

# Balancing Ecotourism with Ecology: Please leave Kabini, Sankey alone

DH [deccanherald.com/opinion/balancing-ecotourism-with-ecology-please-leave-kabini-sankey-alone-964481.html](https://deccanherald.com/opinion/balancing-ecotourism-with-ecology-please-leave-kabini-sankey-alone-964481.html)

March 21, 2021

# DH



# DECCAN HERALD



Harini Nagendra,

- MAR 21 2021, 00:35 IST
- UPDATED: MAR 21 2021, 01:48 IST



Harini Nagendra

In the time of the pandemic, the importance of Bengaluru's spaces of nature is clearer than ever before. Lal Bagh and Cubbon Park are filled with visitors (many without masks, but that's a different story), and even the smaller pocket parks and lakes are full of people seeking a break from 'work-from-home'. What makes a visit to a park or a lake so sought after? The chance to get away from the usual, to see tree canopies that seem to touch the sky, to watch squirrels playing, glimpse a flash of green or blue as a parakeet or kingfisher crosses the horizon – making stress levels melt away, almost magically.

It is good to see that the latest budget plan of the state government has declared its intent to focus on tourism development in Karnataka. But tourism in spaces of nature should be very carefully designed, so that it does not interfere in the very ecosystem processes that it seeks to capitalise on. People need places of nature to visit. But nature cannot tolerate too much of a human footprint. It is a delicate balance, difficult to maintain. Too much focus on attracting tourism, through artificial projects, can rob a place of nature of everything that makes it come alive.

Two of the plans that have been tentatively announced have especially alarmed conservation groups. First, the plan to develop a 'Brindavan Gardens' style botanical theme park at the base of the Kabini dam, at a cost of Rs 48 crore. Such a large theme

park can have a major impact on the biodiversity of the forests around Kabini. The associated increase in road traffic and tourist numbers can take the human impact well beyond what the ecological capacity of the region can tolerate.

Closer home in Bengaluru is the plan to set up an artificial waterfall in Sankey Tank. The waterfall, announced with fanfare in the press, will be 12-15 feet high, 100 feet in width, and cost Rs 1.5 crore. The stated focus is to boost tourism. But Sankey Tank is already one of the most visited of Bengaluru's lakes. The lake is much smaller than it was when it was built, in the late 20th century, having lost ground to many private developments several decades ago. More recently, jogging and walking tracks and parks created within the lake area have reduced the amount of water that the lake can hold, contributing to the flooding that this region experiences every monsoon.

It is not too far back that the lake was handed over to an energy drinks company for a FlugTag event – memories of that event still linger in Bengaluru's consciousness. Residents complained that the lake was left littered with garbage, and it took ages to clean it up. Though this was a one-off event, it gave us a glimpse of what could be an inevitable outcome when we have commercial utilisation of lakes going on overdrive.

The bird diversity at Sankey Tank, though still impressive, is a shadow of what it used to be some decades back. This is the case with all lakes in Bengaluru. Older residents near Kaikondrahalli and Bellandur lakes, at the other end of the city, say they used to see pelicans, painted storks and other birds visit in large numbers. Children were deputed to stand guard near the mango orchards near the lakes to chase away the flocks of parakeets, which could devastate an orchard in an evening, so huge were the flocks. Now, people have to make the long trek to Muthanallur lake near Chandapura, Gulakamala lake near Kanakapura, or one of the other waterbodies outside Bengaluru, to see a functional, thriving water body.

A functioning forest is different from a botanical theme park, and a thriving lake is different from an artificial pool with a waterfall. While Karnataka needs tourism, we must also ensure that an ecological balance is maintained.

## NEXT STORY



Jyoti Punwani,

- MAY 09 2022, 14:16 IST
- UPDATED: MAY 13 2022, 15:33 IST