

## Fates of forests could change for the better with just the name

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What's in a name? The fate of an ecosystem, apparently.

When the forest officers attached to the British Raj surveyed the vast expanse of grasslands and woodlands in the country, they decided to term them “forests”. Many modern-day scientists, however, find this labelling posing a threat to the ecosystem.

“If only they had considered these landscapes of grasslands and wooded areas as savannah, we would perhaps have had better policies to manage these ecosystems,” says Jayashree Ratnam, of the

National Centre for Biological Sciences, who has worked on the African savannah. She was speaking at the international conference on ecology and conversation organised by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) to commemorate its 20th year here on Tuesday.

“A forest implies dense canopy cover, while a savannah implies sparse tree cover, grasslands which are prone to forest fires, and are abundant

with herbivores. Many of our forests are ecologically like the savannah, but are being managed like forests. So, we're subduing forest fires, which has led to increase in invasive species within these ecosystems. We are losing biodiversity here because these grasslands have become targets for government afforestation programmes," said Ms. Ratnam.

The researcher said, "If this "misnaming, misunderstanding and mismanaging" is corrected, then we can treat these forest areas (for instance, Bandipur or Nagarahole) as savannah, where an optimum number of forest fires can be gauged and herbivore population maintained to protect the biodiversity in the ecosystem."

British biologist Georgina Mace, known for her work in developing the IUCN red list of endangered species, said good environment management can help India reduce costs incurred in fighting ecological disasters. Referring to the drought situation in Karnataka, she said: "Good ecosystem management, such as preserving catchment basins, planting trees, would help prevent such crises."

ATREE's founder-president Kamaljit Bawa said as Bengaluru slipped further into a crisis, the role of

science-based think-tanks such as ATREE was growing.

**Source:**

[http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Fates-of-forests-could-change-for-the-better-with-just-the-name/article17090533.ece?utm\\_source=RSS\\_Feed&utm\\_medium=RSS&utm\\_campaign=RSS\\_Syndication](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Fates-of-forests-could-change-for-the-better-with-just-the-name/article17090533.ece?utm_source=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=RSS&utm_campaign=RSS_Syndication)