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Guided tours to be launched

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Chennai, July 29: While the first phase of the multi-crore project of converting the dumping ground into a tropical dry evergreen forest has been completed successfully, the second phase of maintaining it suffers from a serious shortage of staff.

Only nine men work in the Otteri Eco Park. Of the, four are watchmen who take turns to guard the only entrance to the park. "Five gardeners are currently working on the project. Their main job is to water the trees and shrubs besides clearing the foreign species that take roots here. Though the species that were planted were carefully chosen to be self-reliant over time, it takes a few years for the forest to sustain itself," say biologists involved with the project.

They are also concerned that the park has not been utilised properly. The vision was to use it as a live study centre for school students of the area. "Keeping that in mind, we set up little huts that could be used as classrooms and erected a lot of slabs in which useful information on nature and useful details of plants that are native to the area have been imprinted. But, no guided tours have taken place for the last two years," says Mr Rex Vaz of the Pitchandikulam Forest Consultants working with the corporation to initiate the study tours.

Speaking to this newspaper, corporation commissioner Rajesh Lakhoni said, "We definitely have plans to start guided tours". A limited portion

could also be open to the public, he said.

When contacted, mayor M. Subramanian said the corporation would open the park soon. “Access to the park is through a slum which could be a hindrance. Once we take care of that, the eco park will become functional,” he said.