



Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary

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CHAPTER 1. The Delhi Ridge

1.1 Introduction

Delhi is an ancient as well as historical city of India. Delhi, which is located in a cusp formed by the tail end of the Aravalli Mountain Range which is 800 km long (elevation: 1700 meters) and 1.5 billion years old (even more ancient than the young 50 million year old Himalayas), as it culminates at the river Yamuna, is the aspirational capital of over 15 million people. The hilly spurs in Delhi are known as the Delhi Ridge sometimes called “The Ridge” which once occupied almost 15% of the city’s land.

The ridge consists of quartzite rocks and extends from the Southeast at Tughlaqabad, near the Bhatti mines, branching out in places and tapering off in the north near Wazirabad on the west bank of the river Yamuna, covering a distance of about 35 kilometers.

1.2 Status

It is a protected area

1. In the Master Plan MPD 2001 ‘The ridge is defined as the rocky outcrop of the Aravalli range.
It is to be maintained in its pristine glory with no infringements permitted.’
It is demarcated by the Geological Survey of India.
2. The Central Ground Water Board has declared it as notified or protected area for water recharge.

It is protected as a forest under the Forest Act with no non forest activity allowed according to the Environment Protection and Control Committee (EPCA) and the Centrally Empowered Committee (CEC).

1.3 Values

The ridge has an annual recharge potential of 20 Million Cubic Meters (MCM). The importance of the Ridge lies in the fact that it provides us with pure quality water. It could provide natural mineral water for the whole city, when, even the rich and famous drink processed water today. At commercial rates for processed water, \$ 0.25 per litre, it works out to \$5 billion. In spite of untiring efforts by the citizens to preserve this strictly protected area it is being violated by building and builders, so much so that we may have lost a half of it. The loss is irreversible.

1.4 Geographical Segments

The Ridge today, for administrative reasons, is divided into 4 separate zones namely:

1. The **Old Delhi** or **Northern Ridge** denotes the hilly area near Delhi University and is by far the smallest segment of the Ridge. Nearly 170 hectares were declared a Reserved

Forest in 1915. Less than 87 hectares remain today, which is slated to develop as Biodiversity Park by the Delhi Development Authority.

2. The **New Delhi** or **Central Ridge** was made into a Reserved Forest in 1914 and stretches from just south of Sadar Bazaar to Dhaula Kuan. It extends over 864 hectares, but some bits have been nibbled away.
3. The **Mehrauli** or **South-Central Ridge** is centred on "Sanjay Vana", near JNU and Vasant Kunj, and encompasses 633 hectares. Large chunks have been encroached and built upon.
4. The **Tughlaqabad** or **Southern Ridge** sprawls across 6200 hectares and includes the Asola_Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary. This is the least urban of the 4 segments of the Ridge, but a lot of it is village-owned or privately owned farmland.

CHAPTER 2. Southern Ridge

The Southern Ridge is the biggest with 6200 hectares of land while the total ridge area in Delhi is 7777 hectares. Many parts of the Southern Ridge which is notified as reserve forest are not demarcated on the ground. For the Southern ridge approximate areas are

NOTIFIED RESERVED FOREST

1) Official Area of notified reserve forest	62 sq km
2)Area of demarcated notified reserve forest (Forest Dept)	33.25sq km
Asola sanctuary	19.4 sqkm
Bhatti sanctuary	8.5 sq km
Rajokri(4306 bighas). Rangpuri (1365 bighas), Ghitorni(732bighas)	5.35 sq km
3)Undemarcated (or Missing) Area of notified reserve forest	28.75 sq km

PROTECTED and NON NOTIFIED FOREST

- 4) Area of notified protected forest 15.6 sq. km. (Forest Dept. data)
5) Area of non-notified forest surrounded by encroachments 1.22 sq. km.
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FOREST ON GROUND FROM MAPS

