

UNESCO TAG SOUGHT FOR ROOT BRIDGES

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A living root bridge in Meghalaya. Fle Photo

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has underlined some green rules for the living root bridges of Meghalaya to get the UNESCO World Heritage Site tag.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma pitched for UNESCO recognition as the hill State marked its 50th year of creation. Meghalaya has been celebrating its Statehood Day on January 21 since 1972.

A living root bridge is like a suspension bridge formed by guiding the pliable roots of the rubber fig tree (*Ficus elastica*) across a stream or river and allowing the roots to grow and strengthen over time. There are no records to suggest when the Khasi community started the living root bridge tradition, but ecologists say it highlights the symbiotic relationship between people and nature. Such a bridge is locally called *jingkieng jri* .

ZSI Director Dhriti Banerjee said faunal diversity and the preparation of health cards would be the prerequisites for Meghalaya's living root bridges to earn the UNESCO tag.

The State government had a few days ago organised a national convention and a preparatory field visit of ZSI scientists to assess the community and science-based conservation, research and development of the living root bridges.

"These bridges support many birds, animals, lichens, mushrooms, flowers and trees and allow the humans to cross over for their living," Mr. Sangma had said ahead of the convention.

The ZSI team visited some sites in the East Khasi Hills district for the assessment of faunal diversity.

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