

PERIYAR

TIGER RESERVE

For almost half a century it has been one of India's major wildlife preserves, noted for its geomorphology its wildlife and its scenic grandeur. Over its considerable spread ranging from swampy flats to hill tops, the flora varies, and is specially interesting for the changes brought about by the artificial submersion of the hollows between the hills.

The vistas at the lake are out of a fairy-tale—only in Arthur Rackham's illustrations to the tales of the brothers Grimm one can see anything like them. Soft-wooded trees have perished long ago from their immersion, but the hardwoods are still there, jutting out of the lake in fantastic, pitted, many-pronged stumps, looking almost fossilised. There are crag-topped hills and in their groins dark sholas, and everywhere the outlook is vast.

Water-birds perch on the deadwood in the lake, kingfishers, egrets, herons, even an occasional osprey during the cold weather, and darters with outspread wings that, in this primeval setting, put one in mind of the Archaeopteryx! There are woodland birds on the forested banks, and some may be known by their calls—the papiha and the Indian cuckoo, orioles and flute-voiced grackles. And out of the woods great pied hornbills fly out across the lake with a whirl of wings reminiscent of the drone of an aeroplane.

The wild beasts, too, are very much there, tigers and leopards and the sloth bear in the forests, Nilgiri langur around the lake and liontailed macaques in the interior sholas. There are dhole and sambar and muntjac, and the diminutive mouse deer, and other animals besides, among them gaur of impressive size—gaur attain their grandest size here and in the Western Ghats to the north. And of course there are elephants—in fact, to me Periyar has always been the finest haunt of *Elephas maximus* any where. —M. Krishnan

Periyar Sanctuary is the best sanctuary in India for watching and photographing elephants at close quarters. This sanctuary takes its name from the river Periyar, the second largest river in Kerala. When a dam was constructed across the Periyar River by the erstwhile Madras Government in 1895 for irrigation, the waterspread filled the valleys forming a many-armed lake with creeks and small islands. The unextracted trees still stand dead in the lake like fossils holding their branched tops above water and providing perch for darters, the most common aquatic bird in the sanctuary.

History

The Periyar Sanctuary owes its birth to the innovative interest of Shri Chithira Thirunal, Maharaja of the former Travancore State. Realising the importance of wildlife conservation, the Maharaja appointed Mr. S.C.H. Robinson as the first Game Warden in 1933. Based on his recommendation the forest around the lake was constituted as a sanctuary, called Nellikampatty Sanctuary in 1934. In 1950 the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary was formed by adding the remaining portion of Periyar Lake Reserve, Rattendon Valley and Mount Plateau to Nellikampatty Sanctuary. This Sanctuary (777sq.km) was declared a Tiger Reserve in 1978 under the Project Tiger. In 1982 the core area of the reserve (350 sq. km) has been notified as a National Park.

Location

The Periyar Sanctury is in Idukki district and forms part of the high ranges of the Western Ghats. The topography of the sanctuary is undulating. In the east along the state boundary and also in the south-west portion, the land drops precipitously. Vellimala is the highest peak in the sanctuary (2019m). The Periyar lake, the nucleus of the sanctuary is about 26sq. km in extent. The maximum depth near the dam is 46m when the lake is full.

Longitude : Between 76° 55' and 77° 25' E
Latitude : Between 9° 18' and 9° 40' N
Altitude : Varies from 900m to 2019m above m. s. l.
Temperature : Maximum 30°C and minimum 15.5°C.
Rainfall : 2500mm (average)

Flora:

The vegetation varies from grasslands to tropical wet evergreen forests. The principal species are elephant grass in the grasslands and *maruthi, venteak and rose wood in the moist deciduous and semi evergreen forests. *Fambusa bambos* occurs in patches especially along water courses and in moist localities. Plantations of *Eucalyptus grandis* have been established in about 55 sq. km. of the sanctuary since 1962.

