

# Mumbai's Chronicles in Pink!

By Ankita Jha



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Sewri is a locality along the east coast of south Mumbai. Despite being an industrial area, it offers nature lovers a truly unique experience. A rather intriguing flock of birds arrive here around six months before the monsoons lash the city. Undeterred by the tall chimneys belching out industrial smoke, they come year after year, in search of abundant feeding grounds. The smoke and clouds may meet in the sky and become indistinguishable, but these birds stand out in every way possible. You must have guessed by now which birds I am talking about – flamingos, of course!

Even experts are unsure where they fly in from, but most are believed to be domestic flights from Gujarat. For over two decades now, flamingos have kept their date with this beautiful city.

Take a trip to Sewri during low tide and watch a sea of pink take charge where the waters trail off. Watch them float, fly, swim and eat and once they get tired, watch them stand on one leg to get some much needed rest. Get your binoculars and camera, because the flamingos can easily command

your attention for hours. And the landscape that surrounds them only adds to the intrigue. The rusted abandoned ships, the sparkling bronze marshy sand, the early morning sun, other interesting water birds mixed with the neglected crows and pigeons, make for a great way to begin your day.

But don't let the pink hue fool you; flamingos are tenacious birds. The pink in their plumage is all thanks to the algae and crustaceans that they ingest. And no, they aren't trying to hide like an ostrich when they dunk their head into the water for that is how they feed. Their tongues draw water inwards like a pump and their beaks act like filters to catch the algae making their entire feeding mechanism quite unique. The alkaline beds created here because of the sewage seeping out of the city are full of the algae that flamingos love to eat.

However, if one human activity is drawing them here, another is threatening to push them away. Conservationists are crying foul over a plan to build yet another sea link, this time connecting south Mumbai to Navi Mumbai. They fear the link will lead to

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the destruction of the flamingos' feeding grounds. No one knows for sure how adversely the migration of the flamingos will be affected, but environmentalists don't want to take a chance. They are up in arms against the bridge, and their weapon of choice is spreading awareness. Moving the link's path by a few kilometres can ensure that the flamingos aren't affected. Adjusting and changing our plans for the benefit of another creature we share our planet with doesn't seem like a lot to ask for. However, individuals involved in the project don't want to make this compromise.

Awareness among citizens about what we will gain from the project and what we stand to lose is one thing that can ensure a more democratic decision about the bridge. If you are in Mumbai and can spare a morning for the flamingos, you must plan a visit. I believe only those who make the trip will understand that the lives of thousands of these beautiful creatures depend on the decision 'to bridge or not to bridge'. 🐾



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