

Book documents tree species of Bengaluru

It took K Sankara Rao of the IISc 35 years to write about the 800 tree varieties in the city

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A city-based professor has written a book on Bengaluru's rich botanical history. It is called 'Trees of Bangalore', and is divided into two volumes.

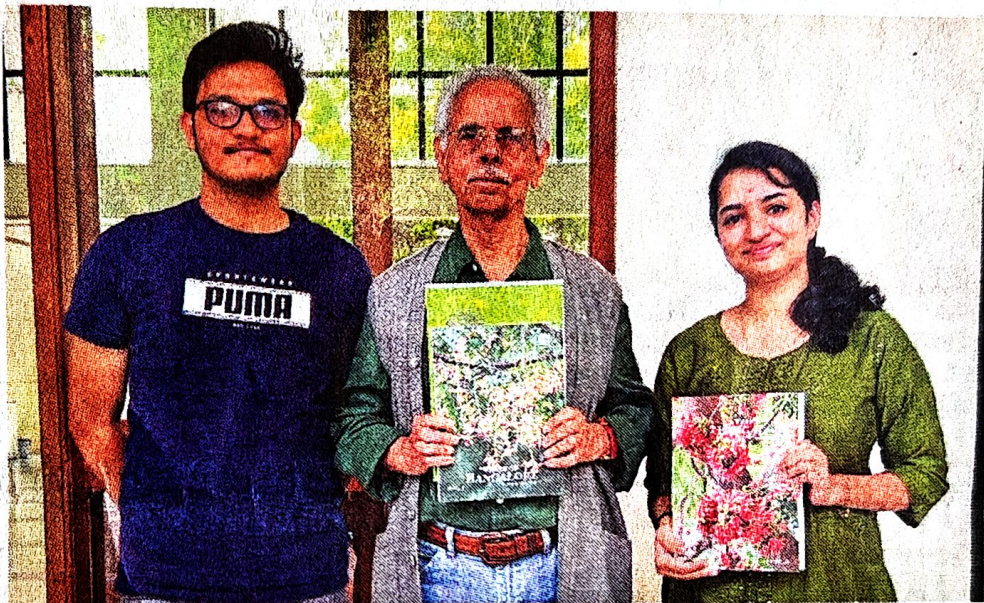
K Sankara Rao, visiting professor and distinguished fellow at the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), has been working on the book for over 35 years. Published by the Indian Academy of Sciences, it was released earlier this month.

On Monday, IISc organised a lecture by the professor to shed light on the purpose of the book. From IAS officers to doctors, the event drew nature lovers from all over the city.

Rao had always been fascinated by the variety of trees in Bengaluru, since he moved to the city in his late teens. He is 85 now. "For decades, I have been on the hunt for a document covering all the magnificent trees of Bengaluru. But unfortunately, even though Bengaluru is called the 'Garden City', very little has been written about its lush greenery," he tells *Metrolife*. This inspired Rao to take on the challenge.

Rao has also authored two pictorial field guides covering the IISc campus. They are titled 'Indian Institute of Science Campus: A Botanist's Delight' and 'Flowering Plants of Indian Institute of Science: A Field Guide'.

Across the two volumes of 'Trees of Bangalore', Rao covers 800 species which have been categorised into trees,



K Sankara Rao (middle) with colleagues.

woody climbers, shrubs, palms and canes, and conifers and cycads.

Throughout the book, you will find information about each tree species with a wide variety of photographs. Accompanying the photographs are the tree's scientific name, English and colloquial names, a brief description, its flowering season, native range, and the landmarks where the tree can be found. Some of the trees mentioned include *Acacia aulacocarpa* (golden flowered salwood or Bengali babul), *Acronychia pedunculata* (Indian aspen or sone mavu), and *Muntingia calabura* (Singapore cherry or ghas-ghasseyya mara).

Another section covers the iconic trees of Bengaluru — such as the Dodda Aalada Mara, a giant 400-year-old banyan tree located in Tavarekere, and the *Roseodendron donnell-smithii* planted at the Raman Research Institute, at the spot where Nobel Prize laureate CV Raman was cremated.

Rao has also included a section on 'Greening the city'. "Currently, we don't

have a guide on where a particular tree should be planted based on the purpose it serves and its characteristics. For example, there is a tree with sausage-like fruits that have been planted as avenue trees across the city. You have to wear a helmet when you walk or ride under them. In this section, I talk about the trees that are appropriate for Bengaluru, and where we have gone wrong so far," adds Rao. Currently, only 55% of the city's trees are native species.

When asked to pick a favourite tree, Rao says, "I've spent over 35 years documenting these trees. In the process, I've been attacked by ants, honey bees, and even fellow Bangaloreans who thought I was breaking into their homes, when I was merely trying to take a photo of a tree in their garden. It's been a memorable experience. It is impossible to pick a favourite."

To order 'Trees of Bangalore', write to orders@ias.ac.in. It is priced at Rs 5,000.