

Project to Restore Sloth Bear Habitat in Jessore Takes Off

AHMEDABAD: Gujarat government has taken up a project to provide better habitat to sloth bears by restoring the ecology of Jessore wildlife sanctuary, where more trees will be planted and unwanted vegetation removed.

As per the last census in 2011, nearly 293 sloth bears were found in the state forests. There is an intense need to create good food habitat for the sloth bears, who mainly eat honey and termites, which can be provided by new plantation, a senior state government official said. The project aims at planting good amount to trees in the sanctuaries and removing unwanted plant species that have intruded in the habitat.

"There has been encroachment of unwanted vegetation species like Lantenaspp and Prospisjuli-flora, which we call 'Gando Baval' in general language. We will remove these species and plant fruit trees in Jessore," he said. "The final testing in the forest will be conducted in next monsoon in June or July and after necessary process, the project will be handed over to the forest department," he said.

Following positive results of a pilot project taken up for sloth bears in Banaskantha district by state forest department in coordination with the Gujarat Ecology Commission (GEC), the government has now taken up the new initiative, officials said. "As the population of sloth bears has increased, attempts are underway to restore ecology of the sanctuary," Gujarat forest minister Mangu Patel told PTI. "As a human being needs a good house, our wildlife is also entitled to have a good habitat," Patel said. The project is estimated to cost around Rs 40 lakh, where GEC will be the guiding body to Banaskantha forest division, officials said.

"Basically, GEC is trying to restore the eco-system in Jessore area. We have taken it up in some patches of Jessore wildlife sanctuary as a pilot project," GEC member secretary A K Saxena said.

This is a small effort to revive good vegetational habitat in the area," Saxena said.

"The state forest department will take it up after the initial success of the pilot project by GEC," he said. "Gujarat Ecology Commission in association with the forest department will take a project to restore Avala Kampa area in Jessore wildlife sanctuary to provide a good habitat to sloth bears," a forest official said.

Along with Jessore, sloth bears' population is also reported at Shoolpaneswar, Jambughoda, Ratanmahal and Balaram-Ambaji wildlife sanctuaries in Narmada, Panchmahal, Chhota Udepur and Banaskantha districts respectively of the state.

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