

In Uttarakhand, India's 'Biggest' Man-Made Grassland

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Wildlife officials in the Terai East region of Kumaon have claimed to have created one of the largest man-made grasslands in the country, spread over 115 hectares. This, they say, is the result of persistent conservation efforts in the Kumaon western forest circle which includes five forest divisions – Terai-East, West, Central, Ramnagar and Haldwani.

As part of the conservation efforts, at least ten natural water sources including springs and ponds have also been revived, they added. Elaborating on the initiative, Parag Madhukar Dhakate, divisional forest officer, Terai-East forest division told TOI, "There are a number of natural grasslands in the country and across the world but a man-made grassland this size, as far as our information goes, has never been created in the country and possibly the world. We started work on this more than a year ago under the Wildlife Protection Programme and the results have been extremely encouraging."

The grassland, named the Kotkharra Grassland in the Doli range of the Terai-East forest division includes most of the 33 native grass species traditionally found in the region like *Apluda mutica*, *Chrysopogon fulvus*, *Dichantium annulatum*, *Heteropogon contortus*, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Saccharum spontaneum*, *Setaria glauca* and *Vetiveria zizinioides* among others.

Surendra Mehra, conservator of forests, Kumaon Western Circle, said that mixed plantation of indigenously found plant species was deliberately encouraged. "These species have been naturally conducive to the recharging of water sources and are of great use in the conservation of the flora and fauna of the region."

Officials said that several habitat management techniques were used for the expansion of the grassland with a special focus on the revival of water sources in order to aid the retention of animals in their respective territories thereby bolstering conservation efforts. "Most of the water sources were revived in areas like Haathidagar, Chehalkhet, Peepalpadav, Nandhaur, Tanda, Bhakhra, Kotkharra, Jaulasaal and Kholgarh which are located in elephant corridors. Because of the availability of water, the pachyderms did not digress from their usual routes thereby avoiding territorial conflict," a forest official said.

Incidentally, last month, 32 new tigers were spotted in camera traps in the Terai-East division which experts say, could be a positive fallout of the conservation efforts initiated as part of the grassland initiative.

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