

International Day of Forests

21 March

C.P.R. Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC) is a Centre of Excellence of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India, established jointly by the Ministry and the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation in the year 1989. The Centre has been a pioneer in environmental education efforts in India and has conducted a variety of programmes to spread awareness and interest among the masses.

CPREEC felt that it was not enough to talk about the environment, to train teachers to teach children, to teach eco-friendly activities and so on without showing that low-cost replicable and micro level environmental improvements were possible. The search for micro level examples of a perfect environment which reflected the heritage and ethos of India led to sacred groves.

India has a long tradition of prudent use and wise conservation of all resources that are useful to people. Forests have been the lifelines for forest-dwelling communities since ancient times. One method for conservation of this green resource was the creation of sacred groves, usually dedicated to a local deity. A traditional means of biodiversity conservation, these groves can be considered the ancient equivalent of natural sanctuaries where all forms of living creatures are given protection by a deity. No one is permitted to cut any tree or plant, kill animals and birds, or harm any form of life in this area.

Though ancient people of India established sound socio-cultural practices epitomizing in situ conservation of biological and genetic diversity, in recent times, this has been forgotten or ignored in the face of development.

Trees in sacred groves serve a variety of ecosystem functions including biodiversity conservations, removal of atmospheric pollutants, oxygen generation, microclimate regulation, stabilization of soil, ground water recharge, prevention of soil erosion and carbon sequestration. Forest based mitigation will not only help in CO₂ reduction but will help in many other ways to support other ecological services. Carbon sequestration in growing forests is known to be a cost-effective option for mitigation of global warming and global climatic change.

The concept of carbon sequestration of trees in sacred groves is a primary role of carbon estimation and it will lead to estimate carbon credit. The benefits of carbon credit will be a major part of income to the villagers by conserving sacred groves with appropriate care.

In order to restore and conserve the sacred groves which are endangered or on the verge of extinction, CPREEC commenced its conservation and restoration programme in 1993-1994. Till date CPREEC has successfully restored 53 sacred groves in the States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

International Day of Forests held each year on the 21st day of March celebrates and raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests and trees outside forests for the benefit of current and future generations.

The theme of the 2015 International Day of Forests (IDF) is **Forests | Climate | Change**, and CPREEC has been organizing training programmes for teachers and students on Conservation and Restoration of Sacred Groves highlighting the ways in which forests and climate change are linked and the importance of conservation of sacred groves.