**WILDLIFE** corridors are crucial since they increase the effective amount of habitat that is available for the species. The corridors maintain biodiversity, allow populations to interbreed, improve long-term genetic viability and provide access to larger habitats. This is especially important for migratory animals and those with large home ranges like elephants.

However, wildlife corridors require special management practices acknowledging the needs of the species using the corridors. Since these wildlife corridors are vulnerable, they must be managed with extreme caution. It is important for resiliency in maintaining the species and ecosystem connectivity conservation.

The Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu is richly endowed with hills, forests, rivers and wildlife. The Western Ghats of the district are the home of rivers such as Bhavani, Noyall, Aliyar and Siruvani which provide drinking water and irrigation water for the people and farmers of Coimbatore.

The Coimbatore Forest Division is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) and also forms part of the Core Zone of the Reserve. This forest division also falls under the Project Elephant Reserve No. 8. The Coimbatore Forest Division holds significant numbers of elephant population and is among the eleven Elephant Reserves in India and one among four in Tamil Nadu.

In the corridors of the Coimbatore Forest Division, elephants can be seen wandering in small herds, in Walayar and...
Bolampatty Valleys, Anaikatti reserve forests, Gopinari reserve forests, Hulical, Jaccanari slopes and Nilgiris Eastern Slope reserve forests. The Sholakkarai, Singapathy and Iruttupallam blocks are their favorite retreats during the rainy season.

However, elephants today face danger to their existence due to loss of habitat, habitat manipulation, anthropogenic pressure and loss of corridors. The corridors are responsible for the movements of animals and gene flow among the habitats or forests for a better and healthy population of elephants. Loss of corridors restricts the fauna and flora into small pockets of habitats or forests.

There are six important elephant corridors identified in the Coimbatore Forest Division. These are:

- **Jaccanari-Vedar Colony Corridor:** This corridor is surrounded by steep escarpment of the Jaccanari Mountain’s on the north and on the east by crop fields. It is very narrow between the Forest College (Mettupalayam) and Vedar Colony. This corridor has severe anthropogenic pressure due to which elephants cause rapid depredation. The perennial Ghandhapallam and Kunukkumadu waterway supports the elephants during the dry season.

- **Kallar-Jaccanari Corridor:** This corridor begins at Kothagiri Road and extends up to Kallar Reserve Forests along the foothills of Jaccanari Mountain bisecting the Mettupalayam-Coonoor highway and Kallar. This is also a narrow corridor with various anthropogenic pressures. Private educational institutions on the periphery of the forests have considerably reduced the corridor usage by elephants.

- **Kallar-Nellithurai Corridor:** This corridor is surrounded on the north by a series of hills and on the east by settlements (Nandavana Pudur, Nellithurai, Sattaiyur and Kil Changal). The corridor begins at first hair pin bend (behind Government Horticulture Garden at Kallar on the way to Ooty and extends up to Pillur Reservoir along the banks of Bhavani River. Expansion of agriculture along the periphery of the corridor hampers the free movement of elephants which causes severe damage by elephants to crops. This corridor is the only transit route for elephants to move between Pillur Reserve Forests and Attapady Valley from Eastern Ghats. Main threats to this corridor are fuel wood collection by forest settlements and livestock grazing.

- **Anaikatti-Veerapandi Corridor:** This corridor is surrounded in the north by Periyanaickenplayam, in the south by Anuvavi Subramanya Koil, east by Chinna Thadagam and west by Anaikatti village. Kodungarai Pallam is the major water source for the elephants and there are also perennial and seasonal water sources available in this corridor. Threat to this corridor in the Coimbatore Forest Division is the indiscriminate growth of building constructions in the fringe areas of the corridor.

- **Marudamalai-Thanikandy Corridor:** This corridor is surrounded in the north and south by Coimbatore, on the west by Kerala State, and on the east by Iruttupallam village in Tamil Nadu. The terrain comprises of undulating plains and steep slopes/hillocks. The perennial water sources available in the area are Vaidhegi falls, Papanasam, Attukal and Paraikinaru. Agriculture expansion in the fringe areas of the corridor is the major threat.

- **Kalkothi-Walayar Corridor:** This corridor begins from Kalkothi (Bolampatty Range) and ends with Chinnapathy of Mannarkad Forest Division through Perumalkoilpathy, Mangalapalayam and Walayar (Coimbatore Range). Most of the areas in this corridor are undulating terrain. Perennial water sources available in this corridor are Aaimoolai, Surulipadugai, Orathi, Parapatti and Chinnapathy as also some seasonal water sources. The major threat to this corridor is expansion of agriculture, constructions, indiscriminate water tapping through bore wells, quarries and due to inter-state railway track.

