

'Poachers pose threat to endangered otters'

To conserve the small-clawed mammal, a research will be conducted by the Ela Foundation and the state mangrove cell

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Owing to the greed of mankind, the small-clawed otters have now become a rare sight. The endangered species were frequently seen in and around waterbodies in the country.

In a bid to change the alarming situation, a research is being carried out on otters in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district by members of the Ela Foundation along with the state mangrove cell. The study will be conducted as part of the Government of India's United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project.

Dr Satish Pande, founder of the Ela Foundation, a non-government registered charity devoted to nature education and conservation, said, "Ten otters are poached against one tiger skin.



Found near waterbodies, the semi-aquatic mammal thrives on fish only.

However, the conservation of the species is not given much importance in the country."

Pande added, "Otters are usually found in the mangroves in Sindhudurg area."

Otters are known as indicators of water pollution. The semi-aquatic fish eating mammal's presence in the mangroves determines the habitat's health.

"These mammals are nocturnal. At any hint of humans, they go under water to hide. Hence, spotting them becomes a challenge. While the local people are on friendly terms with the mammal, it is the poachers that prove dangerous to them. Poachers hunt down the species for fur trade. The pelt is of high value. In fact, in China, a raid had been conducted wherein 760 skins were



found in one go," Pande informed.

An otter weighs around 7 to 9 kg and consumes food equal to half of his body weight. Therefore, the species can only thrive in a healthy ecosystem consisting a lot of fish. The mammal lives in groups of four to 12 individuals.

Besides poaching, the mammal is affected by removal of bank side vegetation and manmade aquaculture activ-

ities which has a profound effect on the aquatic system. Pande explained, "Pollution harms the variety of fish, which is food for these mammals. Also, sand mining puts their habitat at risk. The research, therefore, is to understand all about the mammal, which presently is a mystery at least in the Indian setting."

Another naturalist Bhau Katdhare, who is based in Konkan, said that the mammal is rarely seen due to its shy nature. "They are present in many areas of Konkan, generally in creeks. At present, besides locals, not many are aware of the species. The research material should prove helpful in conserving the mammal."

Stalin Dayanand, founder of Vanashakti and an environmentalist, shared, "It is good to note that attention is being shifted to otters, which are called endangered species today. The study will help in holistic planning of rebuilding their habitat."

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MIT opens its doors for religious studies

The university will start a college which will offer courses in Vedic scriptures

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The Maharashtra Institute of Technology (MIT) is set to make a grand foray into religious studies.

The institute will start the Maharshi Ved Vyas MIT School of Vedic Sciences and Ethical Management, which will offer management courses based on the ethical values derived from various religious scriptures.

While the details of the course structure and duration are yet to be finalised, the college is said to start functioning from this academic year itself.

The college will be affiliated to MIT located in Loni Kalbhor.

The courses will consist a study of the Vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Koran, Bible, Jain Agamas, Buddhist's Dhammapadas and Guru Granth Sahib.

It will also consist study of the scriptures written by saints such as Dnyaneshwara, Tukaram and Ramdas, who led the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra.

Dr Vishwanath Karad, founder of the MIT Group of Institutes, said, "The idea behind starting the college dedicated solely to the study of the Vedas and other religious scriptures was to mould the overall thinking of the present generation to live life most meaningfully."

Karad added, "Dasbodh written by Samartha Ramdas is still so relevant that today's management gurus take inspiration from his writings. It will also be a part of the curriculum of the courses. These scriptures formulate the very basis of our existence."

Meanwhile, Dr Vijay Bhatkar, chairman of the board of governors of IIT-Delhi and father of the first Indian supercomputer Param, will be playing a crucial part in designing the courses.

Bhatkar shared, "Although the courses are full time, we have kept it very flexible. Any student, who has passed Class 12, can pursue these courses. The student can pursue the courses and simultaneously complete graduation as well. By completing



The college will be affiliated to Maharashtra Institute of Technology in Loni Kalbhor.

These courses have a demand in foreign countries, to learn the languages, religion and culture that shaped India

PT. VASANT GADGIL, PROFESSOR AT THE INDIA INTERNATIONAL MULTIVERSITY

these courses, we are sure that a student can very well get a decent amount of income to earn his livelihood. The courses are designed in a manner that it will make the student excel in everything. Moreover, the employment opportunities have increased in this sector. Many companies are in the need of people, who are experts in ethical management as well as in religious studies."

Pt. Vasant Gadgil, professor at the India International Multiversity, said, "We are planning to have a meeting to finalise the courses. Details are being worked out. These courses have a demand in foreign countries, that are very keen to learn the languages, religion and culture that shaped India. Many universities, think tanks and educational institutes are in the need of people, who possess the knowledge of Vedas and religious studies. We will be associating with them to get our students placed."