



Bangalore bids woodpeckers, barbets goodbye

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BANGALORE: Spotting woodpeckers and barbets around Bangalore is becoming increasingly difficult, say bird watchers. Reason: The rapid loss of green cover over the last few years. According to a recent study conducted by the Centre for Ecological Science, Indian Institute of Science under Professor Ramachandra T V, it was found that while the tree cover decreased by 38 percent from 1992 to 2002, from 2002 to 2009, it dropped by a whopping 63 percent due to rapid urbanisation. Says Harish Bhatt, a city-based ornithologist, "Earlier, Lalbagh, Cubbon Park, areas around IISc and Bangalore University campus used to be hot spots for woodpeckers and barbets. But in the past four-five years, they can hardly be seen." "Golden backed woodpeckers and white naped woodpeckers were most common. Not even 10 percent of woodpeckers that we used to see 10 years back are seen today," he added. Trees are the only nesting places for woodpeckers. They are important agents for pest control for trees they nest on. Bhatt said, "Woodpeckers prey on insects (ants, termites, spiders, and caterpillars) on trees and play an important role ecologically by keeping trees healthy." Another birdwatcher Manjunath told Express, "About 95 percent of the woodpeckers make their nests in trees which are generally huge and old. If one needs to see a woodpecker, one must travel at least 20 km from the city now. A few can be spotted around Bannerghatta, Nandi Hills, Devanahalli and Dodballapur areas. Some 15 years ago, there were plenty of woodpeckers around Lalbagh, Ulsoor and Sankey Tank areas," said Manjunath, who has been watching birds for more than 15 years. Another ornithologist M B Krishna said: "Like woodpeckers, barbets also nest on trees. But over the last 30 years, a majority (about 90 percent) of old trees around the city have been axed and this has led to a drastic decline in the number of barbets, particularly the copper smith and small green varieties of barbets." "Although none of the Asian barbets is considered threatened, several species are known to be intolerant to deforestation and need old-growth forests to thrive in."