National Bird Day – 12 Nov: Salim Ali's 130th birth anniversary

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News

12 November, the birthday of ornithologist Dr Salim Ali, hailed as the 'Birdman of India', is celebrated in India as National Bird Day; it is also called National Birdwatching Day. Salim Ali was born on 12 November 1896; 2026 marks his 130th birth anniversary. He was the first Indian to conduct systematic bird surveys across India, and his books popularised ornithology in the country. BNHS's EIACP centre, the Maharashtra Pakshimitra Sanghatana and Bird Count India hold 'Pakshi Saptah' (Bird Week) and the Salim Ali Bird Count from 5 to 12 November, with birders uploading sightings on the eBird app. No record of the day being created by a gazette notification was found, though Union Environment Ministers have paid tribute on the day.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	12 November – Salim Ali's birthday
Born / Died	12.11.1896 / 20.06.1987 (aged 90)
Title	'Birdman of India'
Autobiography	The Fall of a Sparrow (1985)
Awards	Padma Bhushan (1958), Padma Vibhushan (1976); J. Paul Getty Award; Netherlands' Order of the Golden Ark (1973)

Point	Details
Rajya Sabha	Nominated member, 1985
Bird week	Pakshi Saptah / Salim Ali Bird Count – 5–12 Nov
Tamil Nadu	SACON – Anaikatti, Coimbatore (1990)

Background

- Life: Salim Moizuddin Abdul Ali grew up in Bombay; his uncle Amiruddin was a BNHS member, and BNHS secretary W.S. Millard introduced him to ornithology. He surveyed birds in princely states such as Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin. 'The Book of Indian Birds' and the 10-volume 'Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan', written with S. Dillon Ripley, are his best-known works.
- BNHS: the Bombay Natural History Society, founded in Bombay in 1883, is one of India's oldest conservation NGOs. After Independence, Salim Ali saved it from closure for lack of funds, with funding from Prime Minister Nehru, and led it.
- Environment: Salim Ali first documented the birdlife of Thattekad in Keralam and recommended a sanctuary; created in 1983, it is 'Keralam's first bird sanctuary' – the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary (Ernakulam, 25.16 sq km). He also helped protect Bharatpur (Keoladeo) in Rajasthan. India's national bird is the peacock (1963).

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu: (1) The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) was set up in 1990 by the Union Environment Ministry and BNHS as a Centre of Excellence; it sits in the Western Ghats forests at Anaikatti, Coimbatore, and now functions as 'WII-SACON', linked with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII, Dehradun). (2) Tamil Nadu's State bird is the Emerald Dove (Chalcophaps indica). (3) Vedanthangal (Chengalpattu), Koonthankulam (Tirunelveli) and Point Calimere are major bird habitats.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

12 November, the birthday of ornithologist Dr Salim Ali, hailed as the 'Birdman of India', is celebrated in India as National Bird Day; it is also called National Birdwatching Day. Salim Ali was born on 12 November 1896; 2026 marks his 130th birth anniversary.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: 12 November – Salim Ali's birthday; Born / Died: 12.11.1896 / 20.06.1987 (aged 90); Title: 'Birdman of India'; Autobiography: The Fall of a Sparrow (1985).

What is the background to this news?

Life: Salim Moizuddin Abdul Ali grew up in Bombay; his uncle Amiruddin was a BNHS member, and BNHS secretary W.S. Millard introduced him to ornithology.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) is located near which city?

A) Dehradun

B) Coimbatore

C) Bengaluru

D) Hyderabad

Answer: B – Explanation: Coimbatore (Anaikatti) – set up in 1990; now 'WII-SACON', linked with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun.

2. What is the title of Salim Ali's autobiography, published in 1985?

A) Wings of Fire

B) The Book of Indian Birds

C) My India

D) The Fall of a Sparrow

Answer: D – Explanation: 'The Fall of a Sparrow' (1985). 'The Book of Indian Birds' is his field guide; 'Wings of Fire' is Abdul Kalam's; 'My India' Jim Corbett's.

3. Which bird sanctuary, created in 1983 on Salim Ali's advice, is Keralam's first bird sanctuary?

A) Kumarakom

B) Kadalundi

C) Periyar

D) Thattekad

Answer: D – Explanation: Thattekad (Ernakulam) – the 'Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary', 25.16 sq km. Periyar is a tiger reserve (Idukki).

4. Which of India's oldest nature NGOs, founded in 1883, did Salim Ali save from a funds crisis?

A) BNHS

B) WWF-India

C) CSE

D) WTI

Answer: A – Explanation: Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Mumbai – he saved it with Nehru's funding. WWF-India dates from 1969; the CSE from 1980.

5. What is the State bird of Tamil Nadu?

A) Emerald dove

B) Peacock

C) Kingfisher

D) Great hornbill

Answer: A – Explanation: Emerald dove (Chalcophaps indica). The peacock is the national bird (1963); the great hornbill is Keralam's. TN's State animal is the Nilgiri tahr.

Sources: Free Press Journal (12 Nov 2020); SACON profile; WII; TN Tourism; Bird Alliance (Pakshi Saptah 2024); Keralam Tourism (Thattekad); TN Forest Dept (State symbols); BNHS timeline. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.