

Chenchu tribals, the green warriors of Nallamala forests of Andhra Pradesh

Forest Department has roped in 40 Swatch Sevaks to make the Pacherla-Diguvumetta, Atmakur -Dornala and Dornala - Srisailam sections free of plastic pollution

June 27, 2023 08:34 pm | Updated 08:35 pm IST - PACHERLA (NANDYALDT.)

RAMESH SUSARLA

COMMENTS

SHARE

 READ LATER



Chenchu tribal youth picking up plastic waste littered along the road at Pacherla in the Nallamala Reserve Forests. | Photo Credit: RAMESH SUSARLA

Eco-tourism, nature trails, jungle safaris and wildlife tourism have not only brought tourists in droves to the Nallamala Reserve Forests, but also the menace of plastic pollution. And the local 'green warriors', who call themselves Swatch Sevaks, have taken it upon themselves to make the Nallamala Range, a part of the Eastern Ghats that divides Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra Pradesh, free of plastic.

With an aim to conserve the flora and fauna of these green zones, the native Chenchu tribals have been roped in for a drive. The tribal youths walk or cycle a stretch of two km each and pick up the plastic or other non-biodegradable material discarded by the tourists on the State and National Highways that crisscross the Nallamala Reserve Forest.

Nestled in the forest is the Bhramarambha Mallikarjuna Swamy temple at Srisailam, which draws thousands of devotees on a daily basis and the pollution is growing keeping a pace with the increasing tourist count.

One while travelling from Kurnool to Prakasam district will find many tribal youths collecting single-use plastic and other non-biodegradable material from road margins and the bushes nearby with the help of a long stick on the Pacherla-Diguvumetta section of the Nallamala Range.

“Single-use plastic wafers, bags, covers or pet bottles. You name it and it is found here,” say Durga Prasad, while his fellow Swatch Sevaks—Kranti Kumar, Rajkumar and Noor Basha—show the sacks full of plastic waste they have collected.

Close to 40 Swatch Sevaks are engaged by the Forest Department on the Pacherla-Diguvumetta, Atmakur -Dornala and Dornala - Srisailam sections.

“A big round colourful bunch of plastic waste at the end of the long bamboo staff might look very attractive, but it indicates the extent of damage we are doing to the nature.

Thirteen Swatch Sevaks collect three sackfuls of plastic waste weighing close to 2 kgs in a day,” Nandyal DFO Vineet Kumar tells *The Hindu*, adding that they collect close to 700 kgs of plastic waste at Pacherla checkpoint alone annually.

The Chenchu youth, who have been roped in for this drive, are paid ₹9,000 a month each and the plastic waste they collect is stored at the Pacherla Checkpost and sold to a recycler in Nandyal, generating money for the locals.

Atmakur DFO Alan Chong Teron says that the Srisailam and Sundipeta enclosures too are being kept free from plastic pollution.

Creating awareness

The Chenchus, apart from collecting plastic waste, create awareness about pollution and the conservation of wildlife. They counsel the tourists not to drive fast in the forest zone as it could result in a road kill.

“Despite our appeal not to feed wild animals bananas etc., the visitors keep doing it, putting the wildlife in danger,” says Mr. Kranti Kumar.

The Swatch Sevaks are the first to reach the spot in case of a forest fire due to summer heat or human negligence and douse the flames.



Get Curated Updates

Sign up for our free newsletters to get in-depth analyses, previews for the day ahead, thoughtful roundups and more.

EXPLORE OUR NEWSLETTERS

COMMENTS

SHARE

Related Topics