RECCE - SACRED GROVES OF ANDHRA PRADESH- August 1996

August 2

Drove down from Sullurpet and halted at Horsley Hills the previous night. Proceeded towards Anantpur after breakfast. Visited **Thimmamma Marri Manu Sacred Grove - pg.16 No. 5 -** in Anantpur District on the way. The turn off from the main road is Konkanti cross and one has to proceed for 15 km before taking a left at Korathikutti. From this point the road is a dirt track for 12 km - very bad in stretches and takes about 40 minutes to reach the big banyan tree at Thimmamma Marri Manu. The banyan tree is 530 years old and covers an area of 2.1 hectares and has 1100 prop roots. The main trunk is dead and in place a temple has been installed where there is supposed to be a small idol to represent Thimmamma. I could not see the idol as the temple was closed. It seems to be a regular pilgrim spot, a small tourist van of pilgrims came up when we were there, there are vendors selling flowers, coconuts, tea etc and there are beggars sitting just outside the temple. The entire banyan tree has been completely fenced in by the FD. I saw a number of parakeets, the common three striped palm squirrel, woodpecker, mynas etc. No other major form of wildlife. The only thing in favour of the place as I see it is the fact that it is a big banyan tree and stands out amid arid surroundings, including a number of barren hills with beautiful rock formations. Can get a good aerial shot by climbing one of these hills. O/N Anantpur

August 3

Met Dr.B. Ravi Prasad Rao of Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantpur. Dr. Rao was the field investigator who surveyed the sacred groves in 4 districts in Andhra Pradesh. On his recommendation I visited two more groves in Anantpur District.

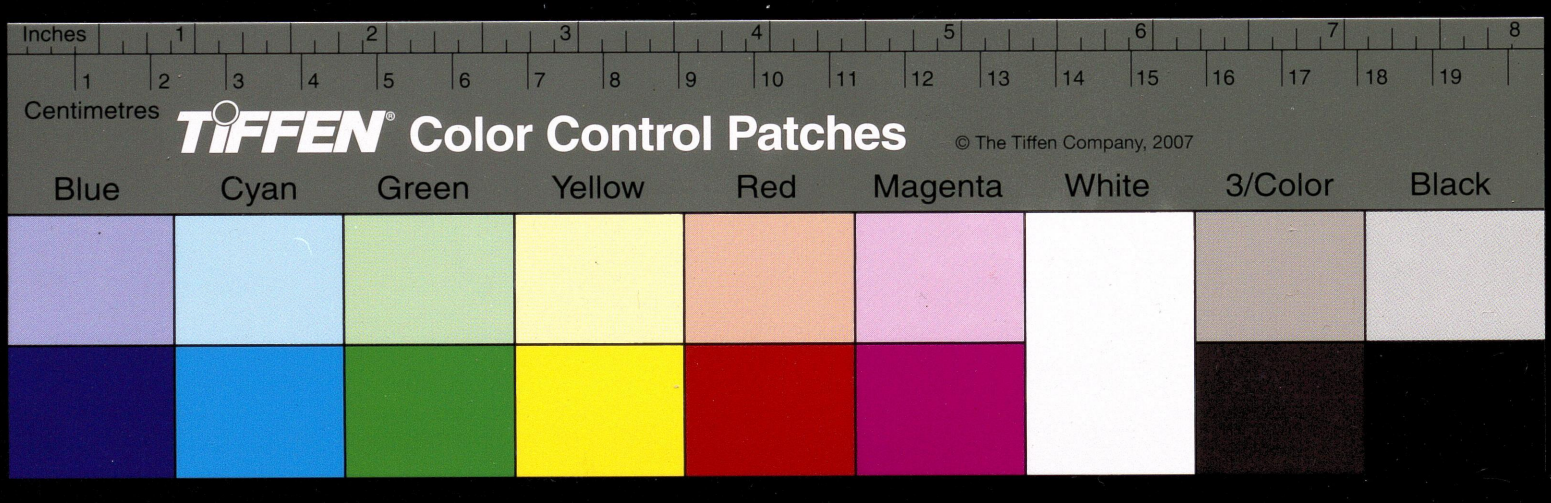
Pennahobilam Grove - pg. 15 No. 2. - 42 km from Anantpur on the Uruvakonda Road. It is just a temple with a number of trees on temple land - mostly Acacia (exotic), tamarind and other dry deciduous trees. Saw a troop of bonnet macaques around the temple.

