India

Healthy forests, healthy people, healthy climate: An initiative for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the North Western Ghats

## News from the Field



August 2024 Applied Environmental Research Foundation and Conservation International

# Activity 1 – Restoration of degraded areas in community forests under conservation agreements

Improving the health of conservation agreement forests through active restoration measures is a long-term conservation strategy of the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF). AERF implemented activities like **fire prevention measures**, **plantation of native trees' seedlings**, **and restored water bodies for wildlife at the sites supported by Daikin project in year 2023-24**. With the help of local labourers including women and men, AERF created around 1km of fire lines in the Kalambaste Conservation Agreement **Forest Area**. This helped protect the forest and plantation sites from forest fires this year. In June 2024, AERF planted **1555 seedlings of 17 tree species** in Kalambaste and Katavali (refer to Table 1). AERF has been doing plantations at various degraded forest sites in Kalambaste for over 5 years. Katavali forest was added 3 years before. Maps of plantation sites in Kalambaste are provided in annexure 1.

Additionally, AERF restored 2 water bodies in the Khadi Kolvan Forest. During forest monitoring, the forest stewards shared information on using these waterbodies during their forest visits in the summer. These water bodies were the only drinking source for wildlife in the forest in the post-monsoon period. Otherwise, they have to roam around including human settlements. These water bodies were silted and lost the capacity of storing water after the monsoon. AERF with the help of local labourers restored these water bodies and created a drinking water source for wildlife. These locations are monitored by placing trail cameras. Leopards, Dholes, Gaurs, Sambars, Monkeys, Civets, and Mongoose are sighted at both places.

These restoration measures cumulatively contributed to improving these forests' health and community well-being. Prevention of forest fires protected biodiversity, assisted forest regeneration, and improved the carbon stock of the forest. Plantation added tree species to the forest, increased forest health, improved forest carbon sequestering capacity, and increased natural resources (biomass). Restoration of water bodies created a safe habitat for wildlife and reduced human-wildlife interaction. These activities also created a social impact in terms of active engagement of local communities, generation of livelihood opportunities at a local level, and reconnecting local communities with the forest with a holistic approach.

#### List of tree species planted on community-owned and managed lands in project villages

Sr.No.	Scientific Name	Katavali Forest	Kalambaste Forest
1	Pterocarpus marsupium	50	50
2	Pongamia pinnata	100	700
3	Zanthoxylum rhetsa	5	0
4	Teminalia bellirica	0	10
5	Saraca asoca	10	0
6	Artocarpus heterophyllus	10	10
7	Mangifera indica	30	10
8	Sapindus laurifolius	20	100
9	Holoptelea integrifolia	0	10
10	Dalbergia latifolia	20	30
11	Gmelina arborea	50	0
12	Anacardium occidentale	50	100
13	Moringa oleifera	0	0
14	Phyllanthus emblica	50	50
15	Schleichera oleosa	0	50
16	Acacia catechu	0	0
17	Melia dubia	15	25
		410	1145

#### Table-1

# Activity 2 – Biodiversity monitoring across seasons in forests under conservation agreements

The AERF research team surveyed conservation agreement forests (CAF) in Katavali, Devade, Ambavali, Talawade, Kalambaste, and Khadi Kolvan. The team carried out premonsoon and monsoon flora and fauna surveys and placed trail cameras to record mammals' movement. Additionally, the forest stewards (guardians) keep visiting forest areas frequently. Along with monitoring and documenting biodiversity, these activities, regulate the movement of trespassers and illegal incidences.

We have noticed the presence of endangered species such as Indian ground pangolin and Asian wild dogs as well as vulnerable species e.g. Indian leopard and Indian Gaur. These evidences indicate the in-situ protection of these privately owned forests and the long-term sustenance to conserve several RET species.

### Activity 3- Farming for wildlife

Agriculture fields are often close to forest areas in the Western ghats and thus, often lead to **hostile human-wildlife interactions**. Wildlife, especially herbivores mammals like Gaurs, Sambar deers, Widlpigs, Monkeys, and Muntjacs raid paddy fields very regularly. The increasing incidences are not good for any conservation initiatives. Therefore, AERF started

an innovative initiative of **Farming for Wildlife** in a couple of villages in Sangameshwar. We hope that this would reduce human-wildlife interaction and its negative impact on forest conservation and local communities. For implementation of this program, AERF selected abandoned fields in the forest areas and cultivated local crops of rice and finger millet on an acre area in village Kalambaste.

### Activity 4- Meeting with local communities

AERF held meetings with the local communities in project villages to discuss ongoing activities like plantation, farming for wildlife, monitoring of forests, outcomes of biodiversity surveys, and adding new areas under the forest conservation programme. With existing support from AERF's conservation partners, AERF added 200 acres of forests to its conservation programme in Katavali, Kadi Kolvan, and Talwade from July 2023 to June 2024. Overall, by June 2024 AERF, through an incentive-based conservation approach, succeeded in bringing 12000 acres of private forests from more than 70 villages under the Private Forest Conservation Programme.

## Photos of the activities carried out in 2023-2024



Plantation in Kalambaste



Farming for wild herbivores in Kalambaste