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Study records 8 endemic plant species in Ambazari Bio Park

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Nagpur: The Ambazari Biodiversity Park, spread over 758 hectares is not only a bird's paradise but also a safe haven for endemic plant species. Out of the 215 endemic plant species which are found in Maharashtra, 8 species have been reported here.

"These findings are part of a study conducted by a botanical expert from the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Central Zone, Nagpur. The research was conducted for all the three seasons between March 2019 till September 2020, and the report was released a few days ago," said Prabhunath Shukla, deputy conservator of forests (DyCF), Nagpur.

Shukla says the study on floral diversity of Ambazari has revealed a higher level of endemism. It was conducted by researcher K Chandramohan from the FSI. The research has revealed the presence of 415 plant species belonging to 283 genera and 77 families in the biodiversity park area.

"Due to the grasslands and good habitat, we recorded 263 species of birds at the Ambazari forest earlier and hence, the biodiversity park is known as a bird's paradise," said Shukla.

The 758-hectare Ambazari forest land was handed over to the department in lieu of the forest area diverted for the inter-state Bawanthadi dam between Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The eight endemic species have been recorded for the first time in Maharashtra. Take for example the Boerhavia crispa. This species was earlier recorded from only Karnataka and Tamil Nadu but has now been found in Ambazari. Cyathocline manilaliana, which is recorded only from Telangana, has been reported from the park here.

Similarly, other endemic plant species Andrographis longipedunculata, Telosma pallid, Dipcadi saxorum, Iphigenia pallidar,

Boerhavia crispa, Cyathocline manilaliana, Oropetium roxburghianum, & Tripogon filiformis have been reported during the study.

“The endemic plant species are usually more vulnerable to anthropogenic threats and natural changes and therefore, hold a higher extinction risk. The preservation of these species is a major concern in a worldwide context and thus, their in-situ conservation should be the topmost priority for any biodiversity management practices,” said Chandramohan.

The FSI researcher added that “The biodiversity park is also known for its grass diversity. I found 47 species of the grass family. They are characteristically reported in regions where there is insufficient soil water to support an arboreal canopy yet adequate moisture to permit the existence of a grass-dominated canopy rather than desert vegetation.”

According to the study, “Biodiversity in grasslands is complicated because of the rather subtle nature of the grassland ecosystem. Ironically, the largest family representing the diversity of the Ambazari Biodiversity Park is Leguminosae (Legume family), of which 62 species were recorded in the park area. High diversity of Leguminosae family, which fix atmospheric nitrogen and enrich the nitrogen status of the soil is probably due to nutrient-poor soil developed from basalt originated from Deccan trap.”

Sounding a note of caution, Chandramohan said, “At times we overlook the biodiversity importance of the grasslands and this is the reason we should accord high conservation priority to the grasslands which face pressure due to grazing, forest fires, and many times plantation activities.”