

**NILGIRI WILDLIFE AND ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION,  
OOTACAMUND.**

**REPORT**

**INDIA BASED NEUTRINO OBSERVATORY—PROPOSAL TO PUT UP UNDERGROUND FACILITIES IN SINGARA RANGE OF NILGIRIS NORTH DIVISION.**

While any initiative in advancement of science and scientific knowledge in our country is certainly a welcome measure and the efforts of the scientists in establishing a neutrino observatory is very much appreciated.

However, the selection of site for putting up this underground observatory in Singara area of the Nilgiris is objected to and opposed by a number of people (including scientists) NGOS and other stake holders of the District due to various important and valid reasons and causes.

In order to interact and understand the points of view and exchange information on the subject matter by the two groups, a site inspection meeting was arranged on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Accordingly the teams met on that day. The Conservator of forests Coimbatore circle was to preside over the event, but due to some urgent work elsewhere, he could not make it to this meeting.

The INO team comprised of three officials from Chennai and one TNEB official in Singara was present. They were

1. Dr. (Ms.) D. Indumathi, Institute of Mathematical Science, Chennai.
2. Dr. V.N. Murthi, Institute of Mathematical Science, Chennai.
3. Thiru. Srinivasan, Engineer from Kallappakam.
4. Thiru. Thirumal, Asst. Director, TNEB Singara.

The stake holders group comprised of the following persons.

1. Thiru. Rakesh Kumar, Jegenia IFS, DFO, Nilgiris.  
South Division – Addl. Charge of MWLS/NP.
2. Thiru. R. Arumugam, Wildlife Biologist and Researcher  
Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore (Placed at Masinagudi)  
Committee member NWEA.

3. Thiru. Kumaravelu, CPR Environmental Education Center, Ooty.
4. Thiru. Ashok, Wildlife Biologist & Researcher, B.N.H.S.  
(Placed at Kargudi – MWLS).
5. Thiru. Sathivel, Researcher, B.N.H.S., (Placed at Kargudi – MWLS).
6. Thiru. Jaya Chandran, Joint Sec., Tamilnadu Green Movement, Ooty.
7. Thiru. Francis Xavier, Joint Sec., NWEA, Ooty.
8. Thiru. T. Vasu, Joint Tr., NWEA, Ooty.
9. Thiru. Bheeman, Committee Member, NWEA, Ooty.
10. Thiru. T. Ravi, Former Sec., NWEA, Ooty.
11. Thiru. Ravikumar, WWF India, Ooty.
12. Thiru. N. Mohanraj, Hon. Sec. NWEA and Senior Programme  
Officer Nilgiris Eastern Ghats, WWF INDIA, Ooty.

Thiru. Mohanraj was the coordinator and facilitator of this meeting. INO team and others met briefly Thiru. Iqbal Basha, IFS, DFO, Nilgiris North Division in his office.

After the field visit, meeting and discussions were held at Masinagudi. The person's present made self-introduction. The INO team explained the salient features of the 'Observatory' project; And the critical requirements of the site and land to locate this underground tunnel with requisite facilities. The present site in the Nilgiris was chosen for the relative stable rock formation of the Nilgiri hills. Further they stated that after the underground facilities were put up, only minimal persons (Numbering about 15) would be working here. All other requirements would be located in Mysore.

After hearing the INO team, The other group expressed their view strongly and assertively, why this observatory should not be put up in the site in Singara. Their main reasons were.

- 1) This Place is falling under a very ecologically sensitive and fragile area.

