

Blackbuck conservation reserve to come up in U.P.

Blackbucks grazing in agricultural fields in the trans-Yamuna belt near Allahabad. Sanjay Kumarde03 buck

A wildlife conservation reserve dedicated exclusively to the blackbuck is coming up over 126 hectares in the trans-Yamuna region of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh.

The State cabinet has approved a Blackbuck Conservation Reserve in the Meja forest division that is known for its rocky, undulating and arid terrain.

A herd of around 350 blackbucks is estimated to be inhabiting the region, senior government official Sanjay Kumar told *The Hindu*.

There are a few national parks and sanctuaries inhabited by blackbuck in the country, like the Velavadar Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat and the Ranibennur Blackbuck Sanctuary in Karnataka. However, there are not many conservation reserves exclusively dedicated to the antelope.

Mr. Kumar, who as a former District Magistrate of Allahabad, played a vital role in conceptualising the reserve, mobilising local cooperation and getting the project approved, says it is the “first ever conservation reserve” of any kind in U.P.

Blackbucks, known for their majestic spiral horns and coat colour contrasts, are found in grasslands and open forests.

They once ruled the open savannahs of north and central India, but are now restricted to just a few patches and habitats, primarily due to human population growth, ecosystem degradation and hunting.

The U.P. government evoked Section 36 A (1) and (2) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, to declare the conservation reserve.

“The conservation of blackbuck can now be done in an effective way. It will also create awareness about biodiversity conservation and provide opportunities for people’s participation. Eco-tourism will be encouraged and locals will get opportunities for employment,” a government spokesperson said.

Safe haven

The blackbucks can often be seen grazing in agricultural fields during the dry season in the trans-Yamuna belt in Meja and Bundelkhand. However, according to Mr. Kumar, who is also a wildlife photographer, the island of safe haven for the blackbuck within the designated reserve is a rocky terrain dotted with trees of dhak, mahua, neem and acacia. “The area boasts more than 200 species of birds and herbivores like blackbucks and bluebull [nilgai], and carnivores like jackals and striped hyena,” he said.

On the intervention of Mr. Kumar, while he was DM of Allahabad till recently, NTPC authorities at the Meja power plant sanctioned an amount of Rs. 1.20 crore to the forest department under their corporate social responsibility to support the work of the blackbuck habitat through construction of approach roads, waterholes and erection of retro-board signages. Mr. Kumar himself sanctioned funds for setting up solar pumps and establishing an interpretation centre for visiting tourists.

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