

# DEPLETING MANGROVE COVER POSES PROBLEMS TO VISAKHAPATNAM

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

Green cover is crumbling due to decades of industrialisation and urban development projects. | Photo Credit: [K.R. Deepak](#)

From an extent of 400 acres of vast mangrove wetlands around Meghadrigedda creek located between the Visakhapatnam Port Trust and airport, the precious green cover today is less than 40 acres. For long a green lung of the city, a home to several bird and marine species, it is crumbling. Thanks to decades of industrialisation and urban development projects.

This rich ecosystem was once a home to many species of birds like white ibis, little egret, pond heron, little stint, black-capped kingfisher, little cormorant, purple heron and also the endangered olive ridley turtles. In a depleting mangrove cover, these species are non-existent today.

On World International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem marked on July 26, Andhra Pradesh Climate Group (APCG) — a team of researchers, academicians and students — led an awareness campaign to drive home the point that mangroves are critical to the ecosystem of Visakhapatnam. “The city’s coastline has faced drastic beach erosion since 2012. With the mangroves stretch shrinking, the sea was impounded into a narrow channel. The erosive power of the sea was strengthened near RK Beach and surrounding areas, thus causing the erosion,” says Aditya Madhav, a research worker who has done a study of mangroves in the region. “All stakeholders must get together and rope in experts to come up with a sustainable solution,” he adds.

Explaining the significance of mangrove ecosystem, Shankar Anant, DFO (Visakhapatnam), says, “Mangroves grow in most difficult conditions of high salinity, hypoxic soils as well as highly specific conditions marked by tidal fluctuations. They develop adaptations like root projections defying gravity called pneumatophores. In recent times, mangroves have been subjected to heavy destruction and exploitation.”

Anant along with his team at the Forest Department recovered around 500 hectares of mangrove plantation at Krishna Delta in 2019 through a special technique called the fishbone method. “It involves making channels in the form of fishbone and allowing mangrove seedlings come along with tidal waters. It is highly technical and successful,” he adds.

Pioneer species like Suaeda come first followed by arrival of crabs which dig the soil and change its character. Mangroves follow them. The entire dynamics change over time. “These man-made plantations soon turn into rich biodiversity hotspots and are abode for variety of fishes, otters, snakes, molluscs, fishing cats, jackals and several others. Fishing cats are the apex predators of this ecosystem,” says Anant.

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