Bangalore, Monday
August 25, 2014, Pages 22

www.deccanherald.com
Vol 67 No 236 ₹ 5.00 B

DECCAN HERALD

RESCUING TREES

The woods are lovely, dark and deep

While concretisation of cities may be inevitable, trees have the tenacity to survive the onslaught of urbanisation. Nature has its own survival strategies in face of adversities and trees too are no exception. The Woods Museum cum Interpretation Centre (WMIC), housed in the sprawling campus of Institute of Wood Science and Technology, was thrown open to the public three years ago. It is the only wood museum in the southern part of the country. The scientists at the museum have put together interesting sections of the ecology that take the onlooker through facts about how plants breathe, fall sick and need to be treated back to life and why it is important to work towards environmental conservation.

TREASURED The seeds of various trees.

Dr V Ramakantha, director, Institute of Wood Science and Technology points out, "The museum is the result of a group of scientists who have dedicated their life to reviving the tree culture in India. Ask them just about anything under the sun about trees or the conservation of wood and they have a ready explanation." Ramakantha states that he and his team of scientists work to rescue trees and carry forward research in understanding how waste wood can be converted into something useful and productive. "Study of diversity in seeds of trees and tree preservation tops our conversation efforts. We have also had a breakthrough in discovering how waste wood can be mixed with plastic to create long-lasting products," he adds.

Shakti Chauhan, a scientist who was instrumental in conceptualising the museum, says wood is often associated with a carpenter and people seldom take interest to understand the science of wood. The various colourful panels in the museum give people a peek into the world of wood like evolution of woody trees, ecosystem functions of trees and the man-wood saga. Another section depicts how wood is systematically dissected from its macro form to cell ultra structure and chemical constituents. "No two cell structures in a single piece of wood is the same. And the two different surfaces of the same piece of wood also look different," explains Shakti. He thinks wood must be treated with a chemical called Copper Chrome Arsenic (CCA) before it is used. "Wood that is not treated with this chemical deteriorates with the passage of time and gets eaten by insects. That's why you find wooden door panels in your house being eaten into by insects," adds Shakti.

SLICE OF HISTORY The bark of a 362-year-old teak wood tree and (top right) a gulmohar tree.

DH PHOTOS BY BH SHIVAKUMAR

Another part of the museum showcases diverse products of wood. A model shows how rural energy needs could met by generating electricity from wood gasification. There is also a wing that captures and preserves insects that eat into wood and the last one stocks paper specimens from different wooden materials and engineered wood products. Pankaj Agarwal, another scientist, points out they have begun to make inroads into mixing wood and plastic to make attractive eco-friendly products. "This will reduce consumption of plastic and encourage people to use products that don't harm the environment. We should grow wood and use it effectively," notes Pankaj. The museum, located in 18th Cross, Malleswaram, is open on all days from 10 am to 5 pm. Entry is free.

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