

To preserve rare Nilgiris orchids, Forest Department staff collect displaced flowers from uprooted trees

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Forest Department officials said that teams of forest staff from Nadugani and Pandalur ranges noticed that recent spells of rain had led to many varieties of orchids falling off the trees | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The orchids are brought to the Gene Pool in Gudalur for their “rehabilitation” and survival; the Dept. hopes to collect specimens from all 125 recorded orchid species in the district

The Forest Department is helping to conserve rare species of orchids and ferns native to the Western Ghats, by collecting them from wind-fallen trees and “rehabilitating” them in the Gene Pool area in Gudalur. The Gene Pool area was established by the Department to conserve native biodiversity unique to the Gudalur forest division in the Nilgiris.

Forest Department officials said that teams of staff from Nadugani and Pandalur ranges noticed that recent spells of rain had led to many varieties of orchids falling off the trees. “The orchids are epiphytic and rely on the native trees for their survival. Over the last few years, heavy rains had led to many trees that host the orchids becoming uprooted. The only way to protect these rare species was to bring them back to Gene Pool and assist in

their survival,” said a Forest Department official from Gudalur forest division.

Over 125 species of orchids have been recorded in the Nilgiris by the Department, of which 70 varieties have been collected and allowed to be established in the Gene Pool area.

Orchids such as *Bubophyllum neilgherrense* as well as ferns such *Asplenium indicum*, *Vittaria flexuosa* and *Dynaria quercifolia* have been rehabilitated over the last few months, with over 100 plants being painstakingly introduced to host trees.

The rare, and in many cases endangered ferns and orchids, are rehabilitated onto native host trees using coir pith, charcoal and dried banana peels wrapped in cotton, with local expertise being utilized to ensure their survival. The Forest Department is also recording the number of plants and the location in which the species is being rehabilitated to keep tabs on the survival rates of the plants.

Officials said that they hoped to collect specimens from all 125 recorded orchid species in the Nilgiris so that the the Gene Pool would become a repository for rare and endangered species of flora.

District Forest Officer, Gudalur division, Kommu Omkaram, said that ferns and orchids are extremely sensitive to even slight variations in climate. “With climate change a clear and existential threat to these ancient species of plants, we felt that it was important to ensure that as many of these plants get a chance at survival. We hope that visitors to the Gene Pool in the future will also get to see these rare types of flora and understand the importance of conserving them,” said Mr. Omkaram when contacted by *The Hindu*.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Coimbatore/to-preserve-rare-nilgiris-orchids-forest-department-staff-collect-displaced-flowers-from-uprooted-trees/article35937247.ece>