INDIA

Pilgrimage in Wildlife Sanctuaries

Green Pilgrimage Network

Alliance of Religions and Conservation
Outline of Presentation

• Context

• Where we work

• Our approach to pilgrimage in PAs

• Lessons learned

• Way forward
## Protected Areas of India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Protected Area</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Area (sq. Kms)</th>
<th>% of Geographical Area of India</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Parks (NPs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLSs)</td>
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<td>Conservation Reserves (CRs)</td>
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<td>Community Reserves</td>
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<td>Total Protected Areas (PAs)</td>
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<td>160473.07</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage Area under Forest Cover: 21.23% of Geographical Area of India

Source: [http://www.wiienvis.nic.in/Database/Protected_Area_854.aspx](http://www.wiienvis.nic.in/Database/Protected_Area_854.aspx)

ENVIS centre on Wildlife & Protected Areas
## ARC/GPN in Protected Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wildlife Sanctuary/National Park/Tiger Reserve</th>
<th>Partner</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, TN</td>
<td>ATREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranthambore National Park, RJ</td>
<td>ATREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary, TN</td>
<td>WTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve, TN</td>
<td>WTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, K’tka</td>
<td>ATREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gir National Park, Gujarat</td>
<td>BHUMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachala Hills, TN</td>
<td>FOREST WAY</td>
</tr>
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Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR)

- KMTR is in the Western Ghats in the state of Tamil Nadu.
- It was created in 1988 by combining Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary and Mundanthurai Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The Tiger Reserve has an area of 818 sq. Kms of which a core area of 400 sq. Km has been proposed as a national park.
- The reserve is the catchment area for 14 rivers and streams and shelters about 700 endemic species of Flora and Fauna.
KMTR Sorimuthu Ayyanar Temple

- Sorimuthu Ayyanar Temple is worshipped by local tribes and people living in villages surrounding the reserve.

- An estimated 0.25 million pilgrims visit the temple during Adi Amavasya (New Moon in July/August) festival.

- Pilgrims camp in the forest for about 10 days during the festival leaving a major footprint in terms of solid waste and sanitation.

Pilgrims bathing in the river

Tents setup by people for camping
Solid waste disposed near the temple

Cleaning team at the temple premises

Pilgrims in the temple complex

Traders being advised not to use plastic
Ranthambore National Park

- Ranthambore National Park covering an area of 392 sq. kms is situated in south eastern Rajasthan.
- Ranthambhore was established as the Sawai Madhopur Game Sanctuary in 1955, declared one of the Project Tiger reserves in 1973, and a national park in 1980.
- Ranthambore is known for its tiger population and is one of the best places in India to see these animals in their natural jungle habitat.
Ranthambhore Trinetra Ganesh Temple

- The Tiger Reserve has a magnificent fort, which has a temple dedicated to Trinetra (three eyed) Ganesh.
- An estimated 0.5 million people visit the temple during the annual ‘Ganesh Chaturdhi Mela’ for three days and thousands visit on Wednesdays and Sundays, auspicious days for Ganesh.

Pilgrims visiting the temple during Ganesh Chaturdhi

Monkeys feeding on plastic
Local women stitching the cloth bags

Campaign at local school

Frisking for polythene bags by volunteers

Workshop for staff of local government departments
Srivilliputhur Grizzled Giant Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary

- Srivilliputhur Grizzled Giant Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary lies in western Tamil Nadu. This sanctuary is contiguous to Periyar Tiger Reserve on south western side and Megamalai Reserve Forest on north western side.

- The sanctuary covers an area of 485 sq kms was established in 1988 to protect an endangered grizzled giant squirrel.
Srivilliputhur Kattalagar and Pachