

State mangrove cover doubles in three years

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Chennai: Mangrove forests in Tamil Nadu, crucial bio-shields that afford protection in case of natural disasters, have doubled over the past three years and now spans approximately 90 sq km, according to the state forest department. The Forest Survey of India's 2021 report had recorded only 45 square kilometres of mangrove cover in the state.

This increase in mangrove cover was discovered through a mapping initiative funded by the TN Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project Climate Change Response (TBGPCCR). Project director I Anwardeen said mangrove forests in the state are primarily found at Muthupet in Tiruvarur and Pichavaram in

Cuddalore district, both of which are protected areas that are recognized as vital reserves for preserving these critical ecosystems.

Beyond these reserves, smaller mangrove patches exist in 11 other coastal districts across the state. Among these, Thanjavur has the largest mangrove forest area, covering 1,379 hectares. Ramanathapuram follows with 528 hectares, and Tuticorin ranks third with 357 hectares. Even Chennai, often perceived as heavily urbanized, hosts a mangrove patch of 124 hectares within the Adyar estuary.

To further enhance mangrove cover, the forest department has been actively planting saplings under the Green TN Mission across all 13 coastal districts. Thanjavur again leads in this effort, with 859 hectares of new mangrove plantations. Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai follow, with 586 hectares and 521 hectares. These saplings are raised in nurseries established specifically for this purpose by the department.

Mangrove forests play a crucial role as natural bio-shields, providing essential protection to coastal communities during natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis. Additionally, these ecosystems serve as key fish breeding grounds, thereby supporting the livelihood of local fishermen.

Stressing the importance of mangroves for their protective benefits, contribution to biodiversity, and role in carbon sequestration, Anwardeen announced that the department will conduct a baseline study on blue carbon in Tamil Nadu's mangrove forests, which will be integrated into the "National Carbon Accounting" system. This study aims to quantify the carbon storage capacity of these mangroves, reinforcing their significance in combating climate change.

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