IE 20/9/2000

Kerala poachers kill tusker, sever head to destroy proof

The headless body of the five-year-old elephant with its chopped trunk lying closeby. *Express photo*

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOCHI, SEPT 19

IN YET another blood-curdling story of poaching, a five-year-old elephant was shot dead and its head hacked away in the Letchmi Estate near Mankulam in Munnar on Sunday.

The incident came to light after estate watchers reported the finding of the elephant's headless corpse at Aanakkulam. The young male was 2.2 m tall. Experts said its small tusks would weigh hardly three kg.

The shocking incident sent the Kerala Forest Department into a tizzy as it is the first reported case of elephant poaching from this part of the State.

Top officials told *The Indian Express* that the elephant was shot at point-blank range as there were no signs of it writhing in pain after it was gunned down. "It must have died instantly," an officer said.

The elephant's trunk was chopped-off and the head hacked away. "This is also a new cover-up strategy as they (want) to prevent us from finding the bullet (since it will) help us trace the poachers. The normal poaching practice is to kill the animal and to remove its tusk either by pouring acid or burning," the officer added.

"It's unheard of," said Chengappa, adviser to the Highrange Wildlife and Environment Protection Association. "One cannot even imagine that this happened in a fully literate state Like Kerala," he said.

About six months ago, a bison was also shot in Munnar. "But this time we don't want the culprits to escape. We're planning to summon the service of police dog squad," officials said on Monday.

Update 27/28
Kerala

M 6/8/05

KERALA / ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC LOSSES CERTAIN

Pooyamkutty project not viable

By Roy Mathew

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 5. The proposed Pooyamkutty hydroelectric project, which is being revived by the State Government, will cause considerable environmental and economic losses to the State. The project will submerge two of the three remaining low-elevation forested valleys in the State and cripple its economy.

The Chief Minister, Mr. A.K. Antony, who left for Delhi on Sunday for Plan discussions, will be lobbying strongly with the Centre for the project which is being pursued in spite of other alternatives.

The Southern Western Ghats had 32 low-lying valleys but most of them were destroyed by irrigation and power projects or converted into plantations or farm lands in the past. Now, in the entire reach of the ghats in Kerala, only three low-elevation valleys (below 300 meters MSL) retain significant extent of natural vegetation. These valleys are important as certain species of trees and plants can grow only at this elevation. The Silent Valley (above 900 metres MSL) or other high-elevation valleys are not substitute for the Pooyamkutty valley and nearby Pichiyar valley or the Kallar valley in Thiruvananthapuram district. (The Vamanapuram irrigation project, if revived, will submerge Kallar Valley).

So, if Mr. Antony succeeds in his mission, he would be striking the last nail on the coffin of many a plant that once grew profusely in the rain forests of Kerala.

Penny wise, pound foolish:

The Chief Minister is defending his action noting that the State requires a higher hydro thermal mix to keep the power tariffs low. However, the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) has estimated that the environmental loss from the first phase of the Pooyamkutty project would be Rs. 3,035 crores.

This is a 1989 estimate based on the Central Government's guidelines. The projected losses would be higher now as more importance and value is attached to biodiversity now. Even by the original estimates, the cost benefit ratio would work out to be negative.

The project will yield 645 million units of power a year. This is not a big addition. The current availability of power in the State is about 14,000 million units including power from the Central pool. The hydel generation within the State constitutes about 65 per cent of this.

The State loses as much as 2,068 million units a year by way of transmission and distribution losses. Hence, 645 million units can be saved if the transmission losses are brought down to about 19 per cent from the current 27 per cent.

There is scope for saving much more energy by promoting energy efficiency. The savings from energy efficiency can be as high 65 per cent. This means that the State would not need additional power stations in the near future and its problems in meeting peak load would be solved automatically.

According to official figures, the gross wind energy potential in the State is 831 MW, of which 605 MW is estimated to be the usable technical potential. So far, the State has tapped only a few megawatts (just 1.93 MW as per last year's figures).

When asked about using this potential at a Cabinet briefing, Mr. Antony replied that the potential was not significant and the State could not do without new hydel projects. Apparently, the officials have not briefed him on wind energy potential and the fact that the firm power potential of Pooyamkutty project is only 73.5 MW.

Whenever new Governments came to power in the State during the past 15 years, it has become routine for them to start a debate on Silent Valley with the intention of pressing the Centre for the Pooyamkutty project. Though the politicians often speak for the poor, they ignore the fact that the Pooyamkutty valley supports the reed economy of the State.

