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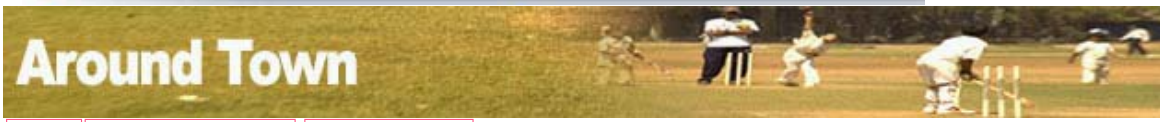
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Ulcer lake

The purpose of two ecology-based events this fortnight is to help the government get its facts right, finds **Shweta Taneja**.



For a decade now, TV Ramachandra has been studying the ecology of wetlands in Bangalore. As the Convener of the Urban Ecology, Environment and Policy Research Group at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Ramachandra's task involves examining the effects of industrialisation and a population explosion – a task that is fraught given that the city's administration functions with little or no factual evidence to rely on. "The management of wetlands is an important issue," he said. "These ecosystems are still being reclaimed or encroached on for agricultural activities and sewage disposal." The significance of such research is heightened by the purpose of getting the government to pay heed to their findings, to in turn make their projects more effective. The workshop titled "Urban Lake Monitoring and Management" that Ramachandra is hosting this fortnight, aims to educate researchers, and also initiate a system of categorising the city's lakes, and understanding their patterns of development, for just that purpose.

Harini Nagendra, the urban ecology program coordinator at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, explained that the main issue is to do with the sheer lack of available data.

That there is no verifiable information to support any kind of analysis of the city's bio-diversity is the biggest hurdle for ecologists, she said, which in turn hampers essential work, like cleaning up lakes, and protecting what's left of a green cover, for instance. What Nagendra basically means is that any question about a census of the number of trees felled for road-widening projects, for instance, will invariably draw a complete blank. "If we do not know how many trees there were originally in Bangalore, how would we know how many have been cut?" she asked. "The estimates range anywhere from 500 to 10,000 trees cut."

Nagendra explained that new projects initiated by the government – the drive to clean up lakes by the City Corporation, in particular, may be well intentioned, and will be followed-up on, but the effort could well end up being pointless if the administration fails to get its facts right. The point that a lot of the planning needs to begin with, she added, is that the city's lakes, which are mostly all manmade, are in fact linked together – something very few people realise. "Take for example what we call the Varthur Lake series, one of the most polluted in the city," explained Nagendra. "The sewage from Central Jail goes into the Parappana Agrahara Lake. From there, it moves through two other linked lakes and finally gets into the Kasanavahalli Lake at Sarjapur Road. So if you clean the Kasanavahalli first, without solving the sewage problems in Parappana Agrahara, in some years, both will be equally filthy."

The solution, offered Nagendra, was to first understand these links, and begin cleaning from the source – which is where the research conducted by the ATREE trust comes into the picture, to help the city administration in their efforts. Ramachandra added that the workshop's purpose was to "identify the causes of wetland degradation and destruction, and discuss concepts and techniques that can help in wetland restoration". The event will also include a day-long open-to-all brainstorming session in the end, to discuss

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methods of conserving and managing urban lake resources. For this session, Ramachandra said they had invited “all stakeholders – wetland biologists, conservationists, planners, policy makers and active citizens”.

Close on the heels of the workshop, a group of students from across different institutes in the city are also hosting a conference on various sub-categories of research in ecology. Named “Young Ecologists Talk and Interact (YETI)”, the three-day event will bring together students from the Centre for Ecological Sciences, the National Centre for Biological Sciences, the Nature Conservation Foundation, and the Centre for Wildlife Studies, apart from participants from IISc and ATREE. Chaitanya Krishna, project assistant with CSE, explained that they also plan to convert the website www.meetyeti.in into “a platform for discussions and information-sharing on ecology research”. The aim is to exchange ideas and make potential nationwide collaborations, he said.

Source : *Time Out Bengaluru*

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