



India

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

News from the Field

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Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF)
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- * This project was carried out by the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), an Indian NGO

Community meetings for conservation agreements

The AERF field team conducted a series of meetings and awareness generation programs in seven villages (Kalambaste, Angawali, Anaderi, Devade, Bamnoli, Devale-Kinjale, and Kulye) to expand the conservation agreement approach and to prevent deforestation on community lands in the last quarter. The meetings yielded several important outcomes: the decision of the village of Kalambaste to sign a conservation agreement for protecting 503 acres of community forest for the next 10 years; Devade to sign a conservation agreement for saving private forests spread over an area of 102 acres, and Anaderi to sign a conservation agreement for saving 40 acres of forest. Similarly, community members from Anaderi decided to adopt improved cooking stoves to reduce the pressure on forests.





Meetings in Kalambaste, Angavali and Anaderi villages

Energy profile survey, bio-stove demonstration and distribution

AERF field researchers conducted energy profile surveys and bio-stove demonstrations in five villages this quarter. Two villages falling in ecologically sensitive zones were selected for the energy profile surveys. These two villages, Washi Tarf Sangameshwari and Angawali, encompass 27 hamlets and 850 households, and household energy data was compiled from 170 of these households. Bio-stove demonstrations were conducted five times in four villages. The energy profile survey showed that about 67% of the households in Washi Tarf Sangameshwari use mainly wood to satisfy their energy needs. The distribution of bio-stoves is planned for the next quarter in these villages.



An AERF field researcher during an energy profile survey in Washi Tarf Sangameshwari



The AERF field team during a bio-stove demonstration in Vighravali.

Hornbill conservation agreement

The AERF field team carried out an extensive survey to understand the conservation status of Great hornbill and Malabar pied hornbill in the Sangameshwar block. Hornbills are called farmers of the forest because they disperse seeds of many rare and endemic tree species, thus maintaining the ecological integrity of the fragmented forest landscape in the northern Western Ghats. The team identified and confirmed nesting activity by both the hornbill species at a total of 22 locations. The number of active nesting sites indicates the availability of sufficient food sources for the hornbills, which in turns indicates the health of the forests. The survey results give reason to be hopeful about forest conservation in the project area.



Distribution map of hornbills (left), and Great hornbill near a nesting site (right)

Nursery of native species and restoration planting

AERF set up a nursery of native, rare, endemic, and threatened trees from the Western Ghats for restoration activities planned for this season. We have set a target of planting 5,000 saplings this year. Through this activity, we are spreading awareness about the importance of native species among local stakeholders. We have already raised 2,000 saplings of *Pterocarpus marsupium*, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, *Terminalia bellirica*, *Pongamia pinnata*, *Melia dubia*, *Terminalia arjuna* and *Zanthoxylum rhetsa*. The AERF team

initiated the restoration work in open areas of the Kosumb sacred grove by planting the saplings in the month of June.



Nursery of native plants set up at the field station in Devruk; and a planting activity in the Kosumb sacred grove

FAIRWILD and Organic certification and export

The AERF team successfully completed the requirements for international FairWild and organic certification for the fourth consecutive year. Both the audits were conducted in this quarter and the organic certificate was issued in the second week of June. AERF supplied 1,200 kg of certified Bibhitaki husk to Indian buyer Phalada Agro through Nature Connect India Pvt. Ltd., which AERF established, and exported 100 kg of certified Bibhitaki husk to Pukka Herbs directly. Nature Connect India thus became the first social enterprise from South Asia to export FairWild-certified material to Europe.



Mr. Elvedin, FairWild auditor, at the processing facility in Devrukh (left), the AERF Team with material ready for delivery (right)



Export consignment being readied for delivery by the AERF field and office team

Spreading the project message through locally produced art

This approach of conservation through sustainable harvesting and business development has begun to have an impact on the ground. Therefore, the AERF team has been working with a local artisan to create souvenirs of the Great hornbill in order to spread the message about how business development and conservation can go hand in hand. The artisan made about 50 wood hornbill carvings, which have been converted into a wall hanging with a description of the project activities. It has been receiving an excellent response from all who have seen it.



Great hornbill wood carvings made by a local artisan

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