

Vagaikulam, Arittapatty to be bio-heritage sites

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The rich biodiversity of Vagaikulam tank in Tirunelveli | special arrangement

By SV Krishna Chaitanya

Express News Service

CHENNAI: The State government on Wednesday identified three ecologically fragile areas — Arittapatty in Madurai, Vagaikulam in Tirunelveli and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) in Coimbatore — and will shortly issue a notification declaring them as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS).

The Tamil Nadu State Biodiversity Board had received as many as 36 BHS proposals from various parts of the State, of which 10 were shortlisted for the recognition. Board Secretary Jayanti Murali told Express that a committee, headed by PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden, has carefully studied individual proposals and prioritised the areas, which needed urgent protection, and are outside reserve forests or other protected areas.

She said that the creation of BHS will not put any restriction on the local communities and their usage of the areas. In fact, it would be a matter of pride and honour to the locals, added Jayanti. “These are traditionally managed areas which often represent a positive interface among nature, culture, and society.

The purpose is to enhance the quality of life of the locals here,” said Jayanti. She added that the BHS would have a detailed management plan prepared by the local Biodiversity Monitoring Committee or institutions like the TNAU. “It’s completely a voluntary exercise,” she said.

D Narasimhan, member of the Committee, said once a site is notified as BHS, there would be an extra vigil on the area, which would help in curbing anthropogenic threats. For instance, Arittapatty, a tiny village in Melur on the outskirts of Madurai, is an important site for birding, which is facing threats from stone quarrying, he added.

Vagaikulam tank attracts 10K birds

“A large number of raptors (bird of prey) are spotted here. The highly-endangered Lagar Falcon, is sighted only here in the entire State. The place is also home to a chain of seven barren granite hillocks, that act like watersheds, and support 72 lakes, 200 natural spring pools and three check dams.

The region is also of historical importance and harbours several megalithic structures, Tamil Bramhi inscriptions, jain beds and rock-cut temples that are over 3,000-years-old,” said Narasimhan. Similarly, Vagaikulam tank is also an important nesting area for many migratory bird species.

It attracts over 10,000 birds and about 90 species. However, the place is facing a threat due to the rampant tree felling. The Veerasamuthiram panchayat had also requested the State to declare it as a BHS, officials told Express. Justin Mohan, secretary of National Biodiversity Board, said they would provide all the technical guidance required for the State government to notify BHS.

Officials said a panel will also be constituted soon to oversee the implementation of management plans. A draft notification of the BHS will be issued and after 30 days, a public hearing will be held.



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