

COIMBATORE

50 hectares in the critical Kallar elephant corridor declared as private forest

Wilson Thomas

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This is the first corridor area in the State to be brought under the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949

Inching a step towards the protection of one of the most critical elephant corridors in Tamil Nadu, the Coimbatore District Collector has declared 50.79 hectares of private land in the Kallar elephant corridor area as private forest under the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949.

This is the first corridor area in the State to be brought under the Act and Collector S. Nagarajan completed the process in a record time of 30 days, said D. Venkatesh, District Forest Officer, Coimbatore Forest Division.

With the declaration of the land as private forest, there will be regulations on sale of these properties and permission has to be obtained for change in land use. “No person shall reduce the utility of the land as forest as the areas have been declared as private forest. It is very important to monitor the land use in such critical corridors,” said I. Anwardeen, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Coimbatore Circle).

“The plan of the Forest Department is to bring the entire private lands in such corridors under some sort of regulation to benefit and assist easy passage of pachyderms in the long run,” he said.

Widely known as Kallar corridor, the Jaccanaire-Hulikal Durgam corridor is situated at the Nilgiri foothills near Mettupalayam. It crisscrosses the Mettupalayam-Udhagamandalam road via Coonoor (part of NH-67) at the beginning of the ghat section.

The second edition of ‘Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors of India’ by the Wildlife Trust of India has listed Kallar as one of the corridors with “high” ecological priority.

“Elephants from Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve move to the southern part of Coimbatore Forest Division through the foothills of highly undulating mountains and cross the corridor between the second hairpin bend of the Mettupalayam-Coonoor highway and Kallar village. The corridor is very narrow due to plantations and various development activities,” it says.

Studies done by researchers say that the Kallar corridor is very significant as it connects the Brahmagiri–Nilgiris–Eastern Ghats elephant population range with the Nilambur–Silent Valley–Coimbatore population range. The movement of elephants between the two ranges facilitates genetic exchange, dispersal and access to a variety of seasonal foraging grounds.

‘Great step’

Welcoming the move, K. Kalidasan of Osai, a Coimbatore based organisation involved in conservation activities, said that protection of Kallar corridor was a long-standing demand as it was a crucial passage of elephants in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, which is home to the largest population of Asiatic elephant. “This is a great step towards securing the corridor,” he said.

With over 8,000 vehicles passing through the corridor daily, conservationists have been demanding a flyover from Kallar Bridge to the second hairpin bend of the ghat section so that elephants can use the natural terrain for uninterrupted movement.

Meanwhile, the Forest Department has written to the Nilgiris District Collector to make the upward traffic to Udhagamandalam via Coonoor and downward traffic to Mettupalayam via Kotagiri at night.

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