

An Evaluation of Avitourism Potential in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka

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Avitourism (“bird-tourism”) is a growing sector in the broader nature-based tourism industry in the world. Jaffna District, one of the four richest water bird areas in Sri Lanka, has great potential for the promotion of avitourism. The area provides suitable habitats for a large number of bird species both migrant and resident, but its avitourism potential has not been evaluated previously, probably due to the three decade long civil war. Thus, the present study was designed to evaluate its avitourism potential using Geographic Information System (GIS). Potential analysis was carried out based on studies undertaken from 2013 to 2018 in the Jaffna peninsula. Multi Criteria Decision Method and criteria ranking method in GIS were used for suitability analysis. The evaluation process for avitourism sites was conducted based on six criteria viz. bird species diversity, tourist preferences, proximity to residential areas, proximity to tourists’ accommodation, distance from main roads, and scenic beauty (factors selected according to expert opinion). The ranking levels were applied within the criterion and between criteria. A suitability map was produced by overlaying six thematic maps. Based on multi criteria analysis, fifteen places among the thirty-eight birding places of Jaffna District were identified including Chundikkulam National Park, Mamunai, Vallai, Thondamanaru, Sarasalai, Anthanathidal, Avarankal East, Arali Baradge, Mandaitivu, Allaipiday, Mankumban, Chavakachcheri, Kopay, Putur and Navatkuli, as high avitourism potential areas; a further fourteen places as moderate potential areas; and the rest of the nine places as representing the lowest potential. The present study showed that several wetland areas in the Jaffna peninsula harbour many waterbird species, including the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), an uncommon migrant but a major attraction among avitourists. Based on the analysis, the potential statuses of bird sites were identified. Hence, the researchers recommend that these wetland areas should be considered for the promotion of avitourism, which will eventually aid in the conservation of these sites as well as the species.

Keywords: Geographic information system, Avitourism, Jaffna district, Multi criteria analysis, Suitability analysis