



Mapping of Myristica swamps crucial for conservation

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MANGALURU: Researchers have suggested a large-scale project to map and carry out further research on Myristica swamps across the Western Ghats, in order to consolidate conservation and restoration efforts. Comprehensive documentation of these remaining swamps, the species and their genetic diversity, and local threats, will allow better protection of these relic forests.

Ecology experts Priya Ranganathan, G Ravikanth and N A Aravind from the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), reviewed the research and conservation of Myristica swamps, which are tree-covered wetlands within the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats. They have recommended the creation of a clear policy for swamp conservation that involves local communities, as well as the forest department. "Swamps should be declared as community conservation areas, and conservation work must focus on the restoration of degraded swamps, and their biodiversity elements. Further, the encroached land that is currently under alternative land use must be restored to its original habitat, and watershed quality revived in these regions," said N A Aravind.

The swamps of the Western Ghats harbour several rare-relic floristic and faunal taxa, comprising many endemic and threatened species. One of the most unique and primeval ecosystems, they once formed a large hydrological network, but due to increased human pressure, these now exist as small isolated pockets, and are one of the most threatened ecosystems in India. The Western Ghats is one of 36 global biodiversity hotspots, occupying less than 6% of India's land cover. Despite its high biodiversity, only 9% of the Western Ghats falls within the protected area network (PAs).

Aravind said myristica swamps face a higher threat of destruction than other evergreen forest types. "Freshwater swamps fall under the umbrella category of 'ecologically sensitive areas,' regions that are biologically and ecologically rich, unique, valuable, and largely irreplaceable if destroyed. Many Myristica swamps do not fall within India's PA network, although some swamps in Kerala and Karnataka are within protected forest landscapes. The Biodiversity Act of 2002 declares important biodiversity areas, including Myristica swamps, as Biodiversity Heritage Sites. However, site-based initiatives are yet to be taken up by the state forest department and State Biodiversity Board of Karnataka, where most of these swamps exist today," he added.

Ravikanth also feels that there are notable research gaps, especially when it comes to the hydrology, soil studies, and ecosystem services provided by these swamps, and further research is needed for a comprehensive understanding of these unique waterbodies.

Source:<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mangaluru/mapping-of-myristica-swamps-crucial-for-conservation/articleshow/85584015.cms>