



India
Healthy forests, healthy people, healthy climate
News from the Field (July 2020–June 2021)

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Conservation International

*This project is implemented by Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), an Indian non-profit organization.

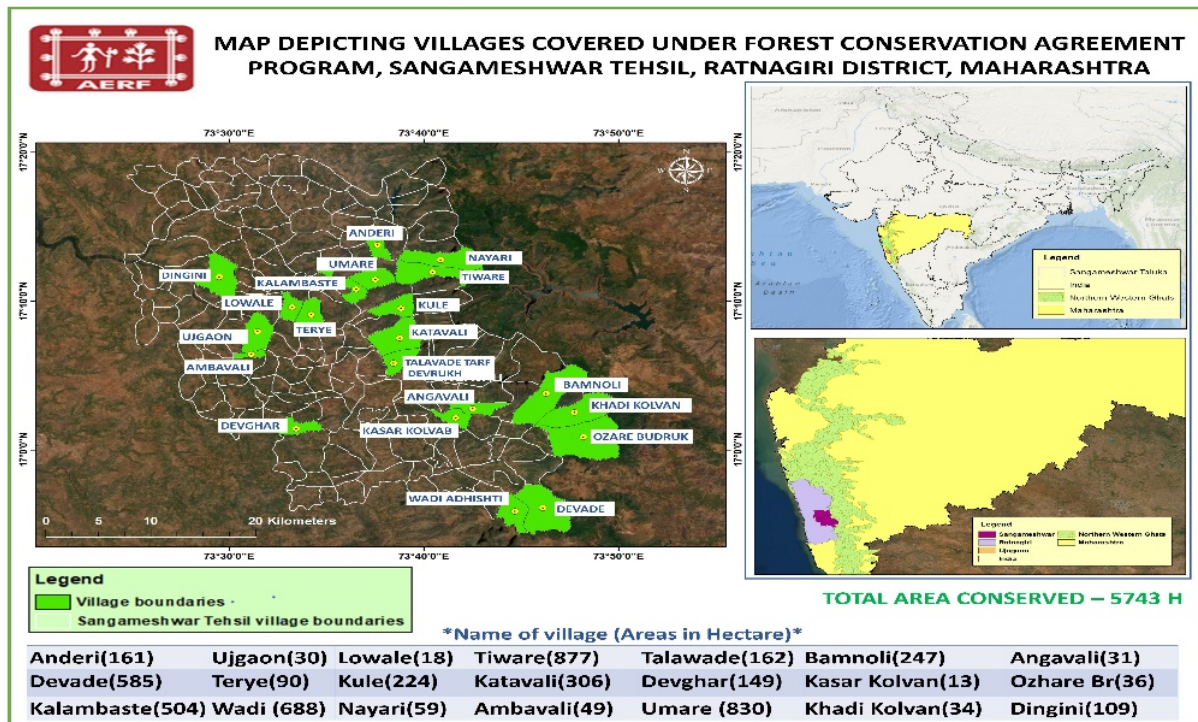
Enhancing connectivity through scaling up conservation agreements

Fragmentation of habitat poses a serious threat to biodiversity conservation in the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot. AERF is committed to addressing this challenge by bringing privately-owned forests in the adjoining areas of the protected area network. Currently, there are 13 villages¹ in Sangameshwar block of Ratnagiri district in which AERF is protecting the private forest areas under conservation agreements supported by Daikin that fall in the buffer zone of Sahyadri Tiger Reserve.

In the last year, AERF tried further to increase the conserved forest areas in most of the above villages for reducing distance between the patches of private forest under conservation agreement and thus enhance functional connectivity between these patches. AERF, with the help of other supporters, successfully brought new forest patches under the conservation agreements in Bamnoli (94 acres), Devade (125 acres), Ambavali (42 acres) and Wadi-Adhisthi (273 acres) during this year. There is a scope for protecting more forest areas through conservation agreements with the remaining villages as well. AERF is approaching local communities in Anderi, Katvali, Khadi-Kolvan, Bamnoli and Talwade to increase the conserved forest area.

This conservation initiative started with Daikin's support is certainly helping to bring more forest under the AERF's conservation programme as local communities have directly benefitted from it. The further scaling up of this initiative is resulting in reducing the risk of deforestation in these villages.

¹ Ujgaon, Anderi, Katavali, Lowale, Devghar, Wadi Adhisthi, Khadi-Kolvan, Devade, Umare, Bamnoli, Ambavali, Kalambaste, Talwade



Map of all sites under conservation agreements in Sangameshwar block (sites receiving support from multiple parties including Daikin; figures after village names indicate the area of forest covered under conservation agreements²)

Mapping threatened species in forests under conservation agreements

AERF's research team conducted biodiversity surveys in the community-conserved forests of Devade, Wadi Adhisthi, Talwade, Anderi, Umare, Ambavali, Bamnoli, Katavali, Ujgaon, and Khadi-Kolvan. The team surveyed plants, birds, amphibians and mammals in these forests and documented rare, endemic and IUCN redlist species. These forests are the habitat of threatened mammals like Gaur (*Bos gaurus*), Indian Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Asiatic Wild Dog (*Cuon alpinus*), Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*) and a highly trafficked mammal, i.e. Indian Ground Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*).

This outcome signifies why the project's initiatives are important to conserving valuable biodiversity of the region.

² The figure of 5,743 hectares indicated as the Total Area Conserved includes surrounding locations effectively conserved as part of the forests covered in conservation agreements.



Asiatic wild dogs (left) and *Sambar deer* (right) in forest under conservation agreement in Bamnoli village

Documentation of traditional knowledge of local communities

AERF has been working with Maharashtra State Biodiversity Board (MSBB) since 2014 to raise awareness among local authorities of the Biodiversity Act 2002 (India), role and functions of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) at the village level, and preparation of People's Biodiversity Register (PBR), a database of traditional knowledge on biodiversity resources. In Sangameshwar, along with the above 13 villages, AERF is working with BMCs in more than 60 villages to train members and prepare PBRs. With AERF's support, these committees successfully prepared the preliminary PBRs of 72 villages and detailed PBRs of 4 villages i.e. Kosumb Ujgaon, Devale and Devade.

Reforestation

Planting of native species is important to restore forests and improve their ecological balance. To improve the health of the conserved forests in Sangameshwar, every year AERF prepares saplings of local tree species in its nursery and plants them in open patches of these forests. Last year, the AERF team planted 737 saplings of 19 species in the open and degraded areas of Umare, Kalambaste, Talwade and Katavali forests.



Community members from Kalambaste and Katavali villages during reforestation activities.

Development of a new value chain for organic turmeric

AERF always tries to increase the scope of conservation measures that help its conservation on the ground with the more active participation of local communities. Last year, AERF started organic farming practices with farmers in Sangameshwar. On a pilot basis, this activity was carried out by farmers in Nivali, Devade, Kosumb, Dhamapur, Umare and Kule. AERF provided farmers with turmeric rhizomes free of cost and instructions for how to cultivate them organically. Later, with the help of Nature Connect, the for-profit division of AERF, the harvested turmeric was procured at a reasonable rate. This has created a new alternative for farmers to generate income and improve their economic condition. Nature Connect is now working on the development of a new supply chain of turmeric that will engage more local farmers in the coming years.

The areas around the forests under conservation agreements have faced the problem of crop damages due to wild animals. Turmeric is disliked by the main perpetrators of Indian gaur and wild boar, providing a solution that balances both conservation and farming.



A forest steward and farmer from Devade village

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