

COIMBATORE'S VELLALORE LAKE IS NOW A BUTTERFLY HOTSPOT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Aerial view of Vellalore wetland | Photo Credit: [Special Arrangement](#)

A miyawaki forest canopy with towering native trees and a dense belt of flowering plants has turned the city's Vellalore Lake into a butterfly hotspot. Blue Mormons, the fourth largest butterfly of India and State butterfly of Maharashtra, have been sighted in great numbers. A beautiful bluish-green butterfly called the common banded peacock, as like medus brown, chocolate albatross, and bamboo tree brown buzzed around the nectaring plants at the lake much to the excitement of butterfly enthusiasts.

"All these species can be sighted in forest covers and wooded-areas, but we were surprised to see them in good numbers in the plains," says Pavendhan A of the Tamil Nadu Butterfly Society (TNBS), adding that so far 83 species have been recorded. "This indicates that 25% of species from Tamil Nadu's checklist (of 327 species) are available in this single location. This criteria qualifies the wetland as a butterfly hotspot."

At one time, Vellalore tank spread across an expanse of 90-acres, was home to rosy starlings, a winter migratory bird that flocked here in thousands to roost. Many old timers recall it as an unforgettable sight. While cormorants used the many trees around the lake as their nesting ground, ducks paddled in the waters. What was once a hub of migratory birds, ran dry and became a dumping ground for garbage and debris. This blocked the inlet channels that fed the lake with water from the Noyyal, the lifeline of Coimbatore.

A team of eco-warriors including R Manikandan, founder of Kovai Kulangal Paadukaappu Amaippu (KKPA), a water conservation NGO started in 2017, along with Coimbatore Corporation and other public works departments, de-silted the Rajavaaikaal channel, which connects the lake with the Noyyal, removed encroachments, and cleared the debris.

"After a gap of over 15 years, the lake filled up during the monsoons in 2018," says Manikandan. A miyawaki forest sprung to life along the bund as a part of restoration. "We planted 10,000 trees in batches. This includes over 300 varieties of native species like neem, banyan, pungai, and poovarasu. We added hundreds of herbal plants, and flowering plants like *thael kodukku*, *nari kilikiluppai*, castor, hibiscus, *arali* and *naatu* rose. It created a conducive ecosystem for butterflies to thrive," says Manikandan.

Kamala Kannan Y, a volunteer with KKPA says a team of bird watchers accompanied by school students have recorded 156 species of birds at the green zone. "We ensure that the green cover is nurtured and well-maintained and supports the many life forms including insects, birds, and butterflies."

A six-member team from TNBS along with KKPA has been conducting regular monitoring of butterflies at the Vellalore wetland as part of a one-year study that started in October last year. They also take students on Nature walks along the bund and explain the life cycle of butterflies and their significance within the ecosystem. Pavendhan explains that it is important to develop the greenery without altering the vegetation that already exists in the area.

He says, "The purpose is to impart Nature education to students. As we continue to lose green

cover in cities, such green zones are important to attract butterflies. For example, the common three ring is dependant on grass, its host plant. But, lawns in the city are cleared up to pave way for buildings. For the grass diamond butterfly, the host plant is turmeric, which is grown in farmlands around the lake.” He adds, “The spotlight has to be back on the conservation of wetlands.”

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