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Lessons in verses on human-wildlife conflict strike a chord with villagers

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PUNE: A 16th-century poetic form, used by poets to compose devotional songs, has proved successful in creating awareness about man-animal conflict among villagers, especially in the wake of increased sighting of leopards and other animals in rural Pune and urban areas.

A not-for-profit organisation has been using narrative songs, known as Bharud, to educate rural communities about the dos and don'ts in situations where they spot a leopard or find themselves confronted by the animal.

Sumedh Tarde, head of projects and communications at ResQ, said, "When we found that one of our volunteers has been performing Bharud, we thought of adapting it to convey the message of man-animal conflict to villagers."

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He added, "The performances revolve around why leopards are being spotted on agricultural land, animal behaviour, safety precautions that need to be taken by humans for themselves and their families, and what to do if one finds oneself in front of a leopard."

A team of five performers, including Anil Sawale Maharaj, a Bharud performer and volunteer at ResQ, have hosted two such sessions, spreading awareness about human-wildlife conflict, through songs in Manjri village in Haveli Tehsil and Kasarsai village in Paud Taluka, each with over 100 villagers in attendance.



ResQ aims to take this initiative to villages around Pune where leopards have been spotted in recent times.

A volunteer at the NGO said that the initiative has struck a chord with villagers. “We have seen an increase in participation from villagers after the Bharud sessions,” he said.

A villager who attended one of the Bharud sessions said, “The session caught our attention because it was presented in a different manner. This form of poetry involves use of puns, which are amusing and make it easy for us to remember. The children also enjoy learning in this fun way.”