

Forest department to restrict cattle grazing inside Kerala's Wayanad sanctuary

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KOZHIKODE: With large-scale cattle grazing inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) causing a marked reduction of forest vegetation and thereby causing herbivores to stray into farmlands and even attracting tigers to human habitations on the fringes as grazing cattle are easy prey, the forest authorities have taken steps to impose restrictions on indiscriminate letting loose of cattle inside the sanctuary.

WWS authorities have raised the issue before other departments like the tribal development department and animal husbandry department and other authorities.

WWS warden Abdul Azeez said the herbivorous wildlife in the sanctuary, including deer and gaur are facing scarcity of grass as it is being eaten up by thousands of cattle, including buffaloes, let loose into the forests by

people daily.

He said it has been found that as much as 3,000 cattle are being let loose into the sanctuary daily from the settlements around the sanctuary and the majority of them are buffaloes grown for commercial purposes.

He said grazing is impacting food availability inside the forests and forcing herbivorous to stray into human habitations in search of vegetation.

"It is also attracting tigers and other carnivorous to human habitations along the forest fringes as once the predators get habituated to preying on domesticated buffaloes grazing inside the forests, they stray outside forests as well and engage in cattle depredation," he added.

Azeez said it has been found during field examination that the majority of the cattle grazing inside the sanctuary belongs to people who are not natives of villages in the forest fringes.

With the forest authorities seeking the help of other government departments in addressing the issue at a meeting held at Bathery recently, the tribal development officer, who attended the meeting assured that he will issue a directive that tribals living in enclosure villages and on the fringes should not let cattle which are not owned by them for grazing into the forests.

Animal husbandry department authorities said geotagging to prove ownership of cattle will be completed in Sultan Bathery by April. They said the department does not encourage grazing inside forests as it would lead to the possible spread of diseases from domestic animals to wild animals and vice versa.

It has also been decided to bring to the attention of the state government the need to ensure that dairy farmers have proper cattle sheds so that they can rear the cattle within them.

WWS, which is home to the largest number of tigers in the state, has of late been witnessing increasing in tiger straying incidents and frequent cattle lifting incidents.