

Project Update: November 2015

Introduction

Shola-grassland habitats occur only in a small part of the Western Ghats. Between 50-85% of this habitat has been modified for various plantations. A recent court judgment has directed the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to remove all timber plantations and several hectares has already been cleared. Research has shown that some of these plantations today host a number of endemic taxa and even provide a “nurse effect” to the slow growing native Shola plants. This suggests that indiscriminate clear-felling will lead to widespread ecological damage.

In this project a visual documentary will be created with all key information accessible to decision makers and public.

Status of Project

The project was initiated in May 2015 after receiving permits from the respective authorities. First 2 months were spent engaging with forest department, scientists and conservationist to make a thorough script and story. As part of the project, multiple forest department meeting were attended and the issue regarding clear felling was raised and explained. This was followed by field visits to document the current status of these exotic plantations in Anamali hills and Nilgiri hills. Unfortunately, due to permit issues and unexpected heavy rains, the field documentation in Palni hills could not be done till now. A separate field trip will be conducted to Palni hills in end of December to finish the documentation of the entire project.

Currently footages are being organised for post production. The film will be ready for circulation in January of 2016.

Future steps

- Finish filming at Palni hills (end of December 2015).
- Organise the footage for post-production.
- Initiate post-production.
- Communicate with forest departments and local NGOs and decide film screening dates.
- Submit final report and film to Rufford.
- Circulate the film and screen it officially at multiple places in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



Left: Plantations in Anamalai hill. Right: Scientists, conservationist and managers understanding the status of plantations during a field trip



Left: Uninvaded Shola grassland from Anamalai. Right: Grasslands invaded by plantations in Nilgiri hills.