Thimmappa Konda - pg.15. No.1 - 75 km from Anantpur towards Kalyandurg. This is a small hillock with a number of Acacia trees (exotic) and tamarind trees. The surrounding countryside is cultivated fields and barren land, so the grove stands out. There are a number of peacocks in and around the grove and the place resounds with their calls. The villagers do not remove any wood from the grove, tamarind is taken only for home consumption and the peacocks are absolutely protected. The temple on top of the hillock is dedicated to Thimmappa and there is a rock engraved Hanuman too. According to Dr. Rao there are at least 40 - 50 peacocks. It would have made a good story except for the fact that the dominant tree species is exotic and the hillock is a patchy dry deciduous forest, which would definitely not fit in our Wet Forests programme. O/N Anantpur.

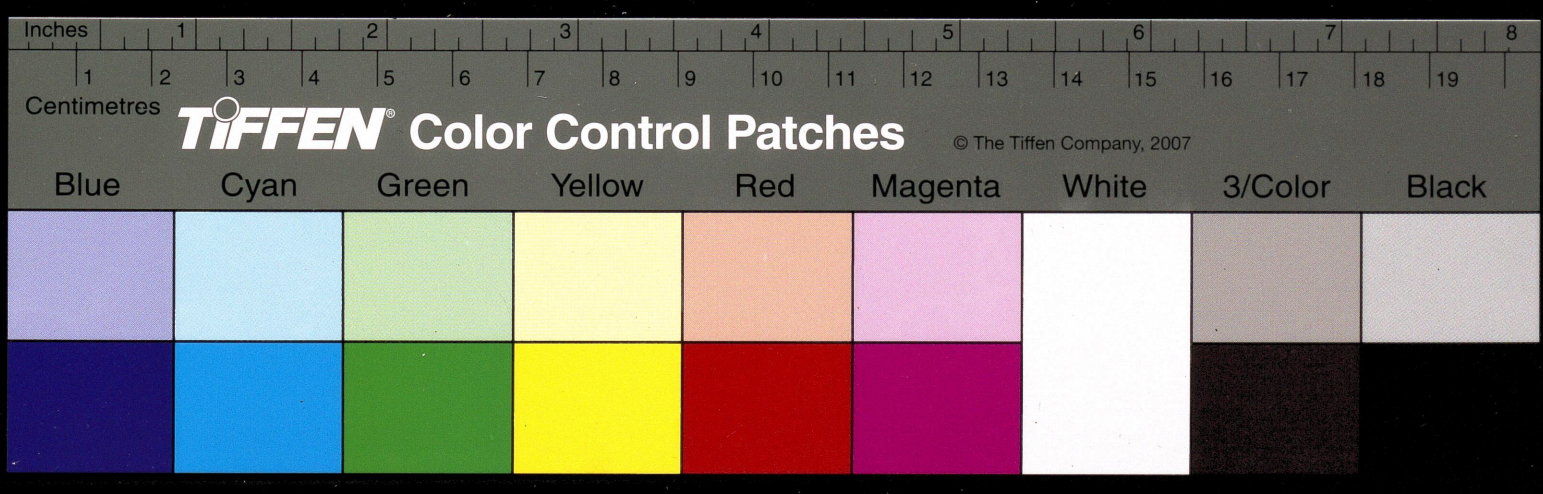
Katam - pg15. No.3 - I decided not to visit this grove after talking to Dr. Rao - the 200 year old tortoise is a land tortoise and though it has been seen a few times by the priest living there, it is a long shot trying to locate it 200 hectares of forest.

August 4

Proceeded towards Kurnool and stopped at **Belum Caves - pg.47 No.7** - as it was on the way. This is appr. 100 km from Anantpur. This is of no use for our programme again as there are no trees, just a series of interesting caves



underground. There is a Swami who lives in these caves, and the deity is a Shiva lingam. There were a lot of bat droppings in the caves, and a small pool of water where some German reported blind fish - could not see them. There is a continuous seepage of water through the rocks, and a few interesting formations like small stalactites.
The other grove that Dr. Rao recommended was **Jagannatha Gattu - pg.46. No.1** - just 8 km from Kurnool. Could not locate the grove, the villagers just kept pointing to a barren hill with a temple when questioned. O/N Kurnool.

August 5
Umamaheswaram - pg.53 No.1 - situated 160 km from Hyderabad on the road to Srisailam. This grove is located just outside the Srisailam Tiger Reserve and is surrounded by reserve forest area - basically dry deciduous forest. The temple is dedicated to Shiva and Parvathi. Tried to see Groves No. 2 and 3 on page 53 too, but could not get permission to see them as they are located within the Tiger Reserve. I personally would classify these as temples located within the sanctuary and in the reserve forest area. Drive to Hyderabad. O/N Hyderabad.

August 6
I met Mr. R.K. Rao, Director WWF - Hyderabad and subsequently Mr. R. Rajamani who were both actively involved in bringing out this book on the Sacred Groves. They suggested that if I were looking for moist forests, that I should concentrate on the east coast, but the forests were dry deciduous or scrub jungle.