

This winter, meet the flamingos in a sprawling, 1,690ha sanctuary

Visitors Will Be Able To Access It Only By Boat

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Mumbai: Mumbaikars will be able to access the Thane Creek flamingo sanctuary by the year-end. The sanctuary extends from the Vashi bridge to the north of the Airoli bridge on the west bank of Thane. It is spread over 1,690 hectares, of which 600ha is the creek and 1,000ha are mangroves.

The gateway to the sanctuary will be from Airoli. What is unique about this sanctuary is that visitors will be able to access it only by boat. N Vasudevan, chief conservator, Mangrove Conservation Cell, said a marine bio-diversity interpretation centre is being set up at Airoli where visitors will be given information about the sanctuary, mangroves, flamingos and other wetland birds. It will also have information on the marine ecology of the state.

“We are procuring two pontoon boats to take visitors across the sanctuary. One will



have a small capacity of around ten persons and the other a larger capacity of around 30 persons. The larger one will be used on the main creek while the smaller one will take visitors to the two creeklets,” said Vasudevan. The number of trips will depend on the tide. Each trip will be for 45 minutes. The conservation cell has raised Rs 4 crore from various sources for the interpretation centre and the boats.

In fact, the cell is managing the sanctuary as well as mangrove forests across the state with a skeletal staff of 24 guards, seven foresters and five range

officers. “We have asked for an additional 55 guards chiefly for Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. Besides, Wildlife Institute of India has been asked to prepare a management plan for the sanctuary,” said Vasudevan.

Development of the sanctuary has been divided into two phases. In the first phase, the cell will introduce the boats and the second, it will put up a whaleskeleton on display at the interpretation centre and develop a mangrove board walk. This is estimated to cost Rs 10 crore and likely to be funded by Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority

(MMRDA). MMRDA is executing Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link, which will adversely affect the Mahul-Sewri mudflats, a major foraging area for flamingos. In fact, it is feared that the flamingos may never return to the mudflats once construction of the bridge commences on account of the noise pollution and movement of equipment.

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) that had been appointed to study and recommend mitigation measures in its report had suggested extending the Thane creek sanctuary to include the Mahul-Sewri mudflat and Uran mudflats, which support 40,000 flamingos. It had also sought protected status for NRI-TSC wetlands, Panje-Funde wetlands as well as those north of it. While the government has accepted the condition, it is yet to notify these areas as a sanctuary. MTHL has been sanctioned on the condition that all mitigation and conservation measures will be implemented and the cost will be funded by MMRDA.

D Stalin, director of the NGO Vanashakti, said once the bridge is complete the flamingos will return.