

The trees of life

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Creating a canopyYellappa Reddy giving pointers to schoolchildren Meet. Dr Yellappa Reddy, the man instrumental in establishing the Elephant Corridor and giving Bengaluru a green boost “Most of my life has been spent amidst trees and plants,” declares tree expert Dr AN Yellappa Reddy, former Conservator of Forests (Karnataka), adding that the conservation of natural forests and plants of the Western Ghats has always been close to his heart. Amidst the green environs of Cubbon Park in the city, Reddy, 83, is busy advising officials on undertaking ‘tree surgery’ on dead trees and getting rid of those infected with fungi to preserve the soil and atmospheric health of the gardens.“They cannot withstand the pressures of wind and storm. We meticulously diagnose and preserve every tree; when their trunks get hollow we have to ordertheirremoval,” explains Reddy, who heads the Tree Committee for Garden Development and Management constituted by the Department of Horticulture. Reddy also was former Secretary, Dept of Ecology, Environment and Forests from 1992-95. The tree committee guides the mapping of diversity in more than 25 botanical gardens in the state, including Lalbagh and Cubbon Park. “We are re-designing parks with fresh landscaping. Forinstance, in Cubbon Park, a host of Plumaria (Deva Kanigle) were added to fight the vehicular pollution passing through the park. Plumeria has the ability to prevent the spread of air-borne diseases,” says Reddy. The tree committee formed five years ago is recording all species to develop more botanical gardens and bring in green labelling to identify and conserve rare and endangered species. “It is

helping us map the endemic for its gene-mapping and nativity,” says Reddy, whose cherished memories go back to 1976 when he had urged the Devaraj Urs-led government to have a Tree Protection Act promulgated to stop the reckless cutting of forest species. “I remember telling Urs that one day Karnataka may not have wood to cremate the dead!” he laughs. Reddy also successfully implemented eco-restoration technologies and bio-strategies for the restoration of the most degraded areas of the Western Ghats. “It is gratifying to have revived areas of original native vegetation by adopting appropriate plant enrichment techniques,” says Reddy, who started his green journey when he was selected to the Indian Forest Academy in 1960. He graduated in Agriculture and pursued a post-graduation in Soil Science. “My journey continued when I was posted to Madikeri as Assistant Conservator of Forests,” he says. In the mid-1970s, he was the sole crusader for the Mudumalai-Bandipur-Wayanad-Nagarahole forests being declared an Elephant Corridor and saw the connecting forest reserve become the largest elephant habitat in the country. He developed techniques for rearing more than 300 native species of Western Ghats plant species, and brought them over to urban regions too. “The most important phase was when farmers in the ‘70s had neglected native wisdom by not planting perennial income-generating species such as jamun, wood apple, jackfruit and tamarind. Even one tree amongst these can yield a farmer Rs. 10,000 a year,” he says. From Hoskote to Bengaluru, Reddy made sure thousands were planted in forest areas, and seedlings were raised to distribute them to farmers across the State. “It was a breakthrough as we had created a huge green bank. Arboriculture (study of tree, shrubs and vines), Silviculture (health, and quality of forests), Permaculture (agricultural eco-systems) and Polyculture (several species), was flagged off and it picked up well,” he says. While Reddy was responsible for Bengaluru getting green belts, nearly 30 lakes have benefited through his curation of 100 herbal plants that include rare greens such as brahmi (for memory), bakula (for dental care) neem (anti-bacterial) lucky gida (kills mosquito) pongamia (anti virus). Trees of the Ficus family Ashoka, Champaka, Kanaka-Champaka and Parijatha release aromatic oils that trap suspended particles in the air, plants for bees, birds and beetles, and trees for bird-nesting varieties have been introduced. “I have brought 250 species of trees near each lake for bio-diversity,” says Reddy. (This column features people who have exchanged their cubicles for the open fields) Contain the amount of organic waste sent to landfills by taking to organic terrace gardening and composting- Dr. Yellappa Reddy.

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