As per 1989 figures quoted in the KFRI study, 26 per cent of the reed supply to Hindusthan Newsprint and 48 per cent of the supply to the State Bamboo Corporation come from the Pooyamkutty forests. About 13,000 people depend on the supply directly and about three lakh people would be affected if the reed economy is crippled.

Much of the reed breaks in Pooyamkutty found in the area would be submerged by the project. This area is under intense exploitation and considerable degradation of the forests has taken place over the years. However, if the area is submerged, reed cutters would move to other areas with fewer reed breaks and richer forests. The consequences for both the workers and the forests can be imagined.

The following is a check list of what would be destroyed even in a small area such as Pindimedu as per the KFRI study: Taxus of Angio sperms - 340 species, timber species - 100, medicinal plants - 174, food and fodder yielding varieties - 90, oil yielding plants - 35, gum and resin yielding plants - 39, tan and dye yielding plants - 40, fibre and floss yielding plants - 22 and spices and condiments yielding species - 5. The direct hit would be taken by 267 families, mostly tribals, who live in the submersible area and depend heavily on the forests for their sustenance.

PA 15

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14/6/02

14 wildlife sanctuaries.
6286 species of flora.
6130 species of fauna.
Evergreen opportunities.

Inviting prequalification bids to develop Kerala's wildlife sanctuaries for eco-friendly tourism.

Kerala, which is one of the last preserves of the unique ecosystem of tropical wet evergreen forests, is every wilderness traveller's dream. And nestled in the lush forests of the Western Ghats in Kerala are 12 wildlife sanctuaries and 2 national parks. Each one home to rare animals, birds, reptiles, insects and plants. Making them a haven of opportunities.

JOIN THE GREEN REVOLUTION

The Departments of Tourism and Forest, Kerala invite prequalification bids from consultants having experience and expertise in preparing ecotourism and wildlife master plans. The consultancy and management of the project will be awarded to a Consortium of Consultants who can offer eco-friendly and cost-effective technology for the development of the wildlife sanctuaries in the State.

Interested consultants and master planners may send in their profiles and essential documents such as details of projects undertaken with costs, supporting document authentication and staff strength, so as to reach the undersigned at the address below, on or before 10th July 2002. The shortlisted consultants will be sent the detailed tender document.

Sd/- Director

Director, Department of Tourism, Park View,
Thiruvananthapuram 695 033
Ph: 0471-326812 Fax: 322279

kerala
God's Own Country

Eco-tourism set to take root in Kerala

C.J. Punnathara
KOCHI, June 17

FROM the curious to the cursory, Kerala has everything that a tourist can ask for – from beach tourism, backwaters, wildlife, hill resorts, historical monuments to culture and vintage architecture.

And now, the State has begun to loosen its monopoly on the rich and diverse forest wealth to make eco-tourism a reality. The State is privy to some of the richest and most diverse rain forests in the world.

The Kerala Forest Research Institute has embarked on a World Bank funded study aimed at selectively opening up some wildlife sanctuaries for eco-tourism.

While eco-tourism still remains an enigmatic concept on the drawing boards of other States, it could soon become a reality in Kerala.

The study is focusing on visitor management strategies and priorities for two wildlife parks and a national park.

It is an attempt to evolve visitor management strategies for the Eravikulam National Park in Munnar, the Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary in Palakkad and the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary in Thiruvananthapuram.

In this quest to explore eco-tourism, Kerala is in august company. The World Tourism Organisation has identified eco-tourism as the segment which will nurture the growth of the industry of tomorrow.

But there is a warning in the Kerala experience: opening up the virgin forest should not mean that the tourists should be permitted to overrun the pristine environment. Every eco-system has a carrying capacity, including the number of tourists who can visit it.

Similar sentiments have also been voiced by the United Nations Environment Programmes (UNEP).

"Eco-tourism has many definitions, but as a general goal it should provide an opportunity to develop tourism in ways that minimise the industry's negative impact and actively promote the conservation of the earth's unique bio-diversity," Mr Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP, has said.

The global community has begun to recognise the fragility and vulnerability of the eco-systems on the one hand and the importance of eco-tourism as the vehicle for growth of the tourism industry on the other.

The World Tourism Organisation, UNEP and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) have declared 2002 as the year of eco-tourism. In fact, the UN General Assembly had, in 1998 itself, declared its intention to celebrate the current year as eco-tourism year.

