Why Don't We Talk More About Mangroves - The Superheroes Of The Coastal Ecosystem

Friday 26 July, 2024

26th July 2024: **On International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem**, it's time to spotlight an often-overlooked champion of our planet's health, mangroves. Designated by UNESCO in 2015 and first celebrated in 2016, this day raises awareness about the importance of mangroves and the need to conserve these critical ecosystems.

Mangroves are spectacular ecosystems located at the intersection of land and sea. They are the 'superheroes' of the shoreline ecosystem, contributing significantly to the wellbeing, food security, and protection of coastal communities worldwide. These mangrove ecosystems support rich biodiversity, providing a valuable nursery habitat for fish and crustaceans and act as natural coastal defences against storm surges, tsunamis, rising sea levels, salt water ingress and erosion. Mangrove soils are highly effective carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of carbon, which play a crucial role in mitigating climate change.

However, mangroves are disappearing three to five times faster than overall global forest losses, with severe ecological and socio-economic impacts. Current estimates indicate that mangrove coverage has been halved in the past 40 years. According to UNESCO, some countries lost more than 40% of their mangroves between 1980 and 2005.

Talking about their importance, Gavin Bruce, CEO of conservation charity International Animal Rescue, said, *"Mangroves are in danger, and it has been estimated that more than three-quarters of the world's mangroves are under threat along with all the aquatic and land organisms that depend on them.* For this reason, we are working alongside coastal communities at the forefront of efforts to restore mangroves; over the last 12 months, IAR has planted a total of 15,600 seedlings from 33 genera, covering 30 hectares."

Due to the passion and engagement of the local people, IAR's initiative has a remarkable seedling survival rate for planted seedlings. These efforts not only contribute to the restoration of mangrove ecosystems but also highlight the role of mangroves in protecting coastal areas and supporting biodiversity.

Gavin Bruce also says there's an urgent need to do more to protect and restore mangrove forests. *"We are witnessing catastrophic changes in the weather, with severe flooding becoming a* regular event. *Mangroves are critical in the fight against climate change, stabilising sediments and reducing wave energy to safeguard coastal farming communities. The severe consequences of mangrove loss include accelerated climate change due to the release of stored carbon, failed crops from seawater, and increased coastal erosion and flooding."*

Let's use this International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem to change the narrative and recognise the irreplaceable value of mangroves before it's too late.

For more information, please visit www.internationalanimalrescue.org

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