**Conflict and Depredation**

The elephants are extensively using these corridors for their seasonal migration. Most of the forest areas in the division...
Expansion of agriculture, indiscriminate water tapping, building of inter-state railway tracks, and establishment of private buildings and several private educational institutions has only further worsened the situation.

are mostly undulating hilly tracts except a few lowland and plain foothill areas. Thus, the elephant movements in this division are mostly restricted to very narrow paths of the foothills of the large mountains.

The human-elephant conflict and depredation in the Coimbatore Forest Division has gradually increased over the years. The large contiguous habitat which allowed free movement of animals from one habitat to the other has been troubled due to increasing human activity by development of private lands next to the forest corridors naturally increasing the anthropogenic pressures such as grazing, firewood collection, fire and faulty land use. Besides, the development of forest lands for plantation and establishment of multipurpose Hydro Electric Project has compounded the problem. Expansion of agriculture, indiscriminate water tapping, building of inter-state railway tracks, and establishment of private buildings and several private educational institutions has only further worsened the situation.

Managing the Corridors
The Coimbatore Forest Department’s efforts to resolve human-elephant conflicts by education and awareness in the fringe villages and keeping the wildlife corridors viable has had good impact. Physical barriers such as Elephant Proof Trench (EPT) and Solar Power Fences (SPF) have been erected for preventing straying of wild animals into the human settlements and other fringe areas. Social security schemes envisage compensation for crop damages and human death, injury to human and asset damages.

There are various other innovative management activities being carried out to reduce the man-elephant conflicts and degrading forest cover in the Coimbatore Forest Division. Habitat management is a vital part of the conservation of wildlife and its surroundings. Various schemes have been implemented in the Coimbatore Forest Division to promote the habitat quality and mitigate the elephant menace.

Schemes such as Tamil Nadu Afforestation Programme (TAP Phase I & Phase II) have been implemented in order to protect forest degradation. The project was implemented on a watershed basis with active participation of people aimed at restoring degraded forests and to alleviate poverty in the TAP villages. Under the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) activities such as tree planting in tribal areas for increasing green cover through Forest Development Activities (FDA) have been taken up.

Besides, centrally sponsored schemes such as Western Ghats Development Programme (WGDP) and Nilgiris Biosphere (NBR) implemented eco-restoration, eco-protection and eco-developmental activities programmes have also made impact. The schemes provide for solar power fences, salt licks and drinking water facilities for wild animals, educational awareness, eco-developmental activities, construction of check dams, fire camps, boats for patrolling, and creation of awareness through nature camps. Under the Tree cultivation in Private Lands Scheme (TCPL), tree planting in private lands in small and marginal farmers’ land for increasing tree cover outside the Reserve Forest areas of the Coimbatore Forest Division was undertaken.

Habitat Management in the Coimbatore Forest Division is one among the most important priorities of forest and wildlife conservation. The major portion of the Coimbatore Forest Division links the elephant populations of the Eastern and Western Ghats through its important corridors. There are several perennial and seasonal water sources available in the division. Water sources influence the regular movements of the elephants and other wild animals from one habitat to the other. During the summer season, some of the seasonal water sources become dry. Therefore, the department has constructed several check dams wherever necessary for the free movement of the elephants.

Anti-poaching camps have also been established and anti-poacher watchers have been engaged to prevent poaching activities in the Coimbatore Forest Division. The anti-poaching watchers mount regular vigilance in the sensitive areas susceptible to poaching. In the Coimbatore Forest Division there are seven anti-poaching sheds with 28 anti-poaching watchers.

As part of forest management, Solar Power Fences have been erected in the forest settlements and reserve forest boundaries to avoid human wildlife conflicts especially from elephants. About 59.2 km of Solar Power fences have been erected in different sensitive areas in all forest ranges under the 12th Finance Commission and Solar Fence Schemes during 2006 to 2008.

Elephant Proof Trenches (EPT) were also made in the areas where the elephants frequently stray into the human habitations. EPT has been made in several locations mainly in the settlement areas near the reserve forest boundary.

It has to be realized that effective corridor management could be the key to the survival of the elephant population in the Coimbatore Forest Division.

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