

Final report

Project Title: Birds in the City: Bengaluru Edition - a boardgame based on the relationship between urbanisation and bird diversity in the context of Bengaluru city

Institutional support: Nature Conservation Foundation

Additional funding support: Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom; Wipro Foundation

Duration: 2021 - 2025

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Project Summary

This interdisciplinary project focused on designing, developing, and producing **Birds in the City: Bengaluru Edition**, an educational board game that engages people in understanding how urban landscapes influence the bird life around them, through play.

The project began with research on patterns of urban development and expansion in Bengaluru over the last two decades. Insights from this research informed the game context and narrative. We consulted birding enthusiasts and ornithologists based in the city to identify a set of representative bird species that are both common and functionally diverse.

The game was developed through an iterative design process involving multiple rounds of online and in-person playtesting. Alongside the game, we created a *companion booklet* that explains the rules, describes key aspects of the game, and includes prompts for reflection.

Birds in the City was showcased and played at public events such as the York Festival of Ideas, York Environmental Festival and Science Gallery Bengaluru. A project website was also created and maintained to share updates from the design journey (<https://www.playinnature.in/game>). The same was reimaged on instagram for further outreach (<https://www.instagram.com/playinnature.in/>).

With additional financial support from funding agencies and donors, 540 copies of the game were produced — part of these were distributed free to schools and nature education programmes, while the rest are available for purchase at subsidised rates through the Nature Conservation Foundation's [online store](#).

Project Highlights and Timeline

Sep 2021 - Dec 2021	Background research and expert interviews
Jan 2022 - Mar 2022	Game conceptualisation
Apr 2022 - Aug 2022	Concept detailing
Sep 2022 - Dec 2023	Iterative online and in-person playtests Locations: Bengaluru, Pune, York (UK)
Jan 2024	News and media coverage
Jan 2024 - Jun 2024	Ideation and writing of companion booklet
Jan 2024 - Dec 2024	Prototype and sample creation from three manufacturers
Jan 2025 - Jun 2025	Production handover to the final manufacturer and further fundraising
Jun 2025 - September 2025	Manufacturing
September 2025 onwards	Outreach, distribution and publicity

Impact and Outcomes

Impacts -

- We have played the game at the following venues and organisations so far - Nature Conservation Foundation, National Centre for Biological Sciences, Student Conference on Conservation Sciences (SCCS) Bengaluru, LVBL team, York Festival of Ideas, York Environmental Festival, Science Gallery Bengaluru.
- Birds in the City has inspired the design of another game about developing urban treescapes of York called [Urban Labor-a-tree](#) in collaboration with Joanne Morris, Stockholm Environment Institute York. The project is funded by York Environmental Sustainability Institute's (YESI) Fellows Discipline Hopping scheme.
- Our impact will continue over the next few months and hopefully years. As more and more people play and engage with the game, we hope that they are encouraged to think about their surroundings and the natural world around them, slightly differently and look at the birds around them and their actions through a different lens, one that is more accommodating of nature in urban spaces. .

Outcomes -

- The game copies are now ready. Our manufacturers were [Mohit Printers](#) from Mumbai. We partnered with [Gatha - Weaving a new Tale](#), for cloth bags for the game components. Gatha is a social impact venture by Vardhishnu Creations Private Limited which aims to provide sustainable and dignified livelihood to women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds .
- We received additional funding from Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom and the Wipro Foundation to make the game available for purchase at a highly subsidised rate.
- We have sent out over 200 copies now including donations to schools and science educators. We plan to conduct an online session about facilitating a play session and conversations.

Challenges and Learnings

Design Challenges

- **Research-based game design**
 - Turning research (about urban changes and bird life history) into an engaging gameplay suited for non board gamers, was the most challenging part. We achieved this through multiple playtests and iterations.
- **Game components**
 - We went with a ‘design-first’ approach and gave ourselves complete creative freedom in terms of the actual size and shape of the game. We didn’t consider practical issues with production and manufacturing at this stage. We realised that the game concept we finalized was quite large in size and had multiple components – it needed to be optimised further for production.
 - The gameplay demanded custom wooden dice as one of the components. It was tough to produce them as per the requirement within the budget. We then had to change the dice to a deck of cards – a solution that works quite well but alters player experience.
 - We had multiple components within the game board – a game board, a score board and a badge board which occupied significant table space. It was hard to produce them in high fidelity within budget - we modified the design to make it into a single board.
Learnings from these instances is, to have the production perspective/constraints in mind while designing the game
- **Visual design**
 - We iterated the gameplay while working with the visual designer. As the gameplay wasn’t finalised, we could not share the whole game/picture with the designer and worked on multiple separate parts. Although we managed it, it was hard to bring them all together in the end.

Learning - have the visual designer / illustrator on team right from the beginning, let them have an idea of the broad vision while they work on small parts for iterations

Team/collaboration Challenges

- We struggled to get an illustrator onboard. We reached out to multiple people and a few of them also got started with work. However, for different reasons, they could not continue working with us. This caused some setbacks in the project timeline.
- We worked with interns to produce blogs about the work that were posted on our website as updates and research synthesis. However, some of these interns did not produce outcomes of expected quality, we had to put in a significant amount of time and effort to make the outcome substantial.

Learning - start scouting for experts early on in the project and take quick first steps in getting them started. Budget for extra time while working with interns – they need considerable handholding.

- Finding the right manufacturing partner was a major challenge. We had conversations with people from various cities – Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune and finally, Mumbai. The first two manufacturers ghosted us, causing some delay. The third one produced a sample, however, they weren't willing to produce a second improved sample. The fourth manufacturer has been working well with us – keeping with timelines and professionals in their deliverables.

Learning - account for delays in production while planning and optimise game components for quick and easy production. However, once there's an established relationship with a manufacturer, this initial teething period may reduce significantly. Also, in many of these cases, the more expensive options may also be the most professional and timely so budget for these options.

Future plans/ strategy

- Hosting game play sessions in and outside Bengaluru for further outreach
- Extending/developing more version of the game (expansions) - Bengaluru city game with other representative birds, nocturnal birds, Birds in the City games for other cities
- Development of a 'lighter' version of the game - containing fewer components, playable in shorter timespan
- Development of solo, 2 player and junior versions (for kids under 14) of the game
- Exploring possibilities of templatising the gameplay that focuses on urban nature connection
- Collaborating with games researchers to conduct evaluative research on the game

Newspaper articles

The Hindu, December 2023

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/bengaluru-birds-flock-together-in-this-board-game/article67683384.ece>

Hindustan Times, January 2024

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/art-culture/your-turn-new-indian-board-games-are-playing-on-climate-ecology-politics-101704461195720.html>

Mint Lounge, February 2024

<https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/business-of-life/birds-in-the-city-board-game-bengaluru-biodiversity-111706713754623.html>

The New Indian Express, February 2024

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2024/Feb/27/a-birds-eye-view-this-board-game-is-co-designed-by-bengaluru-ecologist>

Role of the BSF Small Grants programme

The project was conceptualised in response to the BSF small grant call in 2021. It would have been impossible without this grant to work on a project of this nature. The grant helped us in setting up a small team of illustrators, researchers, content writers and translators and working with them throughout the project timeline. It also was instrumental in getting started with the production phase. Apart from the financial aspects, the support from the BSF team in terms of regular check-ins, connections within the BSF community, outreach through social media and news media was very valuable.