

New initiative to map invasive species launched

‘Mapathon’ being conducted to coincide with ‘Van Mahotsav’

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The Keystone Foundation in Kotagiri has appealed to the local residents to be a part of a citizen-science initiative to “map” invasive species of flora across the district.

The “mapathon” is being held to coincide with the first week of July, celebrated as ‘Van Mahotsav’ in honour of forests across India.

“Over the years, tree planting has run the risk of becoming a competition as to who plants more trees in the week. Important topics about forest health and the questions about which plants go where are often not discussed. One particular issue is that of invasive species which are causing irreversible damage to our forests,” a release from the Keystone Foundation said.

“This year, we at Keystone Foundation decided that as we enter the United Nations Decade of ecological restoration, we want to focus on the quality of forests and involve citizens in identifying and mapping out invasive plants



Staff from Keystone Foundation taking part in the drive to map invasive species in the Nilgiris district.

in their backyards,” said Anita Varghese, Director, Biodiversity, Keystone Foundation.

The Keystone Foundation, along with the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment, has developed a form that can be downloaded on any android device and allows people to upload information on any of the invasive plants that they have sighted.

“During the Van Mahotsav week we wish to reach out to residents of the Nilgiris to download this form,

spend time outdoors enjoying nature and recording invasive plants that we see around us. Through this effort we will be able to gather information about the spread of invasive plants and engage with citizens to identify at least 25 invasive plants that are around us,” the press release said.

More details on the initiative can be found on the website ‘Participatory Assessment of the Regional Distribution of Exotic Species in India’ at <http://miap.atree.org>.