- 2) Already a lot of anthropogenic pressure exists in this area due to various causes such as developmental activities like building of resorts, residential complexes and also because of TNEB's ~~'Push-Up' project~~ PUSHEP.
- 3) Above all, this area is a very important elephant corridor for the seasonal migration of animals between western/eastern ghats. This is absolutely a must for healthy elephant population in this part of the country and the three states of Tamilnadu, Kerala and Karnataka.
- 4) Because of various activities and pressures, habitat degradation and fragmentation, have become main causes for ever increasing man-elephant conflict. Any further activity (of this scale of putting up the observatory) would add up to the woes and problems and the situation would simply go out of control. Recently 'Project tiger reserve' status has been accorded to MWLS and NP and the site in question will fall under 'buffer zone'.
- 5) Realising the importance of protecting and conserving what is left in the area, particularly Elephant corridors, the Government of Tamilnadu through Forest Department is in the process of acquiring some parcels of patta lands in this sensitive area for maintaining the integrity of this important elephant corridor. It would be a paradox to abandon a crucial corridor for the sake of some scientific activity (this activity is not belittled and with due respect this is stated). In the scheme of nature, it is impossible to provide access, migratory paths and territories to wildlife particularly elephants which use these paths for thousands and thousands of years. As stated already, due to various reasons/causes the elephants are under great stress and pressure. Any further intrusion will be disastrous. All these facts are confirmed by competent/famous institutions and brought out in numerous research findings/papers. The institutions are B.N.H.S. (Mumbai), IISC (Bangalore), [REDACTED] [REDACTED] NWEA (Ooty) and others.

During the course of discussions, the INO team offered to assist with sum funds for purchase of alternative lands. This is simply not acceptable, because it is unwise to sacrifice a prime elephant corridor and go in for other lands which the elephants may or may not use.

The stake holders impressed upon the INO team and TNEB officials that this project simply could not be located in Singara for all the valid reasons enumerated as above. Alternative site with less impact on ecology and wildlife was suggested in Droog area coming under Coonoor range of Nilgiris north division. This place was also seen by INO team. But they seemed to be hesitant because of time lag.

Incidentally, when the INO team was coming up the hills, staff working for WWF India, AREAS programme showed them the places and locations of Kallar corridor to impress upon them the need to maintain the integrity of the remaining corridor passages in the Nilgiris for elephants.

To conclude, the NGOS and other stake holders ~~strived~~ <sup>STROVE</sup> hard to drive home the point 'No INO in the Singara area of the Nilgiris'.

It is fervently hoped that the INO team would have taken note of the ground situation, objections and other relevant points put forth before them, however much they are not to their liking and requirements. It is further hoped. That the INO team would look for some other site other than Singara site.

## Forest department to acquire patta lands in Mudumalai

The Hindu  
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These areas serve as vital migratory routes for wildlife

**By D. Pillai**

**COIMBATORE.** In an attempt to minimise man-animal conflicts and create adequate space for migrating elephants in the wild, the Forest Department has proposed to acquire some of the patta lands in and around Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and near Kallar in the Nilgiris.

The conflict is more pronounced in patches of forest-lands, which are not under the complete control of the Department, but still serve as vital migratory routes for wildlife, said P. Selvaraj, Forest Minister.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, the Minister said in order to prevent such problems it was essential that such lands were brought under the absolute ownership of the Forest Department through acquisition by the

Government. It would benefit the entire wild elephant population as well as other wildlife in the region.

The Moyar elephant corridor plays a vital role in the migration of elephants from the Eastern Ghats to the Western Ghats and vice-versa. So the department had decided to acquire private patta lands in this region to the extent of 320.95 acres at a cost of Rs. 181.45 lakhs, Mr. Selvaraj said.

The pachyderms migrate through another important corridor, Kallar Jaccousai, adjacent to the jurisdiction of the Kotagiri Range of the Nilgiris North Forest Division when they move from the Western Ghats to the Eastern Ghats.

The corridor is a very critical one. The department has proposed to acquire about 76,984

acres of land in this region for which Rs. 86.22 lakh was required. Realising the importance of acquiring lands from private individuals, the Government had sanctioned Rs. 2.68 crore for the acquisition of 398 acres of land, he said.

Mr. Selvaraj said in the second half of the last century prime wildlife habitat had been considerably fragmented due to diversion of forestland, illegal or otherwise, especially along the water source for other land uses such as human settlements, agriculture, animal husbandry, power generation and distribution, road transportation and tourism. It was decided to acquire private patta lands as the natural migratory path of animals had been very badly affected by these developments, he added.



A mother and a calf elephant from the wild that strayed into a school at Anakkutti in Coimbatore last year. - FILE PHOTO: K. ANANTHAN