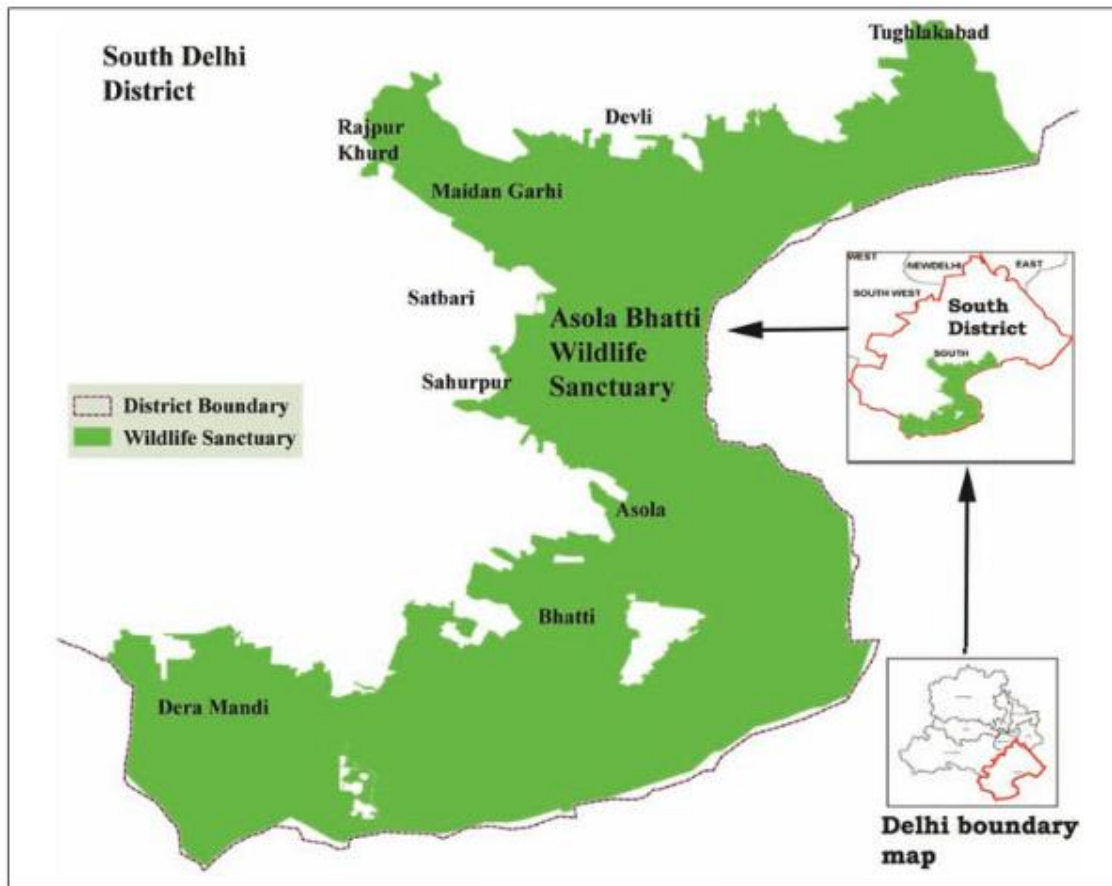
- 6) Actual Area of all forest remaining 61 sq. km.

MISSING NOTIFIED FOREST

- 7) Actual Area of all notified (both reserve and protected) forest remaining, 1) –59.8 sq. km.
8) Official Area of all notified (both reserve and protected) a forest = 1) +4)) = 77.6 sq. km.
9) Missing Forest = 17.8 sq. km.
All the remaining forest needs to be urgently notified.

