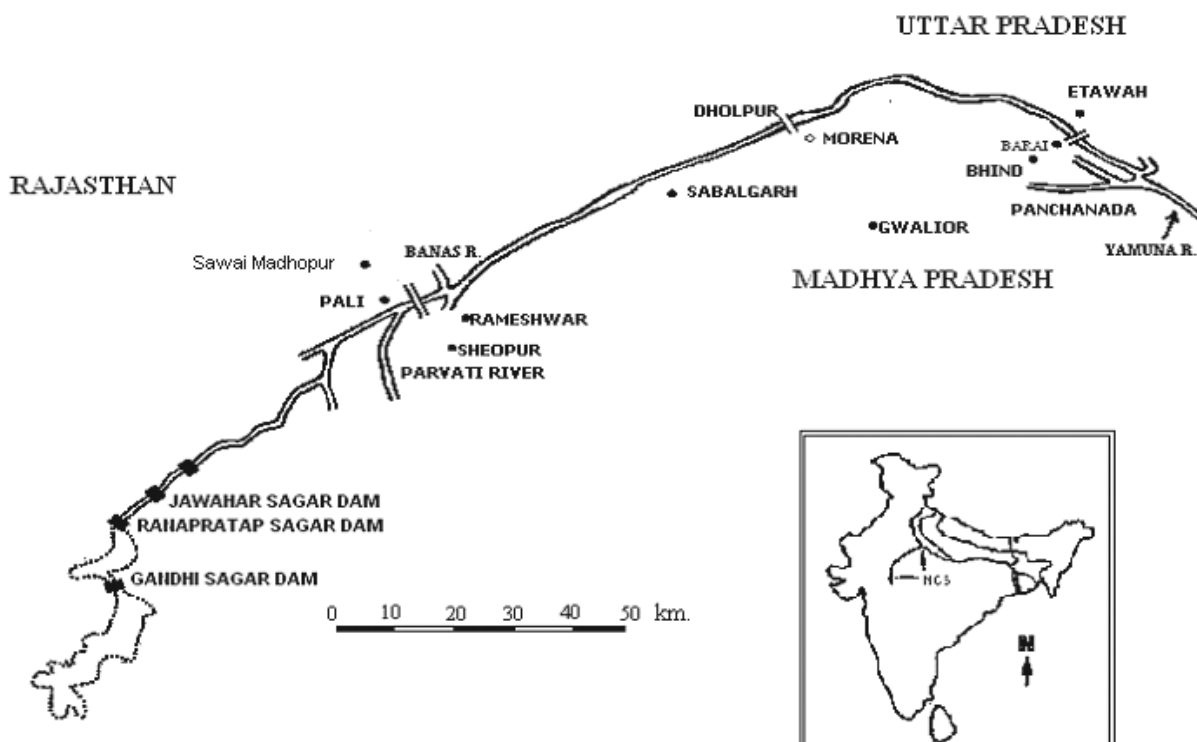


Figure 1: Map of National Chambal Sanctuary showing three entry points (Pali, Dholpur and Etawah) for ecotourism.



Figure 2: Wildlife in the National Chambal Sanctuary, India.



Figure 3: Ecotourism in the National Chambal Sanctuary, India

endangered species in the Sanctuary. Impact of ecotourism on the sanctuary has been assessed using the data on ecotourists and the management programmes of the Sanctuary.

Results

The National Chambal Sanctuary is one of the best-managed wildlife sanctuaries specially created for conservation of Gharial crocodile and other wildlife species like dolphin, otter, freshwater turtles, migratory birds etc. A large population of crocodiles is naturally breeding in the wild. Large numbers of domestic and international tourists visit the sanctuary during peak tourist season from October to April. The sanctuary is quite suitable for wildlife tourism, river rafting, canoeing, adventure tourism, religious tourism, and cultural tourism. A crocodile rehabilitation centre, head-quarters of the Sanctuary is located near the Chambal River to view the crocodiles and turtles in captive condition. The values of wilderness of the National Chambal Sanctuary are: good water quality, safe wildlife habitat, protecting rare and endangered species, providing scenic beauty, recreation opportunities, conserving natural areas for educational and scientific study, providing income for tourist industry. The NCS has all three important values like aesthetic, education and recreation.

Ecotourism in the Chambal Sanctuary is often associated with small group activities. Larger-scale tourism operations include day tours to Nadagaon in Uttar Pradesh sector from Agra, day trips at Rajghat in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh sector, boat trips up to Gharial nesting sites at Tigri-rethoura, or visits to view large numbers of migratory birds on the beach. All these tours provide an educational program for tourists as well as direct experience.

Large numbers of scientists visited the sanctuary to study wildlife conservation on the river and also made educational films. In India Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, which is approximately 25 km north of the Chambal Sanctuary is a major wildlife tourist attraction. The Rajasthan Government has taken initiatives to promote tourism in the National Chambal Sanctuary, to attract tourists coming to Ranthambhore to visit the Chambal also.

There is a well organised tourism sector in Agra in Uttar Pradesh. Every year many tourists visit Agra to see the world famous Tajmahal. The travel agents in Agra developed a tourism package for the tourists from Agra to Chambal Sanctuary to view wild animals like dolphins, crocodiles, migratory waterfowl etc. including the crocodile rearing centre at Deori, Morena.

This study explored two research questions related to the nature of customer satisfaction among various segments of visitors at National Chambal Sanctuary. Research studies revealed that visitors to the Sanctuary were better educated, more friendly towards conservation organizations and more supportive of efforts to protect the wilderness characters of the area. The social change in the region, national focus on the region's natural resources and a growing urban population, as well as educational efforts contributed to the increased tourism in the Sanctuary.

Conclusion

This paper argues for a detailed assessment of the ecological characteristics and natural features that attract tourists to the National Chambal Sanctuary. The studies revealed that people interested in seeing aquatic animals and birds visit the sanctuary regularly. The Government is interested to promote ecotourism in the sanctuary. However, better information is needed on tourists' desires, expectations and needs including tourist activity and fulfillment, across the tourism spectrum. It is recommended that the ecotourism in the National Chambal Sanctuary be ecologically sustainable, and for this to be successful that it contribute to the long-term maintenance of ecosystems and species in the Sanctuary. Major mechanisms for integrating biodiversity conservation and ecotourism and nature-based tourism in the National Chambal Sanctuary are explored in this study.