

Endemic birds leaving Western Ghats

MAR 11
1990

NEW DELHI, March 10 (PTI):

THE tropical rain forests of the Western Ghats are slowly losing their wealth of specialist and economic birds and acquiring birds of more scrubby and urban habitats due to human interference, a report says.

Conversion of the natural tropical forests into secondary forests and plantations has gradually replaced the specialised fruit-eating, endemic birds with generalised, insect-eating ones, says the report by the centre for ecological studies, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

Converting natural forests into man-made plantations has been in practice for at least two centuries, especially in the Western Ghats where plantations of rubber, tea, coffee, cardamom, betelnut and eucalyptus have replaced some of the natural forests.

Frequent disturbances in vegetation can prevent bird communities from establishing in any particular area, says the report by R.J. Ranjit Daniels and co-workers, published in the "Proceedings of the Indian academy of sciences."

The most drastic shift in the bird community from what is typical to the Western Ghats to the atypical, has taken place in the eucalyptus plantations.

The betel nut and teak plantations, which are often allowed to mature for at least 50 years, however, have birds similar to those found in their respective natural vegetation zones.

The IISc researchers say there are two possible reasons for the comparatively fewer birds found in the eucalyptus plantations. Firstly, the plantations are still young and cut every five years for wood, which makes it difficult for any bird community to establish itself.

Secondly, exotic plantations such as eucalyptus may never be able to support bird communities similar to those of natural forests.