

# Locals get glimpse of Madurai's man-made forest

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Madurai: As the city's thinning green cover continues to be a public concern, conversations on forestation and biodiversity took centre stage at a photo exhibition hosted at the Kalaingar Centenary Library on Tuesday.

More than 250 people, including students and photographers, participated in the event organised by Development of Humane Action (DHAN) Foundation and HCL Foundation. The works on display were contributed by 32 photographers from across the state. The photographs primarily documented a 60-acre man-made forest developed on the Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU) campus with the help of residents of Nagamalai Pudukottai.

"This is the first time I'm learning that such biodiversity exists within the city," said Sri Mangai, a visitor. "It shows that people can also contribute to rebuilding green spaces. I wonder how the real forest would feel."

Many photographs featured insects discovered in the forest. "Since the initiative started four years ago, 145 insects have been identified in the forest," said S Ilamukhil, team lead, DHAN Foundation. He added that last year's focus was on flowers and that they documented 135 varieties.

A seminar at the exhibition deepened dialogue on traditional and modern approaches to conservation. Retired professor of botany D Stephen highlighted the ecological role of sacred groves. He said that the community-managed sanctuaries are crucial and very effective in protecting endemic species such as kurunji.

Ornithologist Badri Narayanan said, "If not for humans, there would be no need for conservation. Hence, public participation is key." He stressed that awareness must reach communities living around sacred groves for a lasting impact.

Organisers said the initiative hopes to inspire residents to recognise biodiversity as the backbone of ecological resilience amid rapid urbanisation and encourage them to participate actively in conservation across urban and peri-urban landscapes.