Ranganathittu: A Ramsar Home for Birds on the Cauvery's Islands

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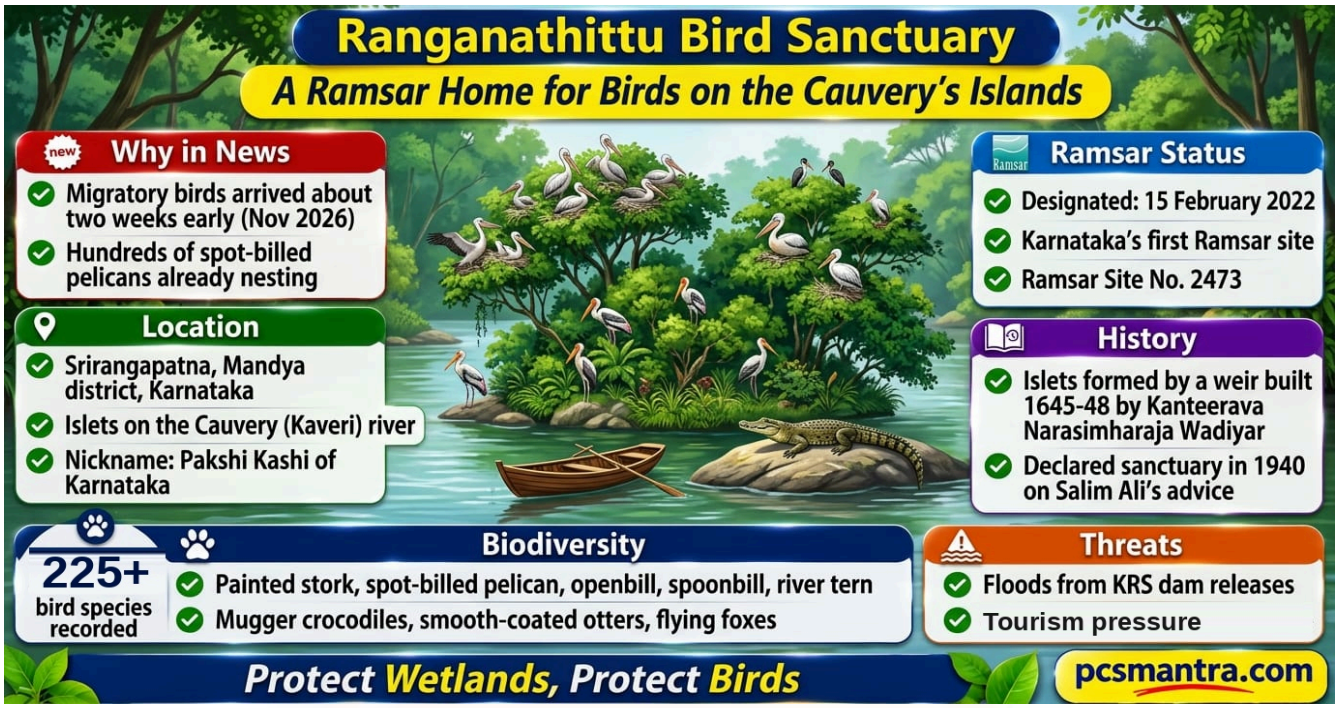

Original symbolic illustration: pcsmantra.com

News Reference: Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary (Ramsar Site No. 2473), Mandya, Karnataka: reports of early arrival of migratory birds, 23 November 2026

Why in the News

A report of 23 November 2026 says migratory birds, which usually reach Ranganathittu in the first week of December, have begun arriving about two weeks early. A naturalist at the sanctuary suggested deficit rainfall and food shortage in their habitat as reasons. This is the naturalist's view, not a confirmed scientific finding.[2]

For the exam, the real subject is the site itself: a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.[1]

Ramsar site: facts at a glance

Designation: Ramsar Site No. 2473, designated on 15 February 2022.[1]

Location: Mandya district, Karnataka; islands and islets in the mid-stream of the Cauvery. Coordinates 12°24'28"N, 76°40'55"E.[1]

Area (read carefully): The Ramsar Information Sheet gives an official area of 517.70 ha (515.513 ha calculated from GIS boundaries). This is the area of the whole wetland. Do not confuse it with any smaller

inner part of the sanctuary or with other figures.[1]

