

## Institutes turn Sherlock to track sandalwood thefts

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**BENGALURU:** The city has many patches of forested lands and in them are valuable sandalwood. Lalbagh Gardens, Cubbon Park, the Indian Institute of Science and University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) are some of these places where sandalwood thefts have been reported from.



A staff member at the Institute of Wood Science and Technology pointing at a

sandalwood tree  Pushkar V

How does one prevent these thefts? Recently, the Institute of Wood Science and Technology tied up with a technology company to put IoT sensors on sandalwood trees at its Malleswaram campus to monitor illegal attempts at cutting and moving them. According to a staff from the institute, there are as many as 30 matured sandalwood trees and around five young ones in their campus. "There have been cases where trees have been stolen from the campus in the past. The joint collaboration between the institute and the company will take off in another six months," the institute's staff member says.

The Indian Institute of Science is another place where there are as many as 200 sandalwood trees according to T V Ramchandra from the Centre for Ecological Sciences. The institute has beefed up security in recent years to prevent miscreants from engaging in illegal activities. "There used to be around 400 trees, but tree smugglers have been relentless. There were a number of security issues so the government removed a number of them a few years back," he adds. Despite the increase in security, there have been still many cases of thefts. "There was a case where a tree that was right in front of the campus main gate near the post office was cut. They apparently use high tech gadgets that minimise noise. Last year, my students caught people cutting a tree at 2am," he adds.

Ramachandra and his team have undertaken a tree mapping exercise that lists the kind of trees in not only the campus but all over the city. "Only where there is heavy security can there be sandalwood. So, it's mainly institutes such as IISc and the University of Agricultural Sciences near Yelahanka where sandalwood still exist. There was a time when I used to see sandalwood even in the Hebbal Lake bed, but those days are now long gone," he says. There have been many cases of thefts from places such as the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and from Balabrooie guest house, both near High Grounds three years back, despite heavy security.

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