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Save dying swamps in Western Ghats

Saswati Mukherjee, TNN Feb 17, 2012, 05:53AM IST



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BANGALORE: One of the last remains of the primary forests of Western Ghats is on the verge of extinction. The slow-growing Myristica swamps take a long time to mature, and with the environment witnessing rapid changes, the plant species is losing out on its stable habitat, which it requires to thrive in abundance.

"The Ghats is an ecologically fragile area which people have, over the years, encroached upon and converted to grow cash crops. This, in turn, gradually affected the Myristica swamps habitat," said TV Ramachandra, member of the Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES).

Most swamps reportedly perished on being converted into rice fields or areca, coffee and rubber gardens, or got submerged under hydel and irrigation projects. Quite a few got destroyed in fires set off by shifting cultivators, while many had to pay the price of forest operations of various kinds, conservationists said.

WHAT ARE THEY?

Myristica swamps are one of the Ghats' unique ecosystems. Located in low-lying, poorly drained depressions, these swamps form an extensive network along water courses, through primeval forests of the Ghats. They are considered priceless for evolutionary biology. With aerial roots, a canopy of large, dark green leaves and little-known specialized data, these swamps continue to interest biologists even now.

"Today, the swamps are found only in small patches, either in sacred groves or parts of reserved forests. No continuous habitat is seen," said MD Subhash Chandran, consulting scientist, Centre for Ecological Sciences.

HOW TO SAVE THEM

Areas where these swamps still thrive need to be cut off from human activity

Circumscribe an area within the reserve forests and protect them. Ideally, identify an area which has a slow-flowing stream

Develop protected areas/corridors to connect fragmented ecosystems or habitats

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