(Source: <http://naturalheritagefirst.org>)

CHAPTER 3. Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary



Map of Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary

Source: An Introduction to Delhi Ridge by Dept. of Forests & Wildlife

3.1 Introduction

Being the National Capital Territory, Delhi harbours a wide variety of opportunities for livelihood and related facilities both in the public and private sectors. This leads to an influx of people from all over the country, leading to a considerable rise in Delhi's population reflected in every census report. By 2015, Delhi is expected to be the third-largest metropolis in the world after Tokyo and Mumbai. The Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary is unique in being the only Sanctuary in the urban conglomeration of NCT of Delhi, harbouring flora and fauna indigenous to oldest Indian Aravalli hills.

Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary lies at the far southern edge of the city of Delhi, at Asola near Tughlaqabad in the Delhi National Capital Territory of India. It covers a vast area of over 6800 acres and contains many species of flora and fauna. It is located on Southern Ridge, the northern terminal of Aravalli Hill Range, one of the oldest mountain system of the world. Biodiversity significance of Ridge lies in its merger with Indo-Gangetic plains. Geographically, the sanctuary

is located in the Southern Ridge and extends from 28°30'15.454"N 77°15'35.514"E to 28°24'42.147"N 77°13'2.181"E and 28°29'17.408"N 77°16'19.757"E to 28°29'11.876"N 77°12'18.407"E.

The sanctuary has the following boundaries:

North - Sangam Vihar and Durga Vihar colonies bordering Mehrauli - Badarpur Road.

South - Inter - state border with Haryana.

East - Haryana interstate border and road from Tughlaqabad Fort to Suraj Kund.

West - Asola, Fatehpur Beri and some other villages of Delhi and Haryana State

In order to preserve the sanctity of the area, 12,860 Bigha and 12 biswa (2,679.29 acres) of land was carved out from the community land of three villages namely Asola, Sahurpur and Maidan Garhi and notified as Asola Wildlife Sanctuary under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 vide notification No. F.3(116)/CWLW/84/897/to 906 dated 09.10.1986. After imposing a ban on the mining of Badarpur, and in the larger interest to protect the ecology of the area, 2,166.28 acres of village Bhatti was notified under section 18 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 vide notification No. F.2(19)/DCF/90-91/1382-91 dated 15.04.1991 as the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (4,845.57 acres).

3.2 Bhatti Mines: A part of Asola Wildlife Sanctuary

As per the statements given by Nav Yuvak Gram Vikas Samiti, Bhagirath Nagar, the village Bhatti Mines (Bhagirath Nagar) was settled for the Pakistani Hindu Refugees by Late Shri Sanjay Gandhi. Refugees and laborers of Rajasthan, Haryana, UP, Bihar especially 'Kumhar' lived here with hard labour and all the few money saved was spent to make a shelter here. The laborers have contributed a lot in digging and making canals, water reservoirs, protection of forests etc. The villagers had their own mines in 1970. They had their licenses (Token) to run the mines. People of the village digging the rocks and mines and drawing BAJRI (Red Sand) from them contributed a lot in the developments of Delhi and the whole nation. After sometimes their mines were kept under control of D.S.I.D.C. In their village on November 22, 1987, then Panchayat Director Sh. Jafferji Ji, M.P. Bharat Singh Ji, Executive Councilor Ch. Prem Singh Ji (Present Speaker of Delhi Legislative Assembly), village head of Bhatti Sh. Kiran Pal Ji and deputy Pradhan (Sh. Saty Prakash Ji) distributed villagers authorized plots of 120 Sq. Mtr. and they have the related legal documents." Ch. Prem Singh Ji, Speaker of Delhi Legislative Assembly, has written letters to govt. requesting to regularize this village Bhatti Mines (Bhagirath Nagar) as other colonies were still being regularized. Meanwhile Delhi Govt. listed their village as J. J. Slum. But on April 9, 1996, they came to know that an order was given by Supreme Court to relocate their village misinterpreting villagers as encroachers. They opposed this inhuman action and wanted to know from chief secretary of Delhi Govt. the real facts behind relocation but they were kept in dark without any true information.

