

Pvt lands can become mini forests: Popular Choice Awardee

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Noted theatre veteran Arundhati Nag presenting the Popular Choice Award to Sammilan Shetty during the DH Changemakers programme in Bengaluru on Saturday. (Photo Srikanta Sharma R.)

Sammilan Shetty, founder of the butterfly park in Belvai, Udipi district, was awarded the Popular Choice Award here on Saturday evening, at the DH Changemakers 2020 event where 20 achievers were felicitated.

The environmentalist, after receiving the award, said he wanted to make more butterfly documentaries and wanted the forest department to encourage people to conserve fauna if they had private lands and mini forests on their properties.

Shetty's private open park, spread over 7.35 acres of semi-forest land at the foot of Western Ghats, is home to at least 70 species of butterflies.

"We do charge visitors registration fees, but that is not enough to sustain the park. My family has been supportive in financial terms. I haven't reached out to the tourism department, but would like the forest department to encourage more people to conserve flora and fauna in their private lands, he said.

Shetty conducts awareness walks for visitors and teaches them the importance of conserving butterflies and their importance in the food chain. Shetty, who used to be a lecturer, said he doesn't miss teaching and that being a conservationist was always what he wanted to do. Even if his mother had not passed on her land to him, he would have bought land to set up a park, he said.

"Protecting nature is not one man's job. When people know the importance of flora, indigenous trees and national parks, then it is possible to conserve. Second, making films about wildlife that inspires is important. We made India's first 100-minute comprehensive film on butterflies with a lot of interesting facts and their life history. We plan to screen this in schools and also abroad, maybe," said Shetty.

When his Trust grows, he wants to take up rubber plantations, monoculturing and create forests in various areas.

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