

Winged Wonders of Odhni Dam

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BIHAR, which is located in the eastern part of India, is endowed with a history, spiritual significance and picturesque natural beauty. There are many things that make this place worth visiting, including many dams and reservoirs, which are not only a source of tourism and reclamation activities but also home to a myriad of avian species, including migratory birds. One such dam is the famous Odhni dam, which is situated in the Banka district of Bihar. Odhni Dam is famous for its water sports adventures and boating activities, and it is the area's most recognisable landmark.

Odhni dam (Lat. 24.82978' and Long. 86.81634') is situated near Balliamahra village, which is approximately 12 kilometres from the Banka district and is surrounded by mountains and forests, providing a refreshing and scenic environment. The dam offers a mesmerising view, making it a good tourist spot. Road connectivity to the place is good, which allows easy access for visitors. Perhaps, this is the reason that recently the dam has gained widespread recognition and has become a potential tourist destination where people take respite from the burden of their hectic lifestyle. The dam is surrounded by hillocks and is covered with fresh water, making it an appropriate place for recreational activities.

The dam has a maximum water level of 126.22 m, while the length of the dam is 686 m. The gross storage capacity of the dam is 51.56 Mm³ (MWL), and its full reservoir level is 123.63 m. In addition to it, the Belharni and Barua streams are located in the north-western part of the dam, and Chanan and Odhni streams flow from the centre of the area. It is framed by a few tidal surges that flow across these streams, making it suitable for boating rides on the dam. These streams have a long life span, which evaporates in the summer but gets flooded

in the rainy season. In the case of Chanan and Barua streams, dikes and canals have been constructed, which inundate the fertile land and prevent floods nearby.

Different Feathers Flock Together

Stretches of wild vegetation and barren land along the periphery of Odhni Dam have greatly impacted the life and landscape of the region in many ways. On the one hand, it is one of the biggest water reservoirs in the state, while on the other hand, its natural habitat attracts a large number of birds every year, including both resident and migratory birds. The Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (DEF&CC), Government of Bihar and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) recently in which a special emphasis was given regarding research and monitoring of birds and their habitats, to increase public awareness against illegal poaching and also to sensitise people in protection and propagation of birds. Above all, the (MoU) also obliges the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) to extend its technical support to the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (DEF&CC), Government of Bihar in conducting of Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) every year during the winter season to boost the citizen science initiatives in the state.

Hence, in collaboration with the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (DEF&CC), Government of Bihar and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), a team consisting of bird watchers, researchers and bird enthusiasts under the umbrella of Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) surveyed the Odhni Dam from 2022 to 2024 and were amazed by seeing the magnificent avian diversity in and around the dam area. To begin with, the reservoir attracted a large influx of bird species, including ducks and other waterfowl. The constant availability of abundant food sources like fish, crustaceans, insects, etc. ensured the food security of the birds. In addition to this, the small islands in the middle of the water and the bank of the dam were ideal breeding grounds for many species of birds. The team also witnessed different varieties of shrubs and trees that were scattered around the dam area. These shrubs and trees were also home to a myriad species of birds, which the birds utilised for roosting, nesting and foraging.

In the middle of winter, a huge congregation of migratory birds were seen by the team along the mud banks, small islands and mudflats. During the past two years more than 60 species of birds (including both resident and migratory) were recorded in the catchment area of the dam like Bar headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Large



A Panoramic View of Odhni Dam, Banka, Bihar