

Saplings planted on degraded forest patches for increasing green cover

Over 2.64 lakh saplings have been planted so far under the Restoration of Degraded Forests Landscape Project in the Villupuram Forest Division, with financial assistance from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development

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wetlands, and a bird sanctuary in Villupuram district are also being restored. The reserve forest area in Chettikuppam covered 52 hectares, and has a mix of Casuarina, Neem and a few native shrubs. The area was degraded and the canopy cover was much less than 30%," he added. "Planting with the assistance and resources of the Auroville Botanical Gardens was also taken up, and 8,000 seedlings of rare and endangered Tropical Dry Evergreen species were planted in the Chettikuppam reserve forest. The saplings are being irrigated during lean seasons continuously under the scheme," Mr. Soman further said.

The work at Chettikuppam aims at providing a green coastal buffer plantation with native species, protecting inland areas from cyclonic winds, increasing the fresh water carrying capacity of the land, and providing habitats to various species of birds and butterflies.

Forest department officials said fences had been erected around the saplings to curb trespassing, and grazing by animals. The saplings would be irrigated using borewells. A contour bund would be created on the land to capture rainwater within the area to enhance soil moisture. Small ponds have been created on the low-lying area of the land to and store surplus water.