

Tamarind Trappings

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By



Garima Prasher

Rs 5 lakh earmarked for revival of India's first biodiversity heritage site in Devanahalli

The Karnataka forest department is finally planning the revival of the 54-acre Nallur tamarind grove, India's first biodiversity heritage site located in Devanahalli. According to officials from the department, Rs 5 lakh has been earmarked for the revival of the sacred grove; on-ground work will begin within a week.

“We have secured Rs 5 lakh, to begin work on the upkeep of the grove. The site has been neglected for too long and if not maintained, we will lose the heritage trees that some believe were planted over 400 years ago. We are looking at securing a minimum of Rs 20 lakh more to ensure complete revival and protection of the site,” said Sumitkumar Subhashrao Patil, deputy conservator of forests, Bengaluru Rural.

The botanical marvel with over 300 trees was declared a biodiversity heritage site in 2007. According to a carbon dating study by the University of Agricultural Sciences in 2008, the oldest tree in the grove is about 400 years old.

Over a period of time, the site has been taken over by invasive species and weeds, threatening the original tamarind trees.

Officials said the priority is to free the grove from invasive species such as *prosopis juliflora*. Experts said this is a shrub native to Mexico, Central and northern South America; it is an aggressive invader.

“The grove has been taken over by weeds. If left unattended, weed shall completely take over the native plantation. So weeding is our priority. We are especially concentrating on the removal of *prosopis juliflora*. *Prosopis* is a kind of weed that grows back if cut and removed. We need to uproot these. The process is time-consuming and resource-intensive. Due to the years of negligence, the natural regeneration capacity of the trees has diminished. However, weed removal will accelerate the process,” said Patil.

Lack of fencing has also led to unchecked cattle grazing from nearby villages. Animals feeding on lower branches of the heritage trees and shrubs will have a negative impact on soil quality and the trees too, experts pointed out.

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“The first step in the revival should be barricading the grove. This will regulate the movement of people and will reduce grazing. Cattle grazing should not be allowed as it degrades the soil quality and makes it impervious. The site also requires application of soil to the tree roots that have been exposed over time due to the lack of maintenance,” said Dr Nagarajaiah C, ex-professor at the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru.

The department plans to barricade the area with barbed wire fencing.

“While a portion of the grove is still protected by the barricade, we need to install more and block the area completely. We decided on a barbed wire barricade as erecting a compound wall will be a costly affair. We are also looking at harvesting rainwater by desilting an old sump inside the grove,” a forest department official told BM.

“The heritage site has been overlooked for years and has not been maintained. While Rs 5 lakh is not a huge sum, it will surely be helpful to some extent. However, the revival process should be done in consultation with the local people. All the stakeholders must be part of the decision-making process. There should be accountability about how the fund is being spent and this information should be made public,” said Dr TV Ramachandra of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc.



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