The World Tourism Organisation says that a substantial portion of GDP and employment in developing countries is related to tourism.

"Areas such as national parks and wilderness areas cover more than 10 per cent of the earth's surface and play a vital role in promoting tourism."

Eco-tourism could be the trigger for the tourism industry of the 21st century and Kerala has been taking constructive steps to promote it.

PA 15 40

Kerala to draw up eco-tourism plan

ET 20/11/02

Joe A Scaria

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM 19 NOVEMBER

AFTER paydirt with Ayurveda, backwaters and beaches, Kerala tourism is all set to break fresh ground by throwing open its wild life sanctuaries and national parks for eco-tourism products. Top sources in the state tourism department told **ET** that three internationally renowned consultants with proven expertise in eco-tourism had been shortlisted for drawing up a master plan for eco-tourism products at the wild life sanctuaries and national parks. The final choice of consultant will be made in a week's time.

GOD'S OWN...

Kerala has a dozen wildlife sanctuaries and two national parks, and eco-tourism products on offer at these locations are expected to embellish the state's tourism attractions. Kerala tourism director Alkesh Kumar Sharma told **ET** that the products could even include safaris, and that the consultant's advice would draw from experiences in reputed wildlife sanctuaries like the ones in Kenya and Tanzania.

Currently, Kerala has a few eco-tourism products, including the 'Tiger Trail' which takes a limited number of tourists on a trekking path through the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

The move to enhance eco-tourism products follows the recent tourism policy announcement of the state government, which lays emphasis on conservation of environment and reduction of the negative impact of tourism.

According to state government estimates, Kerala had 2 lakh foreign visitors last year.

PD 15

Kerala

Antony for amendment to Forest Act

28/3/03

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 26. The Kerala Chief Minister, A.K. Antony, is spearheading a move at the national level for amendment to the Forest (Conservation) Act.

Though the demand for an amendment is being made in the name of tribals, the move is essentially for protection of the interests of the people who had encroached upon forests in various States.

Tribal land had been alienated in as many as 19 lakh cases in the country. Of this, restoration had been effected by various State Governments in only about four lakh cases.

In Kerala, there are more than 1,000 such cases of which restoration had been effected only in three cases. Mr. Antony is now proposing to divert reserved forests for rehabilitation of the displaced tribals.

Besides, there are a number of cases of farmers having encroached upon forest land.

Powerful persons and companies are in possession of a large number of forest land, either encroached or on lease. Governments are keen on regularising these encroachments.

The enactment of the Forest Act had, to some extent, checked encroachments and diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes.

The Supreme Court's interpretation of the law in the Godavarman vs. Union of India case in November 2001 made the law tighter. The Court restrained the Central Government from regularising encroachments in the country.

This came in the way of regularisation as well as assignment of forests planned by the States such as Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Orissa.

As the Court adopted the dictionary meaning of forests, it also became mandatory for the State to even protect the standing trees on private forests. Moves for obtaining forest clearance for various developmental and other purposes, including assignment to tribals and renewal of leases, have also been hit by the order. In Maharashtra and Assam, the orders issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests are leading to eviction of tribals who have occupied forest land.

It is against this background that Mr. Antony is trying to gain support of various States to press the Centre for an amendment of the Act. He has already raised the issue at the National Development Council and other fora.

BL 5/5/03

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KTDC introduces eco-certification for tourism sector

Our Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
May 4

THE Kerala Tourism Department has introduced an eco-certification scheme as part of its efforts to promote eco-friendly tourism in a big way in the State.

The scheme, styled "Eco-Kerala", attempts to evolve a set of practices to help each sub-sector within the tourism sector to be more eco-friendly. It has been introduced keeping in mind the importance of environmental management in tourism-related organisations as the State is being projected as a high-quality destination, according to Mr Alkesh Kumar Sharma, Director of Tourism.

The eco-certification scheme comes close on the heels of the classification scheme introduced recently to ensure the quality of two of Kerala's prime attractions, namely, houseboats and Ayurvedic centres.

The "Eco-Kerala" scheme involves grading of hotels and resorts based on their compliance with three sets of conditions that have been classified as essential, necessary and desirable.

CMYK

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19/3/04

Steps to tackle forest fires

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 18. The Forest Department has chalked out short-term and long-term plans to deal with fires in forests.

