



Andhra Pradesh: New grass species found in Anantapur forest

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VIJAYAWADA: A new grass species has been discovered in the Nigidi forest of Anantapur district. The species has been named after reputed botanist Dr PV Prasanna, scientist G, Botanical Survey of India (BSI).

Andhra Pradesh Biodiversity Board research scientist Dr Kothareddy Prasad, who discovered the new species, said: “The new grass species belongs to the genus ‘Lophopogon’ and rice family. It is named as *Lophopogon prasannae*.”

Dr Prasanna is a grass taxonomist and head of office, Deccan Regional Centre, BSI. *Lophopogon* — a genus of Indian plants in the grass family — is endemic to dry parts of India such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Tamil Nadu. It consists of two species only and the recently discovered species is the third species.

While working on grass diversity at the Nigidi forest between 2017 and 2019, Dr Prasad noticed a unique grass population belonging to *Lophopogon*. “This population occurs in isolation from other two species of the genus. Efforts were made to identify the collected material and realised that it was an undescribed grass,” he said. He said *Lophopogon prasannae* is considered endemic to the Nigidi forest.

Lophopogon prasannae has been assessed as ‘critically endangered’ based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s ‘red list’ criteria.

Dr Prasad said four new species have also been discovered in the Nigidi forest recently. However, he expressed concern over disturbance caused to the forest. “The Nigidi forest is disturbed due to anthropogenic activities such as man-made forest fires, grazing and tourism. It needs effective conservation,” he added.

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