GUDALUR FOREST DIVISION TO USE M-STRIPES APP

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Forest staff undergo training to use the M-STRiPES app in Gudalur Forest Division on Thursday.HANDOUT_E_MAIL

The Gudalur Forest Division is now the first territorial forest division in India to begin using "M-STrIPES" - a software-based monitoring system previously used only in tiger reserves across India.

The M-STrIPES app, short for "Monitoring System for Tigers - Intensive Protection and Ecological Status," which is a slight variant of an app used by the Forest Department in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR), is to help the department prevent poaching, felling of trees and other wildlife offences. The app is to be used for the first time in the conflict-prone forest ranges in the jurisdiction of the Gudalur Forest Division.

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The app can provide data to Forest Department officials, such as forest ranger as well as District Forest Officer (DFO) about the number of Anti-Poaching Watchers (APWs) on patrol duty in a particular area and the exact time in which the patrols were conducted, with Global Positioning System (GPS) co-ordinates of the patrol routes taken.

P. K. Dileep, District Forest Officer (Gudalur Forest Division), said that the application allowed for monitoring the field staff and also allowed the department to figure out locations in each range where patrolling was lax or being neglected. With this information, officials could then figure out the reasons and the difficulties APWs faced in getting there, and finding a solution to ensure more vigilance in such "blind spots," he added.

Apart from SMS alerts being sent to the forest ranger and DFO when a patrol is begun by a team of APWs, the app also allows data and images on direct and indirect sightings of wildlife to be recorded and the recording of locations using GPS co-ordinates, where wildlife offences could have been committed.

On Thursday, the DFO distributed smart phones to field staff in 27 beats across five ranges, installed with the app. "We expect that the application will benefit the Forest Department to tighten patrolling and prevent wildlife offences and other issues," added Mr. Dileep.

H. Madhusudanan, a Gudalur-based conservationist who was present at the training programme organised for the staff in Gudalur by officials from the MTR, who provided the technical expertise and showed staff how to use the app, said that the introduction of the app was an extremely useful step, especially in a zone as ecologically sensitive as Gudalur.