

18th edition of Vembanad fish count records 61 species

The Hindu Bureau

ALAPPUZHA

The 18th edition of the Vembanad fish count (VFC) recorded 61 species, including 58 finfish and three shellfish.

As part of the annual count, a survey was conducted in the southern parts of Thanneermukkom bund under the aegis of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment-Community Environment Resource Centre (ATREE-CERC). Around 110 volunteers, including academics, researchers and fishers from across the region, participated in this year's count, which was conducted with the financial support of the State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK).

In a statement issued here, Maneeja Murali, senior programme officer, ATREE-CERC, said that rain and slush in the lake had adversely affected the fish



Giant freshwater prawn

count. Compared to the previous year, the number of fish species recorded was lower. The 17th edition of the VFC had recorded 85 species, including 74 finfish and 11 shellfish.

The decline in the average weight of Attu Konju (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*, giant freshwater prawn) from 500-600 grams to around 300 grams is a cause for concern among inland fishers. "As in previous years, the availability of giant freshwater prawns was very low. The continued decline in both availability and weight for three consecutive years under-

lines the need for urgent intervention," said Ms. Murali.

Sajeevan M. K., Dean of the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (Kufos), suggested the need for further research into the plight of the giant freshwater prawn and the continued decline of fish diversity in the lake.

Volunteers said that due to the abundance of water hyacinth, boats could not access many areas. Oil deposits were found spread across the water near the Nazarath church at Kumarakom, resulting in very low fish availability.