

SGNP hamlet tackles waste at source to combat man-animal conflict

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According to a study, garbage strewn across the surroundings attract dogs to such villages, which form the largest prey base for leopards leading to man-animal conflict.



For the last three months, the residents of Chunapada inside the SGNP have been sending dry waste for recycling, while the wet waste is being turned into compost. (HT Photo)

A tribal hamlet in the city's national park is countering the concerns of human-animal conflict. For over three months, the residents of Chunapada inside the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), Borivli, have been segregating waste at source and has become the park's first zero waste tribal hamlet.

Garbage strewn across the surroundings attract dogs to such villages, which form the largest prey base for leopards leading to man-animal conflict, a study released by Wildlife Conservation Society, India (WCS-India) and SGNP in March stated. The organisations have found 47 leopards in and around the park.

"If garbage is taken care at source, it will automatically work towards less leopard movement near these hamlets. There is need for more awareness in peripheral areas of SGNP to address sporadic conflict cases," said Nikit Surve from WCS-India.

The 220-odd residents living in 43 homes have been sending dry waste for recycling, while the wet waste is being turned into compost. By segregating waste at source, the hamlet has also reduced the burden on city's landfills.

The project is led by SGNP forest staff, lawyer and beach clean-up crusader Afroz Shah and his 25 volunteers, who removed over 20,000kg waste from Chunapada in over 14 weeks with clean-up drives scheduled every Tuesday.

Every week, the hamlet generates 20 kg organic waste and another 150-200kg dry waste, mostly comprising plastic.

"In December, the SGNP director informed us that the villagers were dumping waste around the hamlet. Owing to this, SGNP officials and villagers, regularly spotted leopard movements around the area, as dogs frequented these dump sites. The leopards also entered the area to prey on deer eating from the garbage. So to address this, we adopted Chunapada," said Shah.

The SGNP staff, led by range forest officer Priyanka Barge and eight forest guards, have been sensitising other hamlets to follow the model.

"This is the first major step to address the waste problem in SGNP. Kudos to Shah for initiating this model. We will now replicate this model in other hamlets, SGNP offices and surrounding residential societies. Through this activity, the tribal residents have a sense of belonging. This is the first hamlet from the park from where no waste will be sent to the landfill," said Anwar Ahmed, director and chief conservator of forest, SGNP.

Four 4-foot-by-4-foot compost pits were dug along the periphery of the hamlet where wet waste is being broken down into compost through vermicomposting (using worms to degenerate waste into manure).

"We have been getting 5kg manure every two weeks, which we used to plant 25 saplings within the hamlet," said Vaishali S, a resident who is in-charge of composting.

Satish Kulkarni, another resident, said, "Each house judiciously collected and segregated the everyday waste from January. It took us sometime to understand the process but now our dumpsites are waste free."

The dry waste is collected using a tempo and volunteers are being provided with sacks by four private plastic manufacturing companies that recycle the waste.

"These companies recycle and send waste back to the industry. We have provided 10 large garbage bins, with every five houses having one bin each to dispose of dry waste," Shah said.

Why you should care

Garbage attracts feral dogs that form the prey base for leopards

In January, a poaching nexus, taking place adjacent to the Film City, Goregaon, was busted. According to officers, food waste dumped openly next to film sets attracted dogs, cats and deer. Leopards entered the area to prey on the animals and were killed by poachers

• **There also have been instances of leopards entering housing societies in Andheri, Mulund, Marol, Ulhasnagar and Thane, owing to movement of dogs around open dumpsites.**

Navapada, the next stop

Afroz Shah, his volunteers and the forest department will now address waste management at Navapada, which has 120 houses and a population of 500

They will be assisted by the Chunapada residents

- *“The project will be implemented across all 43 tribal hamlets with houses varying from 40 to 200 in each hamlet in SGNP,” said Anwar Ahmed, director and chief conservator of forest, SGNP.*

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