

**NATIONAL****Need stressed for rehabilitation of displaced wildlife**

By Our Staff Correspondent

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HYDERABAD, Oct 26: Speakers at a seminar on "Ecological impact of floods" have underlined the need for rehabilitation and protection of displaced wildlife, reduce severe ecological impact and promote forest coverage across Sindh to avert disaster on such scale as a result of flood in future.

They said that floods have thrown an opportunity to grow forests along the river in Sindh through aerial seeding or through boats.

The seminar was held at a local hotel on Tuesday under the aegis of the Friends of Indus Forum to discuss issues relating to ecology and reduction of damaging effects on every sphere of life like wildlife, forests, vegetations, aquatic life and sub-soil or ground water.

The speakers mentioned effects on ecology which have remained under reported though media and discussed different aspects of floods. They said that flood had massive impacts on ecology, including positive ones, like inundation of riverine belt on either side of the Indus that would lead to growth of forests on a big scale and improvement in quality of ground water.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Hyderabad Riaz Shahid Siddiqui said that riverine forests are dependent on floods. He admitted that forest cover had decline due to reduced inflows in Indus and it continues to drop on account of construction of water reservoirs upcountry. It affected mangroves also, he said and added that floods are bound to improve forests and mangrove cover too.

About floods' impact on wildlife, Ghulam Sarwar Jamali, the deputy conservator Sindh Wildlife Department said that 600-700 hog deer, 1200-1500 wild boars and 10,000-12,000 partridges had been displaced from their habitat and took shelter at safe places or islands in kutchra areas and even moved to cropping area.

So far wildlife field teams and owners of private ketis (large landholdings) had rescued 287 hog deer. They were kept in rehabilitation centres in Hyderabad and Sukkur wildlife offices and New Jatoi.

He said this displaced wildlife would be released in their habitat once floodwater recedes. He called for proper rehabilitation of displaced wildlife in their habitat. Despite limited resources, rehabilitative measures are being taken to protect flood-hit wildlife. He said reports of slaughtering of hog deer in parts of Sindh during floods had also been received.

General Secretary Friends of Indus Forum Nasir Ali Panhwar said while flood affected ecology badly, it didn't get proper media coverage. "Floods displaced/killed wildlife but efforts could not be made to protect hog deer, wild boars, black bucks and jackals.

"There is strong need for sensitising journalists about floods' ecological impacts", he said and called for a survey to assess such impacts on wildlife, forests, etc.

Agriculturist Nazeer Memon said that before construction of three barrages, the kutchra area of Sindh used to ensure food security as it was producer of wheat, fish, meant, milk and honey.

He said that the declining forest covers means people are losing oxygen and added that urban areas (of interior Sindh) don't have drainage system and wastewater is being released in water channels and the Indus River. He apprehended spread of dengue fever if stagnant flood water was not drained out.

Prof Qalandar Shah Lakiyari opposed government's plans to award 90- year lease of forest land and said every section of society should oppose it. He said that lease granted on political basis should be withdrawn by the government.

He appealed to intelligentsia of Sindh to come forward and guide people how to cope with the situation.

The recommendations of the seminar demanded legislation on use of underground water, end to lease of forest land, inquiry into non-filling of Chotiari dam and protection of Manchhar Lake from further damages.

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