In this issue

Philately Framing Fungi

Not yet made in India

From edible mushrooms to yeast for making bread and wine, fungi provide us with food and beverages. Fungi are sources of antibiotics and many other pharmaceutical products. Fungi are friends of farmers, converting biomass to manure, helping plants access minerals, improving crop productivity, protecting from infections and overpowering pests. And, recently, the list of industrially important fungi has grown exponentially. Thus, fungi are important both ecologically and economically.

Of course, some fungi cause diseases in humans, crops and farm animals and some are even poisonous. From this perspective too, understanding fungi is important.

To show appreciation and respect for fungi and the mycologists who uncovered the diversity and uses of fungi, countries all over the world have released postage stamps and first-day covers featuring fungi, some of them fascinatingly beautiful. But India, with its rich heritage of fungal species, has never framed fungi in postage stamps.

In a General Article on **page 628** in this issue, Mukund Deshpande and team provide an overview of fungi featured by philately and raise questions on the absence of fungi in Indian philately. Does the Department of Post need more prodding from mycologists to showcase the Indian heritage of fungal diversity?

Human–Elephant Conflict

Resolution by solar fence

Manchahalli village in Mysore district is quite close to the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, the largest habitat for elephants in Asia. So the villagers face crop damage by elephants. In spite of fencing, alarm systems, patrolling and guarding crops day and night, the farmers there used to suffer losses. And then, a little more than 20 years ago, the first solar powered electrified fence was erected there. About five years ago, more such fencing came up. What are the pros and cons of such solar fencing? Researchers from Mysore investigated.

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Semi-structured interviews with villagers in Manchahalli and visits to crop fields brought out interesting facts about the type of crops that are raided by elephants, the distances from forests where the maximum damage occurs and the deterrence that solar fences offer. When the non-lethal voltage on fences falls below critical levels, elephants do crash through fences, braving mild shocks. This happens mostly in the monsoon when sunlight is not adequate to charge batteries or when batteries need maintenance.

If the batteries and fencing are well maintained, the researchers find, solar fencing effectively reduces human–elephant conflict. Though there is a high initial investment for erecting solar fencing, besides the costs of periodic maintenance, in the long term, solar fencing was found to be a boon for the villagers. In a Research Article on **page 707**, the researchers recommend steps that need to be taken now to make solar fencing affordable and accessible to even poor farmers in areas where elephants play havoc with crops.

Agroforestry in Tamil Nadu

Prospects and challenges

Only about one-fifth of Tamil Nadu has forest and tree cover. The National Forest Policy recommends a forest cover of one-third the land area. Given the population pressure, agroforestry is the only way forward to achieve this goal. Traditional agroforestry practices include only a limited number of trees accepted by farmers as being useful or financially rewarding.

There are seven agroclimatic zones in Tamil Nadu and there is a wide variety of trees that can complement the wide variety of crops grown to supplement the nutritional needs of families and farm animals, to bolster income, and to provide protection against environmental degradation. Researchers from the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, Coimbatore and the Tropical Forest Research Institute, Jabalpur analyse agroforestry systems in Tamil Nadu, incentives and schemes available to farmers, the present level of acceptance of agroforestry practices by farmers, value chain and marketing strategies for the produce and the rich potential for agroforestry in Tamil Nadu in a Review Article on **page 644** in this issue. They spell out strategies to overcome the challenges involved in achieving the full potential of agroforestry in the state and highlight the need for extension education.

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