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INSIDE

GRASSLANDS AREN'T WASTELANDS



In the shadow of urban sprawl, Hesaraghatta grasslands remind us why nature must be shielded from human exploitation. PAGE 3

PICK YOUR BRAIN!

A fan of puzzles and crosswords? Hop on the train and treat yourself to some brainstorming. PAGE 15

'CITY IS SAFE'

...Assures Commissioner of Police, **B Dayananda**, highlighting why Bangalore continues to attract more residents

COVER STORY
by SHIVANI VENUGOPAL

FULL STORY PAGE 7



Cyber crimes are the latest trend among criminals. As conventional crimes are decreasing, economic crimes like these are going up. Cyber crimes can be committed sitting anywhere in the world

Pic: Joe Louis

GRASSLANDS AREN'T WASTELANDS

Bindu Gopal Rao

Today, when forests are being chopped across the country to make way for towering infrastructure, 5,010 acre of grasslands, about 30 km outside the city, has got the nod from State Board for Wildlife to be declared Greater Hesaraghatta Conservation Reserve (GHCRC). So, why is this a reason to cheer? To understand this, it is important to go back in time and explore how this unique space fought for survival and came at the top.

Firstly, the space has endured two major threats – photographers, who jig-jag across the space in their vehicles, chasing birds for that perfect picture and often damaging the grassland. And the other, is a government's failed move to start a plantation drive. On the landscape level, the neglect of the catchment area and urban sprawl have put considerable pressure on Hesaraghatta ecology.

"The state Wildlife Board's approval is a win for the region's wildlife and a milestone for grassland conservation. It is the third most important event in the 500-year history of the Arkavathy River and makes this Bangalore's second-largest green space after Bannerghatta National Park," says Mahesh Bhat, one among a bunch, who took things in his own hands and worked to get the grassland protected from "development".

With late Ramki Sreenivasan, Dr. Krishna M.B., ecologist and ornithologist, and Seshadri K.S., fellow-in-residence at Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (Atree), this bunch of Bangaloreans decided to fight and today, have saved an ecology.

Why grassland?



In the shadow of urban sprawl, Hesaraghatta grasslands remind us why nature must be shielded from human exploitation



Grasslands are often misunderstood as wastelands, with little awareness about Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) and their ecological significance. The Hesaraghatta grasslands are particularly vital, not only for their biodiversity but also for the 1,500-acre lake nestled within this expanse. This reservoir, created in 1895 by damming the Arkavathy River, was Bangalore's first water source. Its catchment area spans over 5,000 acres, making it a lifeline for the region.

"Declaring Hesaraghatta as a conservation reserve will ensure that something as fundamental as water is safeguarded," says Amoghavarsha JS, filmmaker and wildlife photographer.

"Enhanced protection means that once the formal processes are complete, the area will be 'sacrosanct'—untouchable and untampered. Before consider-



ing its benefits for wildlife, we must recognise its critical role in addressing Bangalore's water crisis. As a water catchment area, it helps recharge the water table and creates natural water pathways. Without this, wildlife will vanish, and several bird species may disappear. Even the loss of a few bird species could lead to immense crop damage," he adds.

Ecology matters

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ecologist and ornithologist.

He reminisces how Hesaraghatta once boasted vast grasslands, and its lake was a key water source for Bangalore. "During our water bird surveys, we observed a significant number of bird species here. Declaring this area a conservation reserve ensures that there will be no change in land use. Most of this land is government-owned, and preserving it is a major achievement. Protecting such spaces is invaluable for the birds and their habitat," he adds.

Overcoming challenges

There has been opposition from some members of the local community regarding Hesaraghatta's designation as a conservation reserve. Addressing these concerns, Seshadri K.S., Fellow-in-Residence at ATREE, explains, "There is a lot of misinformation being spread for various reasons. Under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, lawful activities are not prohibited. For instance, cattle grazing, if conducted lawfully, will still be permitted. So, grasslands would still be in danger."

Another key issue is the lack of comprehensive research on this biodiverse region so close to the city, particularly in documenting its rich biodiversity. Seshadri, however, still nurtures hope that the declaration of Hesaraghatta as a conservation reserve will mark a turning point for this fragile landscape. "It is a step forward in ensuring its protection and a moment to celebrate an ecological victory," he concludes.