Fauna:

The varied habitat in the sanctuary supports a number of species of terrestrial, aquatic and arboreal animals. Gaur, sambar, barking deer, mouse deer, Nilgiri langur, bonnet macaque, lion-tailed macaque are the herbivores in the Reserve.

Tiger, panther, jungle cat, wilddog etc. are the major carnivores seen in the area.

Other important animals are bear, porcupine, Jackal, Indian giant squirrel, Malabar flying squirrel, wild boar, small Indian civet, toddy cat or common palm civet, mongoose, hare, pangolin etc. Nilgiri tahr is also reported to occur in this area.

Aquatic bird life is rather poor apparently because the water in the lake is deep. The common aquatic birds are the Indian darter and the white * *Terminalia paniculata*, *Lagerstroemia lanceolata* and *Dalbergia latifolia*

necked stork. Other important birds are the great Indian hornbill, brahminky kite, little cormorant, pied king fisher and wood pecker.

Of reptiles, both poisonous and non-poisonous snakes including king cobra are found in fairly good numbers. Tortoise may often be seen basking on the rocks close to the bank. Otters are semi-aquatic mammals seen in the lake.

Approach:

The facilities and ease with which wildlife can be viewed at extremely close quarters while having a cruise in the lake make Periyar one of the best sanctuaries in the country. The headquarters and place of entry is Thekkady which is accessible by good roads from the airports of Madurai (145km) Trivandrum (272 km) and Cochin (190 km). The nearest rail heads are Kottayam (115km) on the Ernakulam-Trivandrum line and Theni on the Madurai — Bodinaikkanur line.

Accommodation

Hotel accommodation is available in and around Thekkady. Aranyanivas Hotel (continental style), Edapalayam Lake Palace (continental style) and Periyar House (Indian style) are three hotel establishments run by the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation, a Government of Kerala undertaking. All these hotels are within the sanctuary limits and set amidst picturesque settings. Visitors, who prefer to stay deep inside the forest for research purposes can stay in the Forest Rest Houses at Manakavala, Mullakudi or Thannikudy. All these rest houses are two roomed with watch towers nearby.

Season:

The sanctuary is open throughout the year. But the best season is from September to May as is the case with all other sanctuaries of Kerala State

Other Information:

Information Centre: There is a visitor centre at Thekkady where the road ends at boat landing, for imparting information to visitors. Phone: 28 Kumily

Snack bar: at the boat landing provides beverages and snacks to visitors at nominal rates.

Picnic spot, lover's nook, and nature trail: developed near the road side on the way to boatlanding is quite safe for enjoying nature. Spending a few hours in this area can contribute greatly for the restoration of the human spirit. It is a sanctuary for man as well as the wild creatures.

Trekking: Trackers are available at the Information Centre for accompanying visitors for trekking. Visitors are warned that there is an element of danger from wildlife attack especially from elephants while trekking in the reserve.

Elephant ride: Trained elephants are available for pleasure rides at the landing.

Pilgrimage centres: The famous Sabarimala temple is situated within the sanctuary area which attracts millions of pilgrims every year. Mangaladevi temple is situated near the Tamilnadu border of the sanctuary.

Nearest Village: is Kumily which is 4 kms. from Thekkady. A variety of accommodation is offered there at very reasonable rates. Besides hotels there are various shops at Kumily to meet the needs of visitors.

Persons wishing additional information concerning the sanctuary may address their inquiries to:—

The Wildlife Preservation Officer,
Periyar Tiger Reserve,
Thekkady—Pin 685 536,
Phone: 27 Kumily.

HELP CONSERVE NATURE

SECONDARY CONSUMERS

(CARNIVORES)

e. g. Panther, tiger, etc.

PRIMARY CONSUMERS

(HERBIVORES)

e. g. Deer, elephants, gaur, etc.

PRIMARY PRODUCERS

e. g. Plants

The survival of man
is dependent on
the survival of
animal and plant life

- *Indira Gandhi*

KERALA FOREST DEPARTMENT
PROJECT TIGER.