

Keralite heads first red list assessment of Indian grasshoppers

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CONSERVATION biologist Dhaneesh Bhaskar, a native of Padinjaraathara in Wayanad, is leading a team which carries out India's first Red List Assessment of grasshoppers, initiated by the Grasshopper Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The field study related to the assessment has begun in Ooty as well as Wayanad which are part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR). "Though India

has 1,034 species described, the grasshopper has been given the status of pest since the British period.

The assessment aims to project grasshopper as a species contributing much to the biodiversity, which exists in all terrestrial habitats. Grasshopper is not a species found in grass only," said Bhaskar.

The survey is being carried out in NBR which comprises 10 wildlife sanctuaries across Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. "We are targeting already described 30 species endemic to



Dhaneesh Bhaskar setting trap in the field



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Western Ghats. Their distribution and status will be updated after the survey. Along with that, chances to identifying new species are high. The listing is expected to be published in 2022," elaborated Dhaneesh, who has a grasshopper named after him-'Cladonotus bhaskari'-which was identified in the Sinharaja rainforest in Sri Lan-

ka. Bhaskar and his team-mostly students -will be working with the financial support of Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and ground support from Chennai-based Care Earth Trust.

Bhaskar, along with a team of researchers, had recently published a paper on the discovery of the new species, *Tettilobus trishula*. It has been given the common name 'Shiva's pygmy trishula' since it has protrusions on its pronotum that are shaped like a trident, the weapon of Lord Shiva.