

From,  
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President,  
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To,  
Govt. Secretary, MOEF&CC  
New Delhi

Respected Madam & Sirs,

**SUBJECT: Regarding Ecological devastation at Kuruva Islets and petition to Safeguard Kuruva Islets**

The Kuruva island is a cluster of 64 islets in fresh water, which is situated in South Wayanad Forest Division in the Chedalath Range of Paathiri Reserve Forest. It is the only fresh water island along the entire Western Ghats. The islets are in the River Kabini, which is an important tributary of the River Cauvery. It is spread over 146.3 hectares and consists of 64 small and large islets which form a unique biodiversity hotspot with both endemic and generalist fauna and flora, some of which is found nowhere else in the Western Ghats or even in Wayanad. This island is one of the few places in the Western Ghats where many critically endangered species like the Muggur Crocodile, Otter, etc. This is the only natural breeding ground for these species in the area for the above species. Schedule I species like the Tiger, the Elephant and other important species like Sambar, Gaur, Wild Boar and innumerable aquatic species, birds, amphibians and butterflies are also found in the Kuruva Island. It is also rich in flora with several species of orchids, ground orchids, ferns, etc. This region is a mosaic of riparian vegetation, evergreen forests, gallery forests, swamps, small fresh water ponds and dry deciduous vegetation. So much diversity in unique flora and fauna within a small area is a sight to behold. The Kuruva Island is also in one of the most crucial wildlife corridors on this planet. It falls in the middle of an age-old traditional migratory path of the Asian Elephants which migrate from the South-East Wayanad-Mudumalai-Bandipur complex to the North-East towards the Brahmagiri-Nagarahole-Kottiyoor forest complex. The islets form an important stretch where wild fauna migrate through a narrow stretch between larger landscapes. Even the slightest disturbances to this area will result in ecological disaster.

Right now, at the Kuruva Island, there is unregulated tourism which is in violation of the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MOEF&CC) guidelines. On an average,

there are more than 2,000 visitors who enter this critical and crucial biodiversity hotspot every day through the western and eastern sides. The District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) and the local MLA who is the Chairman of the Destination Management Committee (DMC) run this unregulated tourist business. The Forest Department here is a victim of political highhandedness and the DMC has made the Forest Department a mere by-stander to the rampant destruction to biodiversity, without any role or authority whatsoever.

The Kuruva Island has been divided into three sections and trekking paths have been made along with fencing in these three sections. This is a major disturbance as it is blocking out the free movement of animals in this crucial migratory path. These large mammals are being forced to find alternate routes, but with few undisturbed havens remaining, the man-animal negative interaction is only on the rise over the last few years. Crores of rupees have been given to the victims in the name of compensation, which is a huge burden to the tax payers. In the last 10 years, more than 10 elephants and 5 people have lost their lives in such hazardous negative interactions. Last week, the DMC conducted a meeting without the participation of the Forest Department and decided to reopen the Kuruva Island which was closed for the monsoons. They have also decided to renovate and open the island to tourism on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

Considering the importance of the Kuruva Island as a biodiversity hotspot and crucial migratory route, we request you to kindly ban all illegal and unregulated tourism activities with immediate effect. To prevent further ecological destruction, the entry of tourists to the Kuruva Island and the surrounded areas must be banned immediately.

Scientific studies and research work must be conducted on the Kuruva Island by reputed scientific institutions like the Wildlife Institute of India to study its endemic species of flora and fauna and the migratory routes. More importantly, the island must be handed over to the Forest Department for protection and maintenance. Being the only fresh water cluster of islets in the Western Ghats, the preservation of such a magnificent and unique biodiversity hotspot is not only our duty but also the urgent need of the hour.

Kindly take the necessary action prescribed above immediately and oblige. Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours faithfully,

(N. Badusha)