

BREEDING 'NEMO', SAVING MANGROVES

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

A pair of clownfish at the Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Research Centre at Airoli in Navi Mumbai. | Photo Credit: [The Hindu](#)

Thanks to the blockbuster animated film *Finding Nemo*, clownfish are a perennial favourite among aquarium enthusiasts. Now a collaborative effort by the Maharashtra Mangrove Cell and Lucknow's National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources (NBFGR) will help villagers in Maharashtra's mangrove belt make a living by cashing in on the fish's popularity.

A team from the NBFGR is at Mumbai's Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Centre in Airoli, nursing hundreds of eggs laid by seven pairs of clownfish, also known as 'anemonefish'. This clownfish hatchery, the first of its kind to be set up in Mumbai, will help the villagers set up a clownfish trade business. In return, the locals would help in mangrove conservation.

A pair of clownfish costs over 2,000. "Marine aquarium trade is a booming business. Our aim is to involve the local communities and offer them livelihood-generating options. In return, we will involve them in mangrove protection," said N. Vasudevan, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Maharashtra Mangrove Cell.

While over 60 villages from the coastal belt have been short-listed, the ones in Thane, Palghar and Raigad will receive the first batch of fish. The Mangrove Cell has helped them build storage tanks and is training them in installing low-cost filtration units, checking water quality, understanding the behaviour of the fish, and in the tricks of aquarium trade. The villagers will be charged 25 per fish.

Around 200 clownfish were brought from Tamil Nadu, Andaman Islands, and Lakshadweep. They were paired, and 57 pairs survived. "There are 30 clownfish species in the world, of which 16 are found in India. We have 10 different species in the hatchery," said Ajith Kumar, a scientist from the NBFGR.

While the space and funds for the project are coming through the mangrove cell, the NBFGR is providing technical expertise. The NBFGR team is excited that the fish have laid several hundred eggs this week. "The eggs hatch in six to eight days. After the larva is born, it takes 20 to 25 days for metamorphosis, when they become miniature adults measuring less than a centimetre," Mr. Kumar explained.

The baby fish will be reared in the hatchery for 30 days, after which they will be handed over to the villagers. The budding entrepreneurs will take care of them for two months, until they grow into the marketable size of 3 cm.

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