



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)
Conservation International

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

Conservation agreements

The AERF field team and the local community in the village of Kalamabaste have agreed to renew the conservation agreement for the next 10 years. This commitment to conservation by the local community is significant considering that they did so instead of opting for more lucrative subsidy-driven plantation of cashews or sale of the land. The forest patch protected through the conservation agreement covers 504 acres and provides a critical habitat corridor for many wild animals. In addition, we signed three more conservation agreements in the villages of Talwade (162 acres), Devade (102 acres), and Ujgaon (4 acres), thus bringing the total area brought under long-term conservation management to 772 acres in this quarter.





Community members sign the conservation agreement in the village of Kalamabaste



Community members from the village of Devade sign the conservation agreement

Biodiversity surveys in forest under agreement

AERF's field researchers carried out rapid biodiversity surveys in the private forests of the villages of Khadi Kolwan and Devade, where conservation agreements were signed earlier in the year. The surveys compiled important evidence for the crucial role that these forests play in saving the biodiversity that is under threat in the Western Ghats. For example, during the survey in Khadi Kolwan, the researchers were able to document 20 different species of birds and 12 different species of butterflies. More importantly, the team found scat of the Asiatic wild dog, an endangered species.



Scat of a wild dog (left), freshwater stream in the forest of Khadi Kolwan (right)

The rapid survey in the community forest of Devade provided information about the presence of 69 species of plants (59 of which are trees). Six of these species are on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List. The forest also has many giant Mango trees and is frequently visited by the Great Hornbill.



Snapshots of the community forest in Devade and the biodiversity it supports

Bio-stove demonstration and distribution

The AERF field team conducted five bio-stove demonstrations in three villages, with attendance by about 100 community members. A total of 22 bio-stoves were distributed in the target villages in this quarter.



Presenting bio-stoves to villagers (left), bio-stove demonstrations (center, right)

Collection of Bibhitaki fruits from FairWild-certified sites

Due to sustained and committed efforts by AERF's field team over the last three years in supplying certified material to buyers, demand is growing in international markets for certified husks of Bibhitaki fruits. This has provided the necessary motivation for the collectors and will generate higher income from the collection of fruits this year. In the first two months of the harvesting season, the team already collected a total of 3200 kg of fruits from certified areas. This is an outstanding example of how enterprise mechanisms can effectively and positively impact conservation and local livelihoods.



FairWild-registered collectors gather Bibhitaki husks (left), Bibhitaki fruits drying (right)

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