

Hessarghatta grasslands likely to be protected

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The area around Hessarghatta Lake is likely to be protected soon | Express

BENGALURU: Around 5,000 acres of grassland in Hessarghatta are likely to be declared a conservation reserve to protect them from increasing commercialisation and human interference. The Karnataka Forest Department and Animal Husbandry Department have put together a proposal. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Sanjai Mohan, said the proposal will be tabled at the wildlife board meeting for approval and that the move is required for the conservation of grassland species and other biodiversity.

Of the 5,000 acres, 2,000 belong to the Animal Husbandry Department and the remaining 3,000 to the Karnataka Forest Department. Many birders visit Hessarghatta Lake for bird watching and the area is being excluded from the identified area for bio-fencing.

Hessarghatta has been in news not just for bird watching, but for the threat of encroachment, racing, hunting, cattle grazing, commercial activities, and for a government plan to set up a film studio. The area to be protected includes the cattle farms maintained by the Animal Husbandry department and Nandini.

There is also a central government semen centre, apart from poultry, piggeries and fisheries units. An animal quarantine centre of the Airports Authority of India is also located in the area and needs additional protection. Dr Manjunath Palegar, Farm Section head, Animal Husbandry Department, told The New Indian Express that the move was required as the department is working on getting 'A' grade recognition for the semen centre here, just as Uttar Pradesh has.

"We send around 80 lakh semen samples to various parts of south India and now the demand from other states is also rising. For this, the bulls in the sheds need to be well-fed with good fodder and be protected from diseases. Conserving and protecting the area is vital as stray cattle and farmers bring

their cattle - which could be carrying disease - for grazing. It is also important to keep human interference minimal," he said.

The forest officials is keen on the area's protection specifically because of the rising instances of birds of prey being given live bait for photography, and the increasing human interference that is affecting the biodiversity of the region. There are also instances of local people hunting smaller animals, birds and reptiles. Hessarghatta Lake receives many migratory species of birds, which need additional protection from locals, said a forest department official.

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