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Do migratory waterbirds bring parasitic diseases to Sri Lanka?

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Mannar is a place with rich bird diversity in Sri Lanka. Many migratory birds come to Sri Lanka during the migratory season from August to April to avoid the harsh environmental conditions in their native countries. These migrants closely associate with the resident animals during their stay in Sri Lanka by sharing the same roosting and foraging habitats such as forests and water bodies. Ducks, Gulls, and Flamingos are the common aquatic migratory birds found in Mannar. These birds arrive from the far east, north, and central Asian countries covering the central Asian flyway. Due to the different origins, these migrants can carry many infections posing a threat to resident animal where they land. A research team from the University of Colombo, jointly with the Robert Koch Institute, Germany initiated a project to identify these parasitic infections from December 2021 to March 2022. We collected bird droppings to identify parasites in the gut of the migratory water birds. Samples were analyzed at the IDEA Laboratory, Department of Zoology and Environment Sciences at University of Colombo. Capturing and handling of birds were done by a trained ornithologist. Finally, we have identified several parasites that can cause infections in many animals, including humans. For example, duck samples analyzed were positive for parasitic worms which can cause diarrhea, nausea, anemia, seizures, and weight loss. Resident and farm animals could easily get infected by associating infected environments. It is important to continuously survey the parasites that the migratory waterbirds carry into our country to see whether there's a real threat posed by them on our native wildlife.

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