

Neelakurinji a protected plant now

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In news– The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) has listed Neelakurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthiana*) under Schedule III of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, including it on the list of protected plants.

Key updates-

- According to MoEF, those who uproot or destroy the plant will invite a fine of ₹25,000 and three years' imprisonment.
- According to the order, the cultivation of Neelakurinji and its possession is not allowed.
- Neelakurinji was included on the list when the Centre expanded the earlier protected list of six plant species to 19.
- Normally, the Chief Wildlife Warden issues a statement to the effect that destroying Neelakurinji plants and flowers is a punishable offence under the Wildlife Protection Act and action will be taken accordingly.

About Neelakurinji-

- Neelakurinji or *Strobilanthes kunthiana* means '**Blue Mountain**', literally the mountain where the flower blooms and turns into a blue/ purple colour.
- These flowers **belong to a shrub that is particularly found in the Shola forests of the Western Ghats** in Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.
- Most of these species have a **unique flowering cycle**, resulting from an annual to a 16-year blooming cycle.
- The **purplish blue flower blossoms only once in 12 years, and gave the Nilgiri Mountains its name**, from the Tamil language Kurinji (flower). a small shrub, blooms once in

twelve years, covering the hillsides with bluish flowers, giving the Nilgiris its name.

- *Strobilanthes kunthiana* is the most rigorously demonstrated, with documented bloomings in 1838, 1850, 1862, 1874, 1886, 1898, 1910, 1922, 1934, 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006 and 2018, these have no match to Solar cycles.
- **The Paliyan tribal people living in Tamil Nadu** used it as a reference to calculate their age.
- The plant is endemic to a small stretch in the Western Ghats from the Mangaladevi hills to the Nilgiris hills.
- In the Western Ghats region, nearly 70 varieties of Neelakurinji plants have been identified. The most popular Neelakurinji is *Strobilanthes kunthiana* which blooms once in 12 years.
- However, some other rare varieties of Neelakurnji are also found in the Western Ghats region.
- The most recent blooming of Neelakurinji was over a vast area on the Kallippara hills at Santhanpara in Idukki. An expert team had identified six varieties of the plant across the mountains.
- The Eravikulam National Park, near Munnar, is known for widespread blooming of the kurinji, with the next flowering season expected in 2030.

Schedules of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972-

- It has six schedules which give varying degrees of protection. Schedule I and part II of Schedule II provide absolute protection – offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.
- Species listed in Schedule III and Schedule IV are also protected, but the penalties are much lower.
- Animals under Schedule V, e.g. common crows, fruit bats, rats and mice, are legally considered vermin and may be hunted freely.
- The specified endemic plants in Schedule VI are

prohibited from cultivation and planting.