

# Chilika Fends Off 'Alien Attack'

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**Bhubaneswar:** Alien and exotic fish species sprung up in Chilika lagoon after tropical cyclone Phailin hit the Odisha coast two years back, a scientific study under Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (ICZMP) has revealed.

In the months after the natural disaster struck, fish catch in the brackish water lagoon went up significantly and there was a substantial increase in catch of exotic fish and freshwater species. Even species such as *Oreochromis mossambicus*, popularly known as Mozambique tilapia, which is native to Southern Africa, were found in big numbers during the fish catch.

While some species are not harmful to the lake community, entry of Mozambique tilapia and *Clarius gariepinus* was a serious concern for the lagoon managers. However, these alien species gradually disappeared from the system and the natives again colo-

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The species may have reached the lagoon through floods from other localities around the catchments		

nised within a year, the study said.

The study conducted by Chilika Development Authority (CDA) indicated that most of the alien species may have reached the lagoon in large volumes through floods from other localities around the catchments. The ICZMP study said Chilika eco-system appeared to be resilient and showed signs of recovery from the sudden impact from the cyclone Phailin.

"This has attracted attention of the scientific commu-

nity and experts around the globe and many research agencies are showing interest to study the eco-system of Chilika. The CDA, in collaboration with National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai is now planning to come up with an eco-system modelling of the lake for the better understanding," said ICZMP Project Director Ajit Patnaik.

On October 12, 2013, Phailin, a very severe tropical cyclone, hit the coast bringing

with it torrential downpour and gale reaching a speed of more than 220 km per hour along with storm surges of 3.5 metre. Since its landfall was close to Chilika, it had severe impact on the 1,100 sq km lagoon's ecology.

The salinity level of the lake dropped alarmingly after Phailin hit State's coast, which was a major concern since it had an impact on brackish and marine elements of the lake eco-system. The sea-grass meadows were completely wiped out as storm surge accompanied by incessant rains resulted in coastal inundation causing large-scale destruction of the coastal vegetation, physical movement of floating aquatic plants, increase in silt load as well as alternation in physico-chemical characteristics of the lake water and sediments.

Scientists are now showing their interests to study the natural phenomenon to understand the pre and post Phailin scenarios, Patnaik added.