

Arittapatti hillocks near Madurai's Melur to be declared biodiversity heritage site

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MADURAI: Arittapatti, a cluster of seven hillocks near Melur in Madurai district which is home to rare birds including 20 species of birds of prey, raptors and a variety of flora and fauna, is likely to be declared a bioheritage site. A member of Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Board said the process has been initiated for the declaration.

Dr S Nagarathinam, head of the department of communications and co-organiser of the regional Eco-Next Media lab, said they had identified threats to the natural eco heritage site, and organized awareness programmes along with National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC) in the site for three years. “We unofficially declared it a bio-heritage site to create awareness and it would be a huge

leap if this is done through an official announcement,” he said.

A Ravichandran, founder of Arittapatti Biodiversity Centre and secretary of Ezhumalai Paathukaapu Iyakkam, said these hillocks, which were about 300 to 500 feet high, are home to rare birds including legger falcon, which have been sighted for the first time in the region apart from northwest India. The formidable Peregrine falcon, its resident subspecies Shahseen falcon, are found to be breeding in the hillocks. What make biodiversity thrive in these hillocks are the 72 water bodies, including natural springs which supply the water.

Ornithologist Dr T Badri Narayanan said though renowned ornithologist Salim Ali had stated in one of his books that Shahseen falcon was endemic to Western Ghats, the fact that they were thriving in these hillocks, which were not connected to Western Ghats, was a matter of great interest. Raptors like Bonelli's eagle and migrant species like booted eagle were also a feast to the eyes in these hillocks.

Director/Scientist F, Eco Next, NCSTC, DST, Govt of India, Dr Pamposh Kumar, who has been a part of the awareness campaigns in these hillocks, said that science could go a long way in self-preservation of biodiversity and heritage. Local people's knowledge when augmented with technical knowledge and inputs contribute to preservation.

Local people say they did not give much importance to these birds till the organised programmes were conducted. K Selvaraj of Kambur says they are seeing more birds in recent times after quarrying activities in the vicinity of the hillocks came to a standstill thanks to court orders.