

PUDUCHERRY

Seminar, rally mark World Wetlands Day

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Speakers stress on the critical life-sustaining role of the distinct ecosystem, importance of its protection



An 'International Wetlands Conservation Network' has been mooted to complement the efforts taken by the government to develop a smart city with access to basic ecosystem services and life support system, M. Nandhivarman, general secretary, Association for Promoting Sustainability in Campuses and Communities, has said.

Mr. Nandhivarman, who chaired a session to mark the World Wetlands Day recently, pointed

wetlands to continue to thrive and grow, while regulating natural resources consumption, groundwater abstraction and pollution prevention.

The event was hosted by a consortia of organisations such as the Department of Forest and Wild Life and Pondicherry University with the Association for Promoting Sustainability in Campuses and Communities (APSCC), the lead host.

The theme for World Wetlands Day 2019, 'Wetlands and Climate Change', was formulated by the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

A students rally, drawing competition and awareness programmes formed part of the celebrations at the Indira Gandhi College of Arts and Science, Kadhirkamam.

The event also fostered the Sustainable Development Goals like Sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), Climate action (Goal 13), Life below water (Goal 14), Life on land (Goal 15), Partnerships for the goals (Goal 17).

Experts pointed out that in Puducherry, the Oussudu and Bahour lakes were the two important wetlands, which are variously described as kidneys of the landscape or lungs of the aquifer or biological supermarket for their diverse ecosystem services.

In fact, Oussudu Lake has been identified as one of the 'important wetlands of Asia' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), while the Asian Wetland Bureau had declared it as 'one of the 93 important wetlands'.

Further, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) had designated it as an 'important bird area', while the Government of Pondicherry had declared it as a 'bird sanctuary' in 2008.

In April 2014, the Tamil Nadu Government declared Oussudu as its '(fifteenth) bird/wildlife sanctuary'.

The lake is now being managed by the Forest Department which has declared Oussudu a protected area.

Bird area

The Bahour Lake, which is the second largest lake in Puducherry, has been recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA) that could support more than 20,000 birds every year.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India, had notified new Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017 to protect and conserve the wetlands by prohibiting a range of activities.

There are at least 115 wetlands that are officially identified by the Central Government and of those 26 were identified as 'wetlands of international importance' under the Ramsar Convention, which is an international inter-governmental treaty for the conservation of wetlands, of which India is a signatory.

Several speakers stressed the critical life-sustaining role of wetlands and the importance of their protection.

Besides being a wildlife habitat for many aquatic and terrestrial species (both nocturnal and diurnal), lakes, ponds and waterbodies regulate soil formation, biodiversity, groundwater recharge, flood protection, and climatic cycles.

Wetlands also make rural areas and cities liveable in many important ways by sustaining the basic ecosystem and life support systems.

Earlier, College principal B. Kumaran who inaugurated the programme, underscored the importance of wetlands and the role of student community for its sustenance.

Wetland conservation

Prof. K. V. Devi Prasad, in his presidential address, pressed the concept 'wetlands should be protected, conserved and integrated into a sustainable future planning and development, because, the future we want includes cities of opportunities for all.'

Thiyagarajan, Enforcement Officer, in his special address highlighted the measures taken by the Department of Forest and Wildlife from climate change perspective and the international recognition that was given to Oussudu and Bahour lakes of Puducherry.

He also requested the younger generation to raise awareness among the general public fostering their participation in this regard.

Prizes were given to the winners of the painting competition on the Wetland Day theme. The event concluded with enforcement authorities, faculty and students taking the 'Wetland Day Pledge' in the presence of Golda A. Edwin programme convener, E. Devabalane, State NSS Coordinator and D. Satish Kumar, NSS officer.

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