

Sonneratia alba species declared state mangrove tree of Maharashtra

22 September 2020



Sonneratia alba is an evergreen mangrove species that grows up to five feet (HT Photo)

The state government on Tuesday declared *Sonneratia alba*, or the mangrove apple, the official state mangrove tree. Maharashtra is the first coastal state in India to declare a state mangrove tree species to enhance conservation of the salt-tolerant vegetation.

The government resolution (GR) issued on Tuesday noted that the state's coastline benefits from mangrove vegetation and read, "Students and general public should be made aware about the importance of mangroves, and their support for the protection and conservation of these trees. Accordingly, the Maharashtra government declares *Sonneratia alba* as the state mangrove tree."

Sonneratia alba is an evergreen mangrove species that grows up to five feet; has white flowers with a pink base; and bears distinctive green apples as fruits. They often grow on newly-formed mudflats playing an important role in combating land erosion. The fruit is used to make pickles. Of the 60 mangrove species found globally, Maharashtra is home to 20.

On August 7, the State Board of Wildlife (SBWL) had approved a proposal for the declaration by the state mangrove cell under the forest department. "Mangrove presence is prominent along our coastline acting as shield against natural disasters and crucial in terms of carbon storage. More so, a large area near our urban centres has mangrove cover. Declaring a state mangrove tree gives our effort to protect this ecosystem a further boost," said Aaditya Thackeray, state environment and tourism minister.

Milind Mhaikar, principal secretary (forest) said, "It is a welcome step which shows sensitivity as well as aesthetic recognition towards the important ecosystem of mangroves. The state is also on a fast track to complete the final notification of mangrove areas as reserved forest, and also hand over these zones to the forest department."

In Mumbai, the mangrove cell documented the species along Thane creek, Bhandup, Vasai and Dombivli along major mudflats. "The idea was to select a species which was neither extremely rare nor common, which could help us spread awareness among local communities and public at large about mangrove conservation," said Virendra Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forest (mangrove cell).

Experts said mangrove apple had the potential to thrive and the species instinctively equips itself with a defence mechanism to fight future sea level rise where the state's dominant species *Avicennia* could fail. "This declaration is symbolic both of our hope to fight climate change through nature-based solutions and the best way to do it that is through a community-based conservation strategy" said N Vasudevan, former mangrove cell head.

MANGROVE CELL FRONTLINE STAFF SUCCUMBS TO COVID-19

Security personnel of the Maharashtra State Security Corporation (MSSC) Tushar Shivaji Aavhad, 31, died at Sion Hospital on Monday. He is the first of the state mangrove cell's on-ground, frontline staff to succumb to Covid-19. "Aavhad died due to health complications (brain haemorrhage) which aggravated after he tested positive for Covid-19. He was a head guard deputed at Mandale for mangrove protection," said DR Patil, divisional forest officer (mangrove cell). Two other officers (another MSSC security personnel and a range forest officer) have also tested positive for Covid-19 and been admitted to different hospitals.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/sonneratia-alba-species-declared-state-mangrove-tree-of-maharashtra/story-VPM2J3RYQTsOMkypOPa2pO.html>