Three parts: (1) Devaraja Islands, 59.08 ha, about 1.60 km downstream of Krishna Raja Sagara dam; (2) around Puttaianakoppalu Island, 202.82 ha, about 8.30 km downstream; (3) Gendehoshally Islands, 255.79 ha, about 30 km downstream.[1]

Biodiversity

Inventory: 188 plant species, over 225 bird species, 69 fish species, 13 frog species and 30 butterfly species, per the sheet.[1]

Breeding site: An important breeding site for about 20 waterbird species, of which 17 breed on trees on the islands.[1]

Other species: Healthy populations of mugger crocodile (Crocodylus palustris) and smooth-coated otter (Lutrogale perspicillata); the river holds the endangered hump-backed mahseer (Tor remadevii).[1]

More than 1% of a population (Criterion 6): Based on 2018 to 2022 census averages, 1,391 spot-billed pelicans, 13.91% of the biogeographic population; 1,568 painted storks (6.27%); 1,572 black-headed ibis (6.29%).[1]

Ramsar criteria

The sheet justifies Criteria 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8: rare species and threatened communities (2), biological diversity (3), support during a critical life-cycle stage (4), more than 1% of a waterbird population (6), significant and representative fish (7) and fish spawning grounds (8).[1]

Conservation history

Per the sheet, Dr Salim Ali drew attention to the place in 1939. The Government of the Maharaja of Mysore declared it a bird sanctuary on 1 July 1940, and the Government of Karnataka notified it as Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 on 1 September 1998.[1]

Exam analysis

River-island ecology: Tree-covered islands in the Cauvery are nesting sites for large waterbirds, and the surrounding area is irrigated, with paddy and sugarcane widely grown. This is analysis based on the facts in the source.

- **Pressures:** The sheet records about 3.5 lakh tourists a year and irrigated farmland around the site; managing both tourism and farming pressure is a key task.
- **Climate:** Reading signs such as early arrival of birds needs long-term data.

For Mains

Question: "A Ramsar designation gives a wetland no absolute shield; it fixes a responsibility of wise use." Examine with reference to Ranganathittu. (Answer in 150 words) | 10 marks

Answer Outline

Introduction: Ranganathittu is a 517.70 ha Ramsar site on the Cauvery (designated 15 February 2022), known for breeding waterbirds.

Main body:

- **Value:** Criteria 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8; breeding of about 20 waterbird species; mugger crocodile and otter.
- **Pressures:** About 3.5 lakh visitors a year; irrigated farming around; changes in water level and floods.
- **Management:** Sanctuary protection (1998 notification), regulation of tourism, water and ecological monitoring.

Conclusion: Ramsar status gives recognition and commitment; lasting conservation depends on managing tourism and farming pressure effectively.

Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1: With reference to Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, consider the following statements:

1. It lies in Mandya district of Karnataka on the Cauvery river.

2. It was designated a Ramsar site on 15 February 2022.

3. It lies on islands of the Krishna river.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

▼ **Answer and explanation**

Answer: (b)

- Statement 1 is correct: per the sheet it lies on islands in the Cauvery in Mandya district.
- Statement 2 is correct: the designation date is 15 February 2022.
- Statement 3 is incorrect: the river is the Cauvery, not the Krishna.

Question 2: What is the official area of the Ranganathittu Ramsar site?

Choose the correct answer:

(a) 51.77 ha

(b) 5,177 ha

(c) 1,770 ha

(d) 517.70 ha

▼ **Answer and explanation**

Answer: (d)

- The Ramsar Information Sheet gives the official area as 517.70 ha.

Syllabus Mapping:
Mains: GS-3 (environment, conservation, biodiversity, wetlands)
Prelims: Environment and ecology; Ramsar sites; protected areas

Sources

1. Ramsar Information Sheet: Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Site No. 2473 (published 3 August 2022)
2. Deccan Herald: Birds start arriving early at Ranganathittu (23 November 2026), used only for the news reference

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Summary answer: Ranganathittu is a 517.70 ha Ramsar site on the Cauvery in Mandya, Karnataka, designated on 15 February 2022.

Question: Where is the Ranganathittu Ramsar site?

In Mandya district, Karnataka, on islands in the Cauvery river.

Question: What is its area?

Official area 517.70 ha (515.513 ha calculated from GIS boundaries).

Question: Which Ramsar criteria apply?

Criteria 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8, per the Ramsar Information Sheet.