The village Bhagirath Nagar was listed in the list of 1071 colonies list no. 820 for regularization in 1993. A resolution was passed then for this purpose by Delhi Govt. From 1996 to 2005 many

documents and affidavits were presented in the Supreme Court by Delhi Govt. and finally an order was passed on February 7, 2006 to transfer the village Bhatti Mines (Bhagirath Nagar). In the village Bhatti Mines (Bhagirath Nagar) 96% of the total houses are pucca, built by bricks, cement, sand and concrete and this village Bhatti Mines (Bhagirath Nagar) is not a J. J. Slum. The Delhi Govt. always kept the Honourable Supreme Court in dark regarding their village.'

3.3 Threats & challenges faced by Asola Wildlife Sanctuary

According to one of the reports of Times of India, Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, a home to more than 100 bird species against just 74 found in the open in Delhi Zoo the place is a live birdsong orchestra. But just 10 years ago, it was a barren, strip-mined ecological ruin marked with dangerous pits. On one summer day in 1990, when seven mine workers fell to death in one of them, rang the curtain down on three decades of unregulated mining in Bhatti, but it took the Army and the Delhi government a decade to transform the wasteland into a thriving forest with a vibrant ecosystem. Since 2001 when the area with more than 200 mining pits was handed over to the Eco Task Force (ETF), a battalion of retired Army staff commanded by serving officials, more than a million saplings have been planted here. Many of them are now full-grown trees, making Bhatti Mines one of the most ecologically rich areas in the city. Also, 36 of the 200 mining pits now serve as water bodies.

The absence of forest boundaries has also led to encroachments. In April, 2014 Hindustan Times has revealed how illegally-built sprawling farmhouses have wiped out hundreds of acres of precious forestland in south Delhi's Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary. As per the govt. sources, the encroachers have altered forest boundaries and destroyed wildlife habitats by building illegal farmhouses and individual approach roads.

According to Delhi Forest Department, the number of wild animals from Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary and adjoining Aravallis being killed on the road is on the rise. Most of such kills happen due to speeding vehicles on the stretch. There are reports of such accidents almost every alternate day now. Jackals, blue bulls (*nilgai*), hare and reptiles are most vulnerable.

Also, the MCD is seeking possessions of Bhatti Mines area as an alternative landfilling site. "The present application is being filed due to immediate and urgent necessity of obtaining a fresh sanitary landfill site in Delhi," the MCD plea begins. The MCD plea also points out that Bhatti mines area has already been cleared by the Ridge Management Board and an Environment Impact Assessment study has been conducted which declared this area to be suitable for a sanitary landfill site to be used for solid waste disposal. The Government now believes that dumping municipal waste in the ecologically sensitive Bhatti Mines – which being far away from human habitation provided an ideal area in a congested city for disposal of municipal waste -- would lead to an ecological disaster.

3.4 Nearby slum area

Sangan Vihar is considered one of the largest unauthorized colonies of Asia and has a population close to 2 million. This is a slum colony with many small houses and temporary settlements. The area is mostly inhabited by underprivileged sections of the society who do odd jobs to sustain in the city. The area is a home to many domestic helpers and drivers. It has no water supply in many of its areas and the people here struggle day & night for the basic amenities of life.

3.5 Bombay Natural History Society (BHNS)

Official Site: www.bnhs.org

The Bombay Natural History Society, founded on 15 September 1883, is one of the largest non-governmental organizations in India engaged in conservation and biodiversity research. It supports many research efforts through grants, and publishes the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. It is designated as a Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (SIRO) by Department of Science & Technology, Government of India.

3.6 Tourism

The main Attraction in the Asola area now is the Conservation Education Centre (CEC) in the Forest Department building run in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society and Government of NCT Delhi. It is modeled on the CEC in Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai. The CEC in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary runs nature trails through the scrub jungle, exposing floral and faunal element, topography of the area. Here one can get a comprehensive package of information on Flora Fauna and also on how to help to conserve them.

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