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Western Ghats's biodiversity faces threat of encroachment: UN body

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Biodiversity in the Western Ghats is facing a threat from deforestation, encroachment and conversion, says International Union for Conservation of Nature at the UN climate change conference in Bonn



A network of 39 separately managed sites in the Western Ghats was inscribed as a World Heritage site by Unesco in 2012. Photo: Hemant Mishra/Mint

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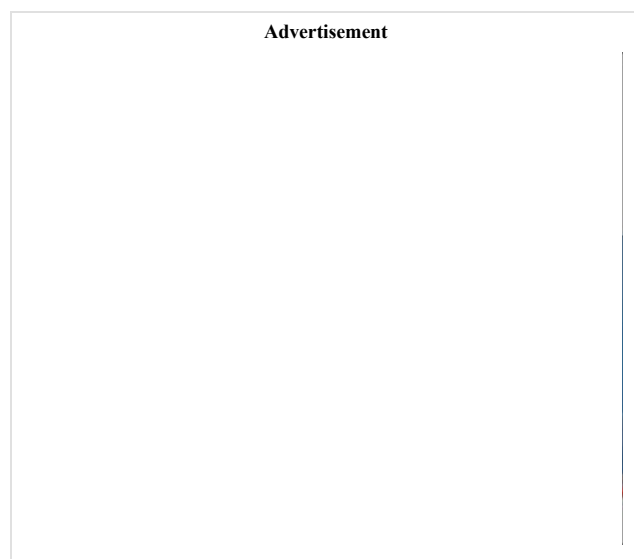
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Kochi: Biodiversity in India's iconic Western Ghats is facing a threat from forest loss, encroachment and conversion, said a

global environment agency in its report.

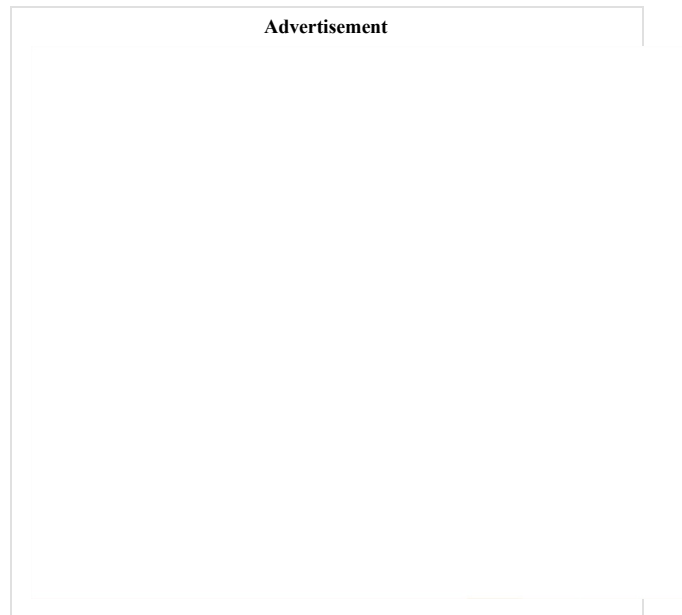
	245.65	3.3%
2	222.5	6.84%
rice	262.2	1.57%
ice	124.35	2.35%



It also put the hills in the “significant concern” category in its new outlook in the conservation prospects of natural World Heritage sites. The report, released recently by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) at the UN climate change conference in Bonn, Germany, says pressure from the human population in the Western Ghats region is greater than that faced by many protected areas around the world.

The new report, “IUCN World Heritage Outlook 2”, which assesses for the first time changes in conservation prospects of all 241 natural World Heritage sites, warns that climate change will probably exacerbate a system already under pressure and

has the potential to impact the large-scale monsoonal processes which the Western Ghats influence. Moderating the region's tropical climate, the site presents one of the best examples of the monsoon system on the planet.



A network of 39 separately managed sites in the Western Ghats was inscribed as a World Heritage site by Unesco in 2012. It says ongoing pressure for development would continue to place the Western Ghats under high threat. Traditionally conserved by small populations of indigenous people leading sustainable lifestyles, the area is under increasing population and developmental pressure, requiring intensive and targeted management efforts to ensure that not only are existing values conserved, but that some past damage may be remediated, it

says.

The report said pressure from human populations in this region should not be underestimated. 50 million people are estimated to live in the Western Ghats, "resulting in pressures which are orders of magnitude greater than many protected areas around the world". Evidence suggests that forest loss, encroachment and conversion continue to affect the property, it said. It, however, acknowledges the initiatives taken by the government to protect the biodiversity of Ghats.

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"The challenges are many, but the will by both government and non-governmental groups to ensure the conservation of the Western Ghats is high," it says. However, until more data is accumulated (on conservation trends and protection and

management aspects), and given the number and level of threats that this property faces, its conservation outlook is still assessed as of significant concern, says the report.

Older than the Himalayan mountains, the Western Ghats, spread over Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, represents geomorphic features of immense importance with unique biophysical and ecological processes. The report says each of the 39 component parts of the property has its own management system and protective measures that vary throughout this complex serial site that stretches over a distance of some 1,600km from north to south.

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“There is a priority need to articulate a clear overarching management framework that harmonizes policy and

management practise across the various clusters and states. Functional corridors that assure wildlife movement and ecological connectivity between the clusters of component protected areas are also required," it says.

The global World Heritage Outlook in 2017 remains similar to 2014, with a positive conservation outlook ("good" or "good with some concerns") for 64% of sites, "significant concern" for 29% and "critical" status for 7%.

These results are for the 241 natural World Heritage sites listed as of November 2017, including new sites which have been inscribed on the World Heritage List since the previous report.

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