Flying a kite this Uttarayan? Make sure you stay away from deadly Chinese Manja

Every year, the annual harvest festival of Sankranti brings with it much celebration, competition, fun and excitement through the tradition of Uttarayan or kite flying. Yet, what is often invisible to us is the imminent danger the soaring diamond-shaped beauties pose for others who inhabit the skies – birds.

“Unlike Cotton manja, the chinese manja is made of nylon and is very strong and more dangerous,”- Mohammad Dilawar. Pic courtesy: Jivdaya Charitable trust
According to PETA India, in Ahmedabad alone, 2,000 birds are injured every year during Uttarayan, including pigeons, kites and vultures. And over 500 of them die from their injuries. And this has started to increase over the last few years due to the rampant use of the “Chinese Manja”, often referred to as “Killer Manja.” The kite flying market prefers Chinese manja (string/thread) because its tensile strength is more than the cotton manja, it is stronger and can be used to fly bigger kites, and of course the reason why most Chinese products proliferate in developing markets – lower in price.

The bird injured by manja requires extensive care till it is cured.
Pic courtesy: People for Animals

Deadly Manja

People for Animals, an organization that works work to rescue and rehabilitate sick and needy animals sees a minimum of 10-15 cases per month during the time of Sankranti. “We receive more rescue requests as people now fly kites almost around the year,” says Kiran Rudra, General Manager, PFA.

It does not help that Chinese Manja is seen as the tool of
victors in kite flying sport. It is prepared using a fishing line of nylon filament that is then coated with chemicals and glass, making it razor-sharp and capable of cutting easily through other kites. “It is not only about kite flying; the sport has evolved into kite fighting. That means, the sharper your manja is, the better are the chances to cut the kites of others and win,” says Mohammad Dilawar, founder and President of the Nature Forever Society. Mohammed Dilawar, named by TIME Magazine as one of the 30 most influential conservationists in the world, has been espousing the cause of urban wildlife, especially sparrows and other birds, for over 13 years now.

“Due to its very high tensile strength, any bird, whether a Pigeon or a Pariah Kite once entangled becomes entrapped and cannot escape,” - Mohammad Dilawar. Pic courtesy: Jivdaya Charitable trust

“The Chinese manja is deadly to birds who get entangled and
bruised while in flight causing grave injuries to them. Once the whole kite fighting fest is over, manja stays behind on trees, electric poles, TV wires and the like, acting like a death trap for birds all year round,” says Dilawar. Nylon, unlike the biodegradable cotton manja, persists in the environment for a much longer time.

“Banning chinese manja wont solve the problem completely as the cotton manja is also dangerous, though it definitely is the first step,”- Kiran Rudra, PFA
Pic courtesy: People for Animals

Making matters worse, birds sometimes carry back Chinese manja for nest building and many times, the chicks or the birds themselves get entangled in it and succumb to such injuries.
Chinese Manja is not degradable and continues to injure birds throughout the year. Pic courtesy: Jivdaya Charitable trust

The problem doesn’t end after the festival is over as injured birds take about 4 months to heal from their wounds. Kite flying is a competitive sport, and in many places like Gujarat, virtually the entire population is involved in kite flying or fighting. With thousands of kites in the sky all of a sudden, birds are unable to adapt and since birds fly at different heights and so do kites, there is bound to be bird death.

What you can do?

Here are some ways you can make this Sankranti festival safer for both your family and birds –

1. Replace Chinese with the cotton manja – it is the first step.

2. If come across any stray strings of Chinese manja, collect
as much as possible and then burn it. Placing it in the garbage bag doesn’t help, as there are high chances that birds, dogs or other scavengers in the garbage dumps get entangled in it or worse, unknowingly feed on it.

3. Kite flyers should manoeuvre their kites away from birds, and in case a bird is found injured it should be immediately moved to a rescue centre.

Even after proper care and treatment, the birds fail to be as healthy as before.
Pic courtesy: People for Animals

4. Once you see an injured bird, hold it with a clean piece of cloth, cover it with a box, give it some water and call the helpline ASAP.

5. Don’t fly kites near power lines, roads, trees, buildings or vehicles.

6. Special rules apply when flying within two miles of an airport. FAA regulations prohibit the use of any kite weighing over five pounds, and kites are not permitted to fly on lines longer than 500 feet in length.
7. Never attach items to your kite or kite line – it can cause injury to people once the kite is cut.

8. Protect your skin by wearing sunscreen and your eyes with a pair of sunglasses.

Manjas that get stuck in the trees are danger to lives of the birds throughout the year.
Pic courtesy: People for Animals

Call for help (Bangalore)

Nature Forever Society works extensively to save house sparrows and works to create, protect and speak for habitats and conservation of birds and wildlife. You can sign their Petition to impose a nation-wide ban on Chinese manja.

Here is the list of helplines you can call to rescue injured birds:

1. People for Animals: 99000 25370, 080-28612767.

2. Ahinsa: 9920510088, 9920510888

3. Animals Birds Nature Foundation: 8792852102
4. CUPA – Compassion Unlimited Plus Action: 080-22947317

5. Karuna Animal Welfare Association of Karnataka: 080-22860205

Pics courtesy: PFA and Nature Forever Society