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Cool IISc shows why green cover matters

By ET Bureau | Updated: Oct 05, 2016, 11.43 AM IST

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In nature's lap a [mini forest](#) inside institute has brought down mercury by two degrees, raised groundwater table and cut [air pollution](#).

The year 1988 marked a quiet start of an environmental experiment at the [Indian Institute of Science](#) (IISc), the results of which provide a new hope for today's [Bengaluru](#), when the city's green cover is under threat from all sides.

That was when a young TV Ramachandra and fellow [PhD students](#) at the IISc Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) planted saplings they got from the Western Ghats on a 1.75-hectare dry plot of land.

Nearly two decades later, the mini forest has 480 trees belonging to 54 species. Ramachandra, now a senior scientist at the [CES Energy](#) and Wetlands research group, believes Bengalureans need to plant trees wherever possible for a better tomorrow, pointing to the IISc example.

The mini forest has lowered temperatures by at least two degrees Celsius in and around IISc campus. The cool climes have benefitted not just those on the IISc campus but also residents in the vicinity, some of whom are ministers and bureaucrats.

The groundwater table is 3.5 metres below ground level from the earlier 60-70 metres. Surface water runoff has reduced, mitigating floods. Also, the campus breathes better air with reduced SO₄ and suspended particulate matter levels.

"The results further show that the experiment of the mini forest can be replicated to create such green pockets in and around other urban spaces," a recent CES technical report concludes.

"Every ward in Bengaluru should have a mini forest," insists Ramachandra. "If corporators want to win the elections, they should adopt this model."

From insects, frogs, snakes to birds and smaller mammals like the elusive Slender Loris, the mini forest area is abound with rich micro and macro fauna. The 54 tree species come from the Sirsi and Yellapur forests in the Western Ghats. "A single plant has unexpectedly attained a gigantic size, with its canopy infesting the crowns of nearby trees covering an area roughly equivalent to 1.6 ha," the report says.

This July, [Chief Minister Siddaramaiah](#) opened the Hennur Lake Biodiversity Park, a 32-acre sprawl with 1,827 trees across 39 species. The forest department, however, is fighting to keep its lands from encroachment.

The Bengaluru forest circle has an estimated 15,046 acres of forest land encroached. "Bengaluru already has a network of forests but encroached. We need fast-track courts to dispose of the cases," Bengaluru Urban Deputy Conservator of Forests Dipika Bajpai said.

The government can acquire land for green spaces instead of flyovers, Ramachandra remarked. "Who allowed them to convert gomala (grazing lands) and parks for other activities," he asked. Large chunks of land with educational institutions and Army can be utilised. "If they want, I can show where land is available."

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