

Making wildlife feel at home on her property

T. Jayashree says humans living in forests must share space with animals

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T. Jayshree, a septuagenarian who has been living in Bokkapuram in the buffer zone of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) for 26 years, takes a daily tour of her 12.5 acre property, especially when she spots a herd of cattle that has entered through a broken fence.

Quickly chasing the herd away from a patch of forest, she says that despite her age, she visits her property every day to check for any potential threat to the wildlife that have made themselves at home around her residence.

Illegal resorts

"I am so afraid that these cattle will spread disease to the herds of deer that live here," says Ms. Jayshree, who has become one of Bokkapuram's least favourite residents, due to her persistent efforts to bring to light the illegal functioning of re-



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sorts along the notified elephant corridor.

"The local body has received more than 30 petitions against me from the resort owners here, who have tried to get water and power supply to my property stopped, so that they can force me out of Bokkapuram," said Ms. Jayashree.

She claims she has faced threats from local residents on numerous occasions, demanding that she stop speaking out against the ille-

gal resorts in the area.

Access for wildlife

Unlike other residents, Ms. Jayshree does not restrict access into her property for wildlife. "I leave the fence of my property open for them to enter, but have a strict policy of not feeding them or getting close to them," she says.

When she first purchased the land in 1994, the 12.5 acre property was used as a grazing area for cattle.

"Now, by restricting the entry of cattle, the property has over 150 native trees and thousands of clumps of bamboo, which have all re-established in the area over the last two decades. I don't plant any trees but I protect the flora that grows by itself," she says.

Due to the protection and refuge that her property offers, a tigress and her cub, a leopardess, bears, dholes, elephants and deer are seen on Ms. Jayshree's property almost throughout the year. "The people who live in this area are not animal-lovers. If deer enter their property, they chase them away, and I have even heard of some of them attacking elephants," she says. "People must realise that to live here is a privilege, and no sort of commercial business must be allowed. Only people who really love wildlife and who can share their space with animals should be allowed to stay here," she says.