

Exploring the Biodiversity of Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park: A Day of Discovery and Awareness

It definitely was going to be one adventurous weekend for me. I woke up with a lot of excitement, dreaming about exploring the wonders of nature. I went along with the Zoo Outreach team to the Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park along with the Bosch team.

We set out at 11:30 am for our nature walk. I had a desire to spot some animals and birds that day. As we walked through the gate, we saw a fern palm- Gymnosperm. It is called the 'Relic of Nature'. As we wandered deeper inside, we sighted a wide variety of trees. Our mentor Sanjay explained us about native trees. Native trees are plants that occur naturally and has not been introduced by man.

It was fascinating to know that native plants sequester more carbon than invasive species, plants that have been introduced and are not present naturally. He also brought to our awareness that the food we consume on a regular basis like Indian almond, coconut etc are non-native species. For example, tamarind, the souring agent we use in our daily meals is also an invasive species that replaced our native souring agent Kokum. It took me some time to take up this fact because tamarind has



The team.



Sanjay talking to us about the history of the Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park before the trail



Sanjay and me discussing about the Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park.



Treasures collected during my nature trail.

already established its dominance in our kitchen today and I have tasted kokum juice only once in a far remote village.

As we continued walking through the trail, we spotted a Rose wood about 200 years old which could live up to 1500 years. We delved deeper into our nature walk and stumbled upon fascinating facts.

Surprisingly, some cacti, originally native to Mexico, now thrive abundantly across India. Our observations led us to discover stingless bees nestled in the branches of the *Bombax cieba* tree, and we learned that the *Terminalia arjuna* tree always prefers to grow near water bodies. We also got to know that there are a lot of endemic trees (found only in that particular

region) to the Nilgiri Biosphere, but sadly a lot of them are already taken over by invasive species thus leading to the threatened status of native species.

To conclude, I collected a lot of treasures like fallen seeds, golden leaves, and feathers. I also gathered a lot of knowledge about native forests and ended my day wondering to create an awareness and impact on all others around me.

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