

Exotic fishes nudge out Kole's own variants

Wetlands spread over 13,632 ha in Thrissur, Malappuram

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Kole wetlands, spread over 13,632 hectares in Thrissur and Malappuram districts, harbour a variety of endemic as well as threatened fishes. However, a recent study under the guidance of E.A. Jayson, Senior Principal Scientist, and Greeshma Paleeri, research scholar from the Wildlife Biology Department, Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Peechi, Thrissur, says exotic fish varieties are proliferating in the wetlands, causing a potential threat to its rich biodiversity.

Mozambique Tilapia *Oreochromis mossambicus*, Highfin Glassy Perchlet Parambassis lala, Three-spotted Gourami *Trichopodus*



Mozambique tilapia and Sucker mouth catfish.

trichopterus, and Amazon sailfin sucker mouth catfish *Pterygoplichthys* Sp. are found in abundance in the Kole wetlands, according to the scientists.

As part of a study titled 'Foraging ecology of birds in Kole wetlands of Thrissur,' fish sampling was done during 2015-17. Mozambique Tilapia *Oreochromis mossambicus* is one of the most harmful invasive species in

aquatic ecosystems worldwide. It was introduced in India for aquaculture in 1952," says Ms. Paleeri.

Sucker mouth catfish was introduced to several Asian countries for aquarium trade. The species disrupts aquatic food chain by overconsumption of benthic algae and detritus, thereby leading to the decline of native species. Highfin Glassy Perchlet *Parambassis lala*,

another exotic/ornamental species, listed as near-threatened, is carnivorous. According to the fisherman of Pullazhi, Puzhakkal, and Adatt Kole wetlands, it was first sighted in 2017.

Call for curbs

"Authorities should impose strict checks on ponds rearing exotic fish near wetlands. Otherwise the Kole fish wealth will be affected," said Manoj Karingamadathil, an environmental activist, Kole Birders Group.

Activists said the biodiversity and fish wealth of Kole wetlands had reduced drastically. The Kole wetlands is one of largest, highly productive wetlands in Kerala and have been declared a Ramsar site for protection.