

Bijnor Mahotsav: Celebrating a Ramsar Site & The Art of Living's Remarkable Role in Community-led Conservation

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This November, Bijnor district marks a historic milestone – its 200th anniversary – with the grand Bijnor Mahotsav on November 8th, 9th, and 10th, 2024. Bringing together people from across the world with ties to Bijnor, the event will not only celebrate the district's vibrant cultural heritage but also spotlight the Haiderpur Wetland, an ecological gem now recognised as a Ramsar site of global importance. This recognition is thanks in large part to Ashish Loya, an Art of Living faculty member inspired by world revered humanitarian and spiritual leader Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. His dedication to Haiderpur has brought crucial awareness to its unique biodiversity, securing its place on the global conservation map.



Grasslands are an ideal habitat for the endangered Swamp Deer

A Call to Protect

For many years The Art of Living social Projects has been at the forefront of environmental restoration and community-led conservation efforts across India, empowering local communities to protect and cherish natural wonders like Haiderpur. Guided by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's belief that, "People should be encouraged to treat the planet as sacred, to treat trees and rivers as sacred, to treat people as sacred, and to see God in nature and in people," the organisation continues to inspire a deep-rooted respect for nature and lasting environmental care.

The Hidden Jewel of Haiderpur Wetland Unveiled

Tucked away in Uttar Pradesh's Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary, Haiderpur Wetland covers an impressive 6,900 hectares. This wetland, formed in 1984 after the construction of the Madhya Ganga Barrage, remained in obscurity for decades, its ecological importance largely overlooked. However, this unassuming landscape holds immense biodiversity, supporting a variety of habitats, including rivers, marshes, grasslands, and forests. It is home to an astonishing range of wildlife,

from otters, jungle cats, and swamp deer to the elusive Gangetic dolphins. For bird lovers, Haiderpur Wetland is a paradise, with over 327 bird species, including endangered species like the Indian Skimmer and the Sarus Crane.

Despite its rich natural diversity, the wetland was once considered a wasteland. It wasn't until The Art of Living Social Projects and its dedicated environmentalists intervened in 2013 that the true value of Haiderpur was brought to light.

A Conservation Triumph

The organisation's commitment to environmental conservation, rooted in its broader mission of world peace and sustainable development, extended to the Haiderpur Wetland with a series of initiatives aimed at raising awareness and securing its protection. Collaborating with local communities, NGOs, and government officials, Ashish Loya advocated for the preservation of the wetland ensuring that its ecological significance was recognised both nationally and globally. The efforts culminated in 2021 when Haiderpur was officially declared India's 47th Ramsar Site, marking a turning point for the area.

This recognition sparked renewed interest from conservationists and birdwatchers, eager to explore the wetland's treasures. Rare bird species like the Smew and the Indian Grassbird now attract global attention, putting Haiderpur firmly on the map as an essential conservation site. However, this success story is not just the result of governmental initiatives or external interest but is deeply intertwined with the efforts of the local community.



Haiderpur Wetlands are a popular wintering ground for 3000+ Grey

Educating Future Guardians

A standout aspect of The Art of Living's Haiderpur's conservation efforts is its commitment to community education and engagement. The organisation has conducted educational tours for over 4,000 students, offering firsthand insights into this vital ecosystem. In addition, awareness workshops in more than 40 surrounding villages have fostered appreciation for local biodiversity. Over 25 local youth, including several women, have been trained as nature guides. They play a crucial role in protecting the wetland from illegal activities while educating visitors and locals about its importance, thus enhancing the community's connection to their environment.

Together for Haiderpur's Future

When the Bijnor Mahotsav unfolds, it will offer an ideal platform to celebrate the progress made in protecting the Haiderpur Wetland. From the cultural legacy of the district to its commitment to environmental preservation, this festival will invite the world to not only reflect on the district's illustrious 200-year history but also to join hands in

supporting its vibrant future, where nature and heritage thrive in harmony.

About the Art of Living Social Projects

The Art of Livings holistic approach to preserving the environment is turning crisis into hope. Fostering change through vast tree plantations, restoring life to once-barren and polluted waterways, advocating natural farming for soil health are just some of the many ingenious and sustainable Art of Living initiatives that revitalise communities, livelihoods, and even policies.

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