More firewatchers and workers would be engaged to put out the fires. Steps would be taken to address water scarcity in the forests. The Crisis Management Committee (Drought), headed by the Chief Secretary, N. Chandrasekharan Nair, released Rs. 8.03 crores for fire protection of forests. The District Collectors would release funds according to requirement.

A conference of forest conservators, convened by the Forest Minister, on Wednesday, reviewed the situation. The Chief Conservators have been asked to visit the districts again and supervise fire protection activities. The Minister would be reviewing the situation every week.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, P. K. Surendranathan Asari, said that immediate steps would be taken to set up water-harvesting structures in buildings and other facilities of the department. Steps would be taken to supply water through tankers to tribals and animals as a short-term measure. Bore-wells and hand pumps would be set up. Deepening and desilting of riverbeds, ponds and waterholes and construction of check-dams would also be undertaken.

The District Collectors would sanction up to Rs. 15 lakhs for works at the range and divisional levels.

Mr. Asari said long-term plans would involve micro-level watershed management. Construction of rainwater harvesting structures, check-dams and surface tanks would be undertaken as part of this. The Minister had directed that the works should be carried out in a transparent manner.

Blaze in Ponmudi

Meanwhile, the grass and bushes in an area of about 10 acres near the Guest House at Ponmudi were charred in a fire which broke out in the hill resort today. On being alerted, fire engines were rushed to the hill resort from Thiruvananthapuram at around 1 p.m. and the blaze was put out with the help of Forest staff by about 2-30 p.m.

Nature Lovers in a Shock (Kerala)

The Nature Lovers here are in a shock while we are in an attempt to save acre to acre of forests here we are again in a ~~dilm~~ puzzle. The Kerala Govt.'s decision to hand over 1 to 5 acre of forest land (each family) (which includes protected areas of wild life) has come as a rude shock as the same would lead to Districts like Wayanad, Palghat turning to Deserts (Totally comes to Lakhs of acres)

The political decision said includes the interest of forest lobby- vested interested forest officials to capture thousand acres of forests. The shocking decision came on 16.10-2001 to satisfy the so-called strike of the tribal castes. The intention of the strike itself had been questioned. The "Conservation of Nature Society" has approached the 'ministry of Environments & forests' to interfere in this matter as the decision would

have to

(Kannur Dist)
Kerala

change the entire climate of Kerala & the wild life would be written off. The politician's vote changing methods of using forests should to be stopped. 'The friends of Elephants forum' have also faxed to the Department of Environment. The main factor in this is whether the scheduled castes would actually get the actual benefits or the middle man would again loot the people.

The state have already seen enough loose of forest many a times state forest officials stonewalled. The areas of allotment includes lands in Aanalam Farm adjacent Nilgiri Biosphere, where wild animals like Tiger, where wild animals like Tiger leopard & even Black panthers are seen.

Dhanodh

VINOD KUMAR DAMODAR
President

Friends of Elephant forum,
Breeze, Near Cherooty Nagar- Calicut-1

Forest Lands disappear in Kerala

The recent attempts by the Kerala Government of Kerala to satisfy the voters of the state have assured that they would be distributing forest lands to the scheduled tribes in areas especially in the Districts of Wayanad where already forests have been destroyed in such conditions that the District would be transformed into a desert where the forests have been converted into plain areas in the name of backward castes.

In this regard even though the D.F.O.s should have actually being seen to protect the forests it is seen that they are in the front now to allott the same to the scheduled tribes, the context is that the forests now are de-graded

However the areas ~~is~~ such are still rich in wild life. The friends of Elephants forum has approached the Ministry to re-think its decision on the matter as the genuine schedule Tribes may not be getting the benefits out of the allotments the result would only be forest destruction.

