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Know your trees: Baobab in Mumbai, Senegal lilac in Malleswaram

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The Baobab tree in Mulund, Mumbai, has sparked a lively debate among participants of 'TreesIndia', a citizen science project to document trees across the country.

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Citizen campaign to document trees springs surprises

A ready prop for string lights and suitable canopy for parking like any other avenue tree, the solitary Baobab on a busy Mulund (Mumbai) street has turned overnight into the subject of substantial curiosity and debate among participants of a citizen science project to document trees across the country. Titled 'TreesIndia', it is an effort to create awareness about neighbourhood trees and aggregate information on tree diversity in India.

After all, the *Adansonia digitata* (known also as the "upside-down tree" as its branches can resemble roots) belongs to the dry savannahs of sub-Saharan Africa, and while it is known in botanical gardens in India, the Baobab is not the commonest avenue tree here.

The campaign was launched on Earth Day, April 22, and is hosted by India Biodiversity Portal. Among 3500 entries received so far by the crowd sourcing campaign, Mulund's Baobab, a Senegal lilac (or *Lonchocarpus sericeus* from West tropical Africa) in Malleswaram and other exotics were unexpected finds, says R. Prabhakar, who created the India Biodiversity Portal.

Nature enthusiast, Ravi Vaidyanathan, who uploaded photos and observations about the Baobab, says it grows near the Mulund railway station (East) and is more than 50 years old. He has seen the tree "grow from a small slender tree during my school days to the huge tree that it is now [with a] base diameter an easy 2.5 metres".

Anvitha S. from Bangalore says she has seen five Senegal lilacs around 11th Cross Road, Malleswaram. Indeed the biggest contribution to the portal has come from the increasingly mowed-down Garden City. Of the around 680 tree species identified and mapped, 400 have come from Bangalore, said Mr. Prabhakar. The most commonly recorded species across the country were Peepul, Gulmohar, Mango and Jacaranda.

The campaign continues to receive observations that will be used to build an open-access information system for tree species and distribution in India, he added. The enthusiastic participation from citizens "has convinced us that crowd-sourcing is an effective way to aggregate biodiversity data from different locales," the TreesIndia team says.

"We hope to create a page for every one of the 7500-odd species in India and have this information up in the public domain," Mr. Prabhakar said.

The campaign was launched in association with ATREE, SeasonWatch, Nizhal (Chennai), Keystone Foundation (Kotagiri), Strand Life Sciences, Azim Premji University and others. To upload your observations visit <http://treesindia.indiabiodiversity.org>.

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