

KERALA

Riverine forest to get protection

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Meenachil's banks near Peroor are home to rare varieties of riparian plant species

The lush wilderness along the Meenachil's banks near Peroor, Kottayam which is home to rare varieties of riparian plant species, has finally been afforded some real protection.

Acting on a recommendation forwarded by the Kottayam Social Forestry Division and concerted efforts put up by the conservationists, the Ettumanur municipality has decided to accord the location the status of a local bio-diversity hotspot, sources said.

The move enables the authorities to ensure protection of the riverine forest, which has been under pressure from sand-mining and illegal tree felling.

Diversity Act

Accordingly, the government agencies including the State police and the Kerala Forest Department can now enforce protection of the area by invoking provisions of the Biological Diversity Act 2002 .

The two-km-long patch of land, which extends from the Poovathumoodu bridge to the hanging bridge at Peroor, has been home to different varieties of riparian plant species, commonly called Attuvanji, says G.Prasad, Assistant Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry Division.

“It's an intimidating confusion of vines and towering trunks that also comprise plant species like Ochreinauclea missionis (Attuvanji) and Mallotus atrovirens (Ezhanjil), Tetramilis nudiflora (Thavalamaram) etc, which has been classified as ‘vulnerable’ by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources,” noted the official.

The unique eco-system, according to him, also supports a variety of crustaceans, amphibians, fish and bird species including the bitterns and darters, besides regulating the micro-climate of the locality.

The Kottayam Nature Society, a collective of nature enthusiasts that has been at the forefront of the efforts to conserve the land, recently held a mapping of the riparian plant species at the location.

“It’s indeed a feral from the history of the Meenachil with an impenetrable network of roots. Protecting this green spectacle, which is one among only a handful of such locations left along the Meeanchil's course, from human interventions is crucial in conserving the river eco-system as a whole,” noted N.Unnikrishnan, a naturalist and secretary of the KNS.

First step

Declaration of the local bio-diversity spot, according to him, was only the first step in the right direction as the focus is on bringing it to the attention of the Kerala State Bio-Diversity Board.

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