

24th day of October 2016
Sulthan Bathery, Kerala

From,
The President Wynad Vana Samrakshana Samiti
Sulthan Bathery

To,
The Chief Minister of Kerala
Government of Kerala
North Block, Government Secretariat,
Thiruvananthapuram,
Kerala, India
PIN 695 001

Dear Sir,

**Subject:-Regarding Capture and Placing a Tusker in Kraal at Wynad
Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala**

We are an organization committed to the cause of wildlife and conservation in Kerala and especially focusing in and around Wynad Wildlife Sanctuary.

Wynad Wildlife sanctuary, is an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere reserve, which shares its boundaries with the some of the elephant habitats in the world, namely Nagarhole Tiger Reserve and Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu. This NBR accommodates the single largest Asian elephant population in the world. Hence we are always bound to come in close contact with negative interactions with Asian Elephants.

On 22nd of November 2016 Wynad Wildlife Sanctuary authorities had captured a tusker who had been in conflict situation for the past few months. We are with you in the capture and do not deny the fact that certain harsh intervention is required when people's properties and livelihoods has been threatened.

However we feel the decision to put the poor animal in "KRAAL" and domesticate is uncalled for as the animal has not been reported to have killed anybody or injure any person. The movement of the animal was restricted to night time crop raid and this animal was really scared of humans and would retreat at the instance of sighting human beings.

Current Scenario:-

1) Disruption of male social structure:

Elephants are social animals with well-established dominance hierarchy that operates at many levels. The dominance is usually related to age and body condition. Long-term studies on African and Asian elephants suggest that older males "control" younger males. Although male elephants become sexually mature when they are about 15, in presence of older bulls they become reproductively mature only when they are about 25. In the absence of older bulls younger bull can go berserk and uncontrollable. A classic in Africa where the younger bulls had gone on a rampage in the absence of Older bulls, however this aberrant behavior was immediately rectified following introduction of fewer older bulls. Introduction of older bulls saw reduction in musth duration of younger bulls. Here in our case, there are many sub-adult and young males in the landscape, we should urge caution while taking decisions such as **removal of this older bull** etc. Absence of a large bull from the population should not let younger bulls go berserk. Furthermore, my (and other experienced observers') anecdotal observations suggest that in presence of this larger bull other younger bulls are well behaved and are less dangerous.

2) Male-Female Sex ratio

Since our male-female ratio is skewed, this unscientific approach of capture and domestication of adult male bulls would have an adverse effect on the elephant population on the long term. Many states are already adopting this unscientific method of removing breeding bulls, if all the elephant states adopt such adverse measures, our country would be void of elephants in the very near future.

These protected areas become some of the last remaining viable and vital home ranges for Asian Elephants which ensure there is always a healthy genetic population and also become critical in the long term survival of Asian Elephants, removing one such healthy male from one of its last remaining home ranges will certainly have a major impact in the coming days/years.

3) Radio Collar:-

This adult bull was already radio-collared and hence could have been driven safely as there was enough time and data to take proactive decisions regarding the drive. Now this case has become a classic case where the state has been proven to be in-efficient even with precious data on the elephant's movements and was not able to deter the elephant from crop raids.

If such drives had proven inefficient even with the available data, then this would set precedence to other states to not adopt such proven efficient methods.

Way forward:

1. TRANSLOCATION

To solve this issue regarding this Adult bull on a short term solution for this current crisis, is to opt for translocation to deeper jungles with good forest cover and other resources like female herds, water and feeding grounds.

- a. Adult Elephants are the few surviving males and this superior gene is extremely valuable for the long term elephant conservation and healthy elephant population
- b. Dominance hierarchy: Elephants are social animals with well-established dominance hierarchy that operates at many levels. The dominance is usually related to age and body condition. Long-term studies on African and Asian elephants suggest that older males "control" younger males. In the absence of older bulls younger bull can go berserk and uncontrollable.
- c. Translocation is an effective tool rather than rough drives (driving elephants with firecrackers, Kumkis, crowds shouting and pushing elephants from one patch to another, one beat to another, one division to another and one state to another) as the rough drives make the elephants more aggressive and the plight of the field staff is in danger of being trampled. Drives become directionless and pressure oriented (from local crowds) the elephant is put to stress and could become a dangerous situation if drives go wrong.
- d. This adult bull has survived for these years with all the hardships and has gained immense knowledge in his years of adulthood; ethically this elephant has all the right to survive with dignity.
- e. It is proven that such translocation drives are very successful in the case of the lone single tusk tusker in Gudalur range Gudalur division in 2009, which is suspected to have killed humans, after it was driven to Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in 2011 the elephant, has never returned to Gudalur division for the past 6 years.

To understand elephant conflict we must understand the elephant or elephant populations to mitigate conflicts, one of the primary reasons for conflict is fearlessness, elephant being an apex species, has not apparent predators once it has become adult, so slowly this character is brought to practice once it is habituated to human presence.

Translocation must be considered as the most viable solution for this particular Male tusker and in the long run more elephants that remain in human dominated landscapes would eventually be habituated to human presence and would reflect the same negative interaction that is seen in this Adult Bull.

While there is pressure from local residents and other third parties, **Capture and life in captivity** should be considered as the last resort because

1. Such large mature bulls are a rarity in the wild and hence **genetically a very important** specimen
2. Forecasting the **utility of the elephant as a kumki**, we cannot gamble and capture this very important genetically superior male as after capture the animal might become timid and would not have the character of a Kumki which has had a childhood with other Kumkis
3. This Adult Tusker **might not survive the ordeal** of a capture and training protocols as it would kill the animal in the stress or while in the process of capture
4. It would effectively be a **burden on the state** to keep feeding an adult bull which has no apparent utility and to sustain it in captivity.
5. While on one hand capturing and training this particular Makhana might seem like the quickest way to solve the issue, we must bear in mind that **there are +100 elephants in the same range**, capturing each one is neither a feasible solution nor a long term solution to the conflict

We request you to kindly look at long term sustainable models such as relocation, ensuring vital corridors are in-tact, keeping elephants as a priority species and release the poor animal that has the very important role of in this protected area as well as the overall a part in managing the eco-system services rather than put the poor animal in a life of hardship and a burden to the state.

If you would consider our humble request to only translocate the animal to a safe place rather than a life in captivity.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours faithfully,

(BADUSHA.N)

Copies to:

- 1) Chief Minister of Kerala, State of Kerala
- 2) Principal Secretary, MOEF & CC, Government of India
- 3) Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala
- 4) Principal Secretary, Environment and Forests, Government of Kerala
- 5) Inspector General of Forests, MOEF & CC, Southern region
- 6) Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Force, Government of Kerala
- 7) Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Government of Kerala