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Armed with hi-tech gadgets, BMC begins tree count



Two minutes to record the GPS location of the tree, another two to measure the girth using a measuring tape, another 5-7 minutes to identify it and note its characteristics and that's one tree down. For an entire year, 30 people, including surveyors and botanists, will record information of trees as part of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC's) tree census, which began Monday at Oval Maidan in Churchgate.

For the first time, the surveyors will use Trimble GPS units to note the location of a tree. This information along with a unique ID for each tree with its characteristics will be superimposed on the civic body's geographic information system (GIS) map. While citizens can zoom in on the map to

get the basic details, junior tree officers in each ward can access the entire data on the tree using a code, according to the gardens department.

“BMC will for the first time have data about the geographical distribution of a particular species in the city. We will now be able to store data of the city’s tree cover on a live platform and the trees will have unique IDs, making it easier to track them,” said SVR Srinivas, Additional Municipal Commissioner. “We urge citizens to cooperate and allow access to the surveyors to record trees inside their property,” he added.

Besides the location and girth, information such as the tree’s canopy diameter and type, the tree’s condition as well as the carbon sequestration potential (potential to trap atmospheric carbon dioxide) will be available. Special remarks indicating whether the tree is diseased, was mechanically cut or had been uprooted or whether it has a cement collar around it, will also be included in the report. Photos of rare species, trees of “heritage and cultural value” as well as endangered species will be available after the census is done.

Monday’s counting was part of the pilot survey, which will have information of 1,000 trees and will be ready in three-four days.

“The target is to record information of at least two-three lakh trees in a month,” said Dhanya Nambiar, chief taxonomist in charge of the census.

The census will cost the civic body Rs 2.7 crores and is being conducted jointly by Mumbai-based SAAR IT Resources and Nagpur-based Apex Spatial Tech Solutions. The tree census includes survey of all existing trees within municipal limits irrespective of ownership, excluding trees in Aarey Colony, BARC, Navy Nagar, and forests area like Sanjay Gandhi National Park and mangrove areas.