

**POTENTIAL FOR PROMOTING AVITOURISM IN NANTHIKADAL LAGOON,
MULLAITIVU, SRI LANKA**

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Avitourism plays a major role in wildlife tourism, contributing significantly to ecotourism. It has the potential to integrate sustainable development with wildlife conservation. The present study focused on the use of bird diversity for promoting ecotourism, specifically avitourism, in a selected area in Mullaitivu District, which consists of a unique geographical landscape including four lagoons, 208 freshwater tanks, a dense forest, and a 78 km stretch of coastline. All these resources give good opportunities for bird diversity, bird habitats, and potential for avitourism. In addition, the presence of infrastructure facilities such as road networks help promote avitourism within the study area. The point count method was utilized for estimating the bird diversity in the area. Sampling was conducted at nine selected points, encompassing three habitat types around Nanthikadal Lagoon. During the study period, 79 bird species belonging to 35 families were identified. Waterbirds were the dominant group observed, and among them, 26 species were migrants. According to the global/national conservation status, 10 species were Near Threatened (NT) and 3 were endemic. The forest area had the highest bird diversity (Shannon Index: 3.985), followed by shrub land (3.919) and marshy area (3.694). The present study also explored the potential for promoting avitourism, knowledge generation on bird diversity, and bird conservation. The Mullaitivu region not only holds avitourism potential, but also becomes a prime destination for ornithological studies, particularly in the realm of avitourism. It will simultaneously complement and enhance many other existing options for ecotourism.

Keywords: Avitourism, Conservation, Ecotourism, Nanthikadal Lagoon, Sri Lanka