

# Invasive plant species spread over 10 hectares to be cleared

## Greens, Farmers Determined To Protect Wayanad Sanctuary

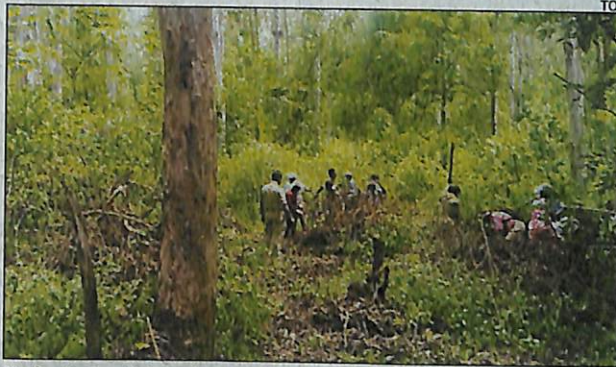
The Times of India-04-06-2018-P-06

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**Kozhikode:** While people elsewhere in the state will plant millions of tree saplings marking World Environment Day on Tuesday, a group of greens and farmers in Wayanad are set to uproot over one lakh invasive plants that have been posing a threat to the forest ecosystem in the hill district.

Agami, a collective of paddy farmers, along with greens and forest officials hope to clear 10 hectares infested by *Lantana camara* (sleeper weed), a vigorous shrub grows in dense thickets disrupting the growth of native species. Already they have cleared around 50,000 plants spread across four hectares of two forest stretches in Tholpetty range of Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) and South Wayanad division.

Native to South America, *Lantana camara* is believed to be brought to India by the British as ornamental plants. The species has engulfed around 40% of the 344-sqkm sanctuary.



Native to South America, *Lantana camara* is believed to be brought to India by the British as ornamental plants. Around 50,000 of the disruptive plants were already uprooted as part of the new campaign

“*Lantana* replaces native plant varieties and hinders the free movement of wild animals inside the forest. Also, it is non-palatable for many herbivores,” said WWS warden NT Sajan, explaining how the species has affected the food base of animals, thereby exacerbating human-wildlife conflict.

Ratheshan V, assistant wildlife warden of Tholpetty range of WWS, said the plan

was to eradicate *Lantana* in phases with public participation.

Stanley Augustine, secretary of Agami, said farmers under the collective have come forward for the proliferation campaign after realising that the species has been stifling growth of grass, driving herbivores to stray into human habitations in search of food.

“We intend to uproot anot-

her 50,000 plants of the invasive species on World Environment Day at Irulam in South Wayanad forest division. Every year the government has been spending crores of rupees for planting lakhs of tree saplings to mark the day, but most of it doesn't survive in the long term. We thought that uprooting the invasive plants from the forests would serve the higher purpose of restoring the forest,” he added.

According to Asia Pacific Forest Invasive Species (APFISN) *Lantana* infestations can sometimes be so persistent that they could completely stall the regeneration of rain forests for several years. It also threatens natural habitats and native flora and fauna as it infests pastures, grazing lands and the allelopathic qualities of *Lantana* reduce the vigour of native plant species and limits their productivity. Allelopathy is a biological phenomenon by which an organism produces one or more biochemicals that influence other organisms.