Dhanab

VINOD KUMAR DAMODAR
President
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" "
Beeze
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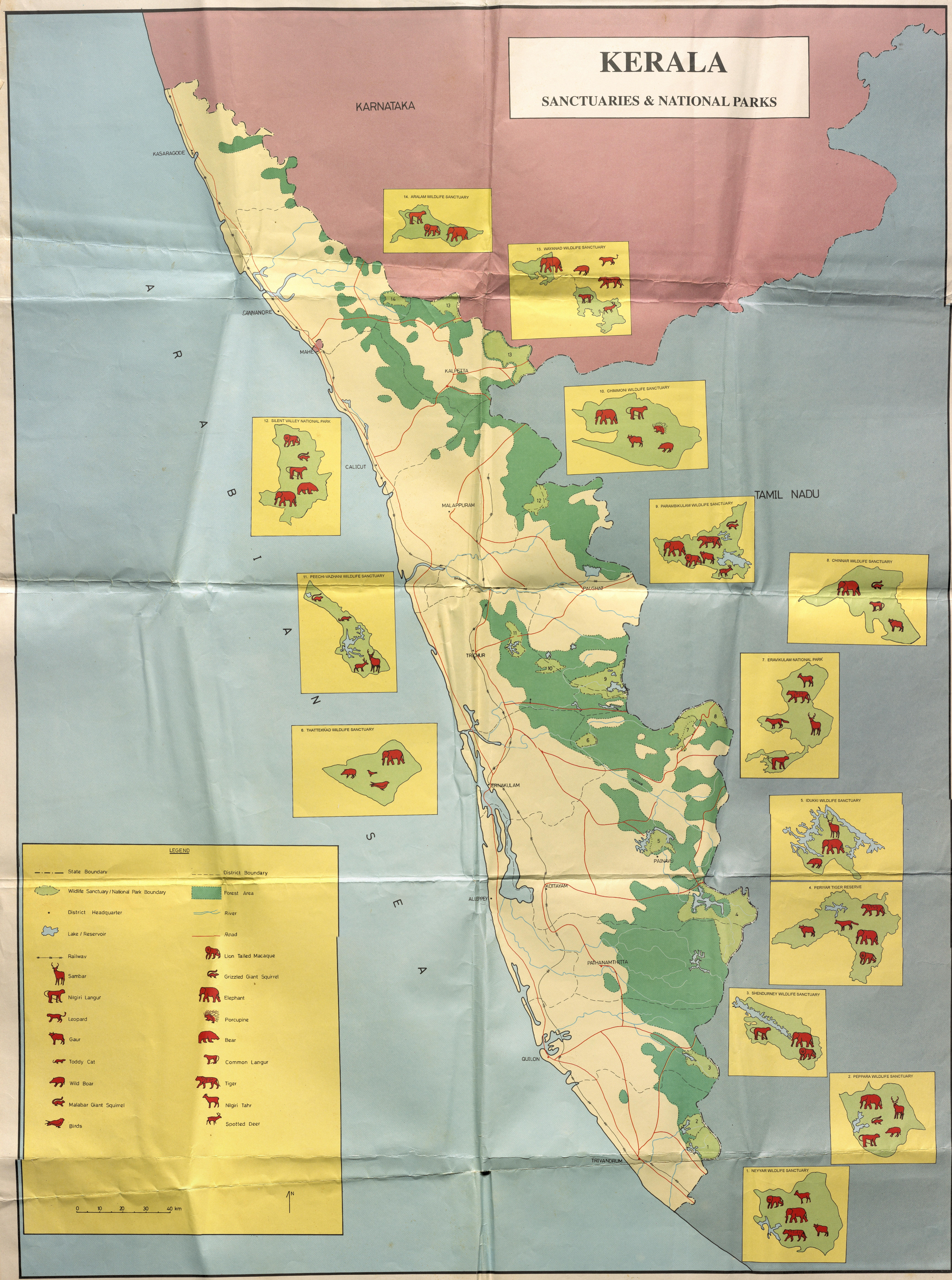
KERALA

SANCTUARIES & NATIONAL PARKS



KERALA FOREST RESEARCH INSTITUTE
KERALA FOREST DEPARTMENT (WILDLIFE)

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Done : MAV 33

TOI
Aug, 21, 2001

First ecotourism project to go full steam soon

EW DELHI: Nation's first ecotourism project in the Shendurney wildlife sanctuary in the Thenmala forest division along the border of Kerala-Tamil Nadu is expected to go full steam soon.

The project, comprising ecofriendly general tourism, eco-tourism and pilgrimage tourism, launched at a cost of Rs 9 crore under the auspices of Thenmala Eco-Tourism Promotion Society (TEPS) is designed factoring all vital parameters needed for ecotourism, according to tourism officials.

"Ecotoursim is an environmentally conscious plan for safeguarding natural environment, providing and maintaining the quality for tourists and benfitting local people. Plans are afoot to make it successful soon," TEPS chief executive officer K G Mohanlal told PTI.

The cost of the project, which is 72 kilometres from Thiruvananthapuram, was relatively less since it had been designed by utilising the available forest and periphery land without creating imbalance for the ecosystem, Mohanlal said pointing out that "at any point of time, only a group of 10-15 people, including guides, will be allowed."

The project, above 500 metres sealevel, had been divided into four sectors- 'culture zone', 'adventure zone', 'leisure zone' and 'deep woods'- with flexibility for tourists to start with any sector. Tourist inflow had been fixed on the basis of 'carrying-capacity' of the place as suggested by Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI).

KFRI would take up environment impact assessment (EIA) study periodically to analyse any negative impact and if there was any, the tourist centre would be temporarily closed for public till normalcy was restored, he said.

(PTI

RA 15

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> From: Dr.Sreekumar B. <ktm_bskumar@SANCHARNET.IN>
> Sent: Wednesday, March 19, 2003 10:39 PM / > Subject: Vembanad lake &Pathiramanal island
> > Vembanad-Kole wet lands is a new Ramsar site in Kerala.Following the boom > > in tourisom industry the Lake is on the edge of an ecological break > > down.There is a reduction of 33% in the number of water birds within the > > last one year as per the latest Mid winter water bird census conducted on > > 19th Jan 2003 at ten selected sectors in and around the lake. > > The 68 hectare Pathiramanal island in the Vembanad lake, lie between > > Muhamma and Kumarakom, comes in the Thannermukkomsouth village of > Cherthala taluk in Alappuzha District. It lies between E 76 o23' &76 o24' longitude > > and N 9 o37' & 9 o38' latitude.
During the early last century the island was purchased from Bheemji Devji Trust of Cochin by one Mr. ACA Anthraper. Around one lakh coconuts were obtained from the island in a single cropping at that time. Fourteen > > families of workers stayed in the island.
Following the land reforms Acts, the island was taken over by the government as surplus land in 1979. Later it was handed over to the Tourism Department after re-settling the families residing in the island in > Muhamma panchayat. It was with the Department till 30/4/2000 when the Government > > leased it to Oberoi group hotels (GO (MS) No: 332/2000/CAD.) ,after > forming > > a joint venture company- KTDC and Oberoi- for eye washing. > >
Due to its undisturbed atmosphere, the island is a favoured breeding ground > > of Indian Otters (Lutra lutra). Fish and mussels available in the > > surrounding area provide plenty of food items to Otters.
> > The island is known for generations as roosting place of a number of water > > birds. As the island was cleared of the inhabitants, the disturbances were > > practically nil and it has became a haven for the waterbirds. The roosting > > water birds are mainly of the Cormorant family, including Darter, Little > > Cormorant, Indian Shag and Large Cormorant. Purple Heron, Pond Heron, > > Night Heron, Black Bittern, Chestnut Bittern and Yellow Bittern too are > > found here. Little Egret, Smaller Egret, Large Egret, Cattle Egret, Grey > > Heron are seen during the day time. Two pairs of Redwattled Lapwings > > appears to be residents of the Island. > >
> > The Pathiramanal island has its own unique flora with rare plant s like > > Crocodile apple. Another plant named Aponogeton appendiculatus, endemic to > > Alappuzha district of Kerala is seen only in the backwaters surrounding > the Pathiramanal island. It is described in the page 31 of The Red Data Book > of Indian Plants published by The Botanical Survey of India. The shallow water close to the island is the only place where new mussel colonies (Villorita sp.) are growing in the Vembanad lake. This shallow > > swampy area is the breeding ground of a number of fishes and crustaceans. > > Late Prof. KK Neelakantan (ornithologist)has noted that the backwater between the island and Kavanattinkara(is the place where the migratory > > ducks from Siberia and Europe used to sleep during day time. (page 4, > Pulluthottu Poonara Vare- Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath) A court stay was there against the handing over of the island,which was > > veccated one week back from the High Court of Kerala.So Oberoy is > starting > > their construction there immediatly. > > If we want to regererate the ruined Vembanad lake,saving the > pathiramanal > > island and its surroundings is the one and the only way by declaring the > > island and the surrounding portion of the lake as a nature reserve.> > Oberoy has already spend crores of rupees for the ruling and opposition > > politicians for getting the island for them.They bought an advocate from > > Delhi for getting the stay vecated from the court. > > What can we do?
> > Dr.Sreekumar.B,President,Kottayam Nature Society,Srinilayam,Near Union
> > Club,Kottayam.686001 Kerala.
> >