

CONSERVATION VALUE

Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajgir, (RWLS) is a small sanctuary of 35.84 sq km. under the Nalanda Forest Division, Bihar Sharif. Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary represents a remnant patch of forests nestled in the picturesque Rajgir hills within the South Gangetic Plain that is an important habitat for wildlife including the Painted Spurfowl, apart from numerous other fauna including mammals such as the hyaena and jungle cat amongst others. Rajgir also is of prime religious and cultural significance important to Buddhists, Jains and Hindus alike, and is dotted with numerous shrines, relics and monuments to the past. Protecting this sanctuary, which is far more important to the larger ecological, agricultural and cultural landscape than its mere size suggests, is consequently important. This sanctuary provides numerous ecosystem services to the surrounding landscape and even globally. The Forest Survey of India map (FSI, 2015) of Bihar indicates that this is the only forest-covered patch in Nalanda district. Therefore, to protect this forest vestige, a 35.84 km² was notified as Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary under section 18 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 vide S. O. No 727 dated 25.05.1978.

Rajgir WLS lies between latitudes 24° 55' and 25° 05' N and longitude 85° 6' and 85° 30' E in the Nalanda district of Bihar. The sanctuary is enclosed by five peaks of the Rajgir hills that form a natural boundary, separating the sanctuary from the surrounding landscape of agricultural fields, habitation, roads and villages. These five peaks are Vipulgiri (1), Ratnagiri (2), Udaigiri (3), Sonagiri (4) and Baibhavgiri (5). To the north of the sanctuary is located the Panchanae and Saraswati rivers as well as the town of Rajgir.

The Rajgir hills, although naturally floristically poor, support fauna characteristic of dry, deciduous forests including a fast-dwindling, globally Near Threatened (Arumugam et al., 2015) population of Striped Hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*). Moreover, the mosaic of habitats such as scrub forest, bamboo thickets, grasslands, rocky cliffs and sal forests ensure a varied and diverse birdlife including species endemic to this region of India like the Painted Spurfowl (*Galloperdix lunulata*). A survey of wildlife (TERI, 2015) found 28 species of larger mammals, over 183 species of birds, 39 species of reptiles, 11 species of amphibians, 13 species of fishes, 51 species of butterflies and 6 species of scorpions. These surveys point to a varied diversity and abundance of wildlife that is characteristic of this region, and the range of habitats and ecosystems found in Rajgir WLS.

Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*), Neelgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Cheetal (*Axis axis*), Jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus murghi*), porcupine (*Hystrix indica*), Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*), Langur (*Semnopithecus entellus*), Monkey (*Macaca mulatta*), Jackal (*Canis aureus*) are the species of vital importance in Rajgir Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajgir besides some of the endangered species like, Barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), Python (*Python molurus molurus*) etc. are also found in the Sanctuary.

Rajgir wildlife sanctuary is a mosaic of mixed Sal forest, thorny shrub desert patches, bamboo patches and hilly areas with dry deciduous forests, creating a set of varied and favourable habitats for avifauna.

A total of 183 species of bird were recorded by TERI during field visits conducted in the Rajgir wildlife sanctuary (2014).

During the winter season migratory birds like the Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Red-crested Pochard (*Rhodonessa rufina*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) frequent water bodies in, and around Rajgir wildlife sanctuary. There is a good diversity of migratory birds in the Basuri Talab waterbody. Vulture species are not spotted in this area except the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*).

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