

## KARNATAKA: KUDREMUKH'S GREEN COVER IS SHRINKING, SAYS SURVEY

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*Researchers find forest cover is under threat from development works and farming*

The green cover of Kudremukh National Park (KNP) has reduced from 33 to 27 per cent, says a team of researchers who has undertaken extensive study.

The team, which had prominent members like T V Ramachandra, Setturu Bharath and Nimish Gupta from the Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, noted that unplanned developmental activities during the post-industrialization period threatened biodiversity, ecology and water availability in the region.

Home to diverse endemic species, KNP falls under the Global Tiger Conservation Priority-I (as per Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and World Wide Fund-US). The Centre created Protected Areas (PAs) network across wild habitats to conserve and reduce impacts. KNP comes under the Global Tiger Conservation Priority-I (as per Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and World Wide Fund-USA) and is a habitat to diverse endemic tax.

Rajiv Gandhi Tiger Reserve (RTR), also known as Nagarahole National Park, is home to elephants, and it has been experiencing anthropogenic pressure, evident from degradation of forests and intensified agricultural activities. Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) is the first National Park (NP) to get status as tiger reserve (TR) in 1973, which is also a habitat for numerous bird species and mammals endemic to Western Ghats. Rampant habitat degradations are common phenomenon across PAs due to unplanned developmental projects such as dams and interstate highways in the ecologically sensitive habitats apart from other pressures such as grazing, firewood collection and weed infestation (Eupatorium, Parthenium, Chromolaena odorata), illegal hunting, poaching (elephant poaching for ivory), due to lack of effective eco-management leading to a very frequent instances of human animal conflicts.

Unauthorized occupation of forest lands for cultivation in the buffer region has aggravated human-animal conflicts leading to the frequent animal mortalities, the study noted. The research paper, published in the Journal of Environmental Management under the title 'Modeling landscape dynamics with Land Surface Temperature (LST) in protected areas of the Western Ghats, said PAs are characterised by high levels of biodiversity and endemism. "KNP shows loss of green cover from 33 to 27 per cent by 2016 and higher loss is witnessed in RTR region's deciduous cover. Land use changes have altered ecological functions of PAs such as microclimatic moderation evident from the enhanced Land Surface Temperature with time. The impacts in these ecologically fragile regions are long-term," it said.

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