

Students join Vembanad mapping project



College students and environmentalists participate in a study launched to investigate the pollution levels in Vembanad Lake in Kochi on Monday (Photo: DC)

Optical mapping aims at understanding extent of pathogenic vibrio pollution.

Kochi: Around 250 students from 16 colleges joined a multi-institutional research project for optical mapping of Vembanad lake on Monday as part of a campaign by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) to promote citizen participation in scientific research.

The project aims at understanding the extent of pathogenic vibrio pollution in the Vembanad lake, identifying their reservoirs in the ecosystem, mapping the distribution of vibrio carriers using remote-sensing techniques and developing forecast models that would serve to anticipate hotspots of microbial infection.

The study is jointly carried out by the CMFRI, National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Nansen Environmental Research Centre-India (NERCI) and Plymouth Marine Laboratory, the UK under the India-UK Water Quality Initiative of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

The students started collecting data for the study using Secchi Disc, a simple handheld device to measure turbidity level of water, after undergoing training at the CMFRI. They were also trained to upload the collected data using a mobile app which was developed as part of the project. The study mainly focuses on mapping the hotspots of vibrio in the lake and developing a forecast model using remote-sensing technology. The students are coming from colleges in Ernakulam, Alappuzha and Kottayam districts.

During the launch of the citizen participation initiative, Dr A Gopalakrishnan, the director of CMFRI, said massive participation of students in the project would enhance the frequency and spatial extent of data collection, which is a crucial factor in a research initiative especially the study on Vembanad lake.

“In addition to being a part of a scientific work of high social relevance, the students get a golden chance to shape their career in science,” he said.

CMFRI would ensure the participation of stakeholders such as fishermen, environmental activists, NGOs and residents along the banks of the lake during the next phase of the project, he added.

Dr M. S. Sunil, philanthropist and winner of Nari Shakthi Puraskar, inaugurated the programme.