



## Discounts on entrance fees for exercising in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, India

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mainly based on an interview with Vinod B. Mathur  
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**Short title:** Discounts on entrance fees for exercising in National Park, India

**Key Message:** Citizens of an Indian town claim free of charge access to a protected area for their morning exercises and therefore demonstrate the immense value that recreational and other cultural ecosystem services have to society.

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### 1. What was the problem?

Keoladeo National Park is located about 200km south of New Delhi, nearby the town of Bharatpur in the Indian state of Rajasthan. It covers an area of 28.73 km<sup>2</sup> (WWF 2010:36).

Bharatpur has a population of around 250,000. Amidst the urban landscape, the forests and wetlands of Keoladeo attract hundreds of people, who visit the park every morning to walk and enjoy the fresh air, beauty and tranquility (WWF 2010:36). The walkers are mostly men, but women and children also take part. Bird watching in the park's wetland areas is a popular tourist attraction.

Local residents had been visiting Keoladeo Park regularly for recreational purposes long before it had been declared a national park in 1981. In 1985, the park became a World Heritage Site. The purpose of the World Heritage Site was primarily to protect a large number of migratory aquatic birds, particularly the Siberian Crane (*Grus leucogeranus*) (WWF 2010:36). As local residents were regularly walking up to what was to be the core of the protected wetland to do their morning exercises (often involving noisy elements like clapping or laughing in synchrony), the park management decided to scale down public access to the park and to ban noisy forms of exercises. Free access to the park was therefore closed.

Instead, the park management decided to charge an access fee to the park to cover the costs for the management of the national park. This fee would apply to local residents doing their morning exercises, as well as to tourists.

When the park management declared their intention to impose general fees, local people who had been visiting the park for their morning exercises protested heavily and demanded free park access for morning exercising.

**2. Which ecosystem services are relevant?**

Though the main purpose of the national park is the conservation of wildlife, the directly relevant ecosystem services for this TEEBcase are cultural services: *Recreation, Tourism and Aesthetic appreciation*. However, the national park also provides a vast range of other essential ecosystem services, such as *Regulation of local climate and Habitats for species*.

The provision of these cultural ecosystem services was not directly examined for the case study. However, the protests by local citizens and their demands to re-open the park for their recreational activities are evidence enough that people obtain important benefits from visiting the national park.

**3. How did the park management solve the situation?**

**a. First Phase: Discount on entrance fees for national park**

As a response to the protests by local morning walkers, the management rethought their strategy. It was decided to drop the fee for morning walkers, and instead keep an entrance fee up only for tourist purposes (mainly bird watching).

In this sense, the park management offered every resident of Bharatpur (ID and address proof required) a free ‘morning walkers pass’, which allowed the holder to enter Keoladeo park free of charge during the set morning walk hours and exercise on a designated 2km stretch. There were hardly any extra costs for implementing the new scheme. The park managers now start their duty an hour earlier than before, to control the ‘morning walkers’ passes’, but this does not have any major financial implications. The ID-passes for the morning walkers were produced cost-efficiently, with a passport picture and basic personal data printed on paper, with no digitalization.

While most of the park consists of wetlands, the 2km stretch for the ‘morning walkers’ leads exclusively through terrestrial areas. The birds’ and other wildlife’s habitats are mostly in the park’s wetland areas, which the morning walkers are not permitted to access. The wetland areas are restricted to tourists, who come later in the day for bird watching. As long as the ‘morning walkers’ obey the rules set up by the park management they are therefore of no disturbance to breeding birds and other wildlife when exercising and chatting.

Specifically, the entrance scheme of Keoladeo national park works as follows:

5am – 7am	exclusively morning walkers admitted, enter free of charge with their ‘morning walkers pass’
from 7am - dusk	exclusively tourists admitted, pay an entrance fee; ‘morning walkers pass’ not valid

The park guards open the entrance gates at 5am to check the 'morning walkers' passes'. The early opening times are feasible, as summer temperatures in Bharatpur rise quickly during the day and residents consider it too hot to exercise outdoors after 7am. Demand for outdoor exercising opportunities is therefore low during the day. The usage pattern varies with the course of the year: during summer, when daytime temperature in Bharatpur town can reach over 45°C, the number of 'morning walkers' touches nearly 1,000 (WWF 2010:36). Demand for cooling down from the city's heat decreases when winter comes.

As visitors come to enjoy the fresh, un-polluted air inside the park, no motorized vehicles are permitted inside the park. The only means of transport allowed (and only after 7am) is the 'cycle rickshaw-pullers', who also serve as nature guides for the tourists (WWF 2010:36).

Latest by 7am, all morning walkers are obliged to leave the park. This is to prevent a conflict of usage of the 2km stretch between the 'morning walkers' and the tourists who come walking, on bicycles or in rickshaws for bird watching.

Unfortunately, quite a number of 'morning walkers' refused to obey the park's rules, and the management had to draw according consequences in a second phase (Anoop KR, pers. comm., 2013).

#### **b. Second Phase: Gradual shift of 'morning walkers' to area outside the national park**

Difficulties arose because not all 'morning walkers' showed respect to nature while exercising in the national park. Some did not leave the park on time or urinated and defecated in the national park. To solve the issue, a new recreation park with walkways for morning walkers was therefore created recently in front of the park (Anoop KR, pers. comm., 2013). The recreation park provides virtually the same air quality as the national park and offers a variety of walking trails for the 'morning walkers'. The exercising activities by the local population are now being gradually shifted to the new recreational park (Anoop KR, pers. comm., 2013).

### **4. Lessons learned**

Enabling conditions for entrance schemes like the one described are:

#### **1) *Balancing human recreational use and respect for nature:***

**a. *Visitors' respect for the park and its species:*** *To preserve the sanctity of the National Park, it is essential that visitors respect nature conservation measures in the park.*

Apart from the difficulties described above, 'morning walkers' in Keoladoe National Park had been breaking twigs of Neem trees to use them for their personal dental hygiene, as it is common in India. When this took overhand, the management explicitly prohibited breaking twigs from any tree in the park, and declared a fee would be imposed on offenders.

**b. Number of people:** *the number of people using a national park for their morning sports has to be supportable. If demand exceeds the amount of visitors the park can take, the management might have to impose limits to the number of people allowed to exercise in the park at one time.*

In Keoladeo national park, this issue has not arisen yet, as numbers of morning walkers are stable, and the effect of recreation is not impaired by a too large number of people.

2) **Human safety:** *The visitors' safety has to be assured. If human safety is at risk, the park management may have to limit access to the park accordingly.*

For instance, a female tiger had once occurred in Keoladeo National Park, though the area is not commonly known as a tiger habitat. For the park management, this raised the delicate question of how to react to the occurrence of wildlife perceived as potentially dangerous by the visitors. In this particular case, the tiger was translocated to Sariska Tiger Reserve to solve the issue. In incidents like the one described, the park management may be forced to decide upon the park's priorities.

In conclusion, the walking paths in Keoladeo National Park and in the adjacent recreation park provide a good example of substantial benefits that local people derive from recreation parks and national parks, given that they respect the rules set up for the park's protection and show respect for nature.

**Please note:** *Within the scope of this TEEBcase, it was not possible to conduct interviews with either the morning walkers or the park administration.*

#### **References:**

If not stated otherwise, the information in this document is based on an interview with Vinod B. Mathur, Dean at Wildlife Institute of India, conducted by Carolin Kugel on 03.12.2012.

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