

Restoration Cases Flagship Collection

Case #20: Junglescapes: Communities restoring forests to conserve wildlife in the Western Ghats, India



Forest undergoing restoration, Western Ghats, India. Photo credit: Junglescapes

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In brief

Overview

The Western Ghats in India are a global biodiversity hotspot, home to elephants, tigers, and many other endemic and iconic species. But forests and grasslands there are degraded from anthropogenic pressures including fuelwood harvesting, cattle grazing, and the proliferation of invasive plants. The result is poor wildlife habitats in and around many of the region's extensive wilderness areas. Traditional conservation efforts treated locals as a threat to forests. In 2007, Junglescapes, a local NGO, adopted a new approach that engaged local indigenous villagers as restoration partners and champions. Many of these communities had been displaced to create conservation areas. Junglescapes created accessible, low-cost restoration methods tailored to the region to remove invasive species and restore wildlife habitat. They also leveraged and helped conserve the extensive traditional ecological knowledge of the communities they work with.

Exemplary practices

Junglescapes learned from piloting and trying different techniques to make restoration low-cost and viable at larger scales. They gradually switched from focusing on tree planting to using assisted natural regeneration, a restoration approach focused on facilitating native forest regrowth. They combined traditional and scientific knowledge in an organic, pragmatic way, gradually giving communities a greater role in restoration planning and decision-making. Ultimately, this approach produced a number of innovative, locally-adapted restoration techniques that use local materials and know-how, implemented by communities that self-identified as environmental stewards. Junglescapes received the SER Full Circle Award in 2017, in recognition of its success in integrating local communities in large-scale restoration.

Key lessons learned

- ◇ *Assisted natural regeneration can be a powerful tool to facilitate “restoration for rewilding.”*
- ◇ *Implementing responsible restoration—using native species, fidelity to local ecosystems, working with nature, and monitoring progress—is critical for good ecological outcomes.*
- ◇ *Giving local indigenous and forest-based communities increasing autonomy and treating them as allies can build trust, stewardship, and robust restored ecosystems.*
- ◇ *Combining science with traditional ecological knowledge can produce a suite of social, cultural, and ecological benefits.*
- ◇ *Recognize the value of learning from nature, rather than about nature*