

Nailing what ails trees

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Pain relief: Volunteers extricate foreign objects from tree trunks in Mumbai on Sunday.

A group of green activists are busy pulling out nails, brackets, rods and other metal objects from tree trunks

A group of young volunteers has taken up a unique task to save the environment: in the past two months, they've been going to different parts of Mumbai, removing nails, iron rods and screws in tree trunks. This, they say, is an attempt to increase the life span of trees. Since April 1, the group of 25, mostly students, have made nearly 300 trees nail-free.

On Sunday, they gathered at Virar for a drive, which saw participation by locals too. "So far, we've collected more than 400 nails, two screwdrivers, a bag full of

iron objects like rods and brackets and a box full of stapler pins,” says Tushar Warang, a resident of Nepean Sea Road and a volunteer with Pune-based Angolichi Goli-Bath Pill that has initiated the ‘Nail Free Tree’ campaign. “Trees are living beings. It is worrisome to see how humans treat them, piercing their trunks with all kinds of foreign objects. Humans howl in pain if a tiny thorn pierces their foot; the trees can’t express their trauma verbally.”

Pune beginnings

The initiative began in Pune, where volunteers from Angolichi Goli have made more than 400 trees nail free so far. The group hopes that this will become a people’s movement and bring about a change in mindsets. “During our drives over weekends, local mechanics and shopkeepers join us. Many pledge to never pierce trees with foreign objects, and not let anyone else do so,” said Mr. Warang.

The group, which has begun a study on the effect of piercing tree trunks, believe the practice pains the tree and reduces its lifespan. “Trees can live up to 300 years and more. Several environmentalists we spoke to have told us that it harms the tree,” he said. Trees become weak and the risk of them falling during strong winds and rain goes up.

Data collected from the civic body and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru shows Mumbai has more than 29.75 lakh trees for a population of nearly 1.8 crore. According to IISc, green cover for 33% of the population is ideal for maintaining good oxygen levels and healthy air. Going by this, Mumbai requires nearly 59 lakh trees. Mr. Warang added, “This shows us how little we care about green cover. We’ve also come across new ways of killing trees, including pouring acid on the roots. Now, people who want to get rid of a tree use concrete instead of soil. This gradually kills it, and it is then disposed of by the civic body.”

Kalyan resident Avinash Patil, a volunteer, says the city has one tree for five residents, when it should be the other way around. “Of every 100 trees planted, only 25 survive. So, tree plantation alone won’t do; saving and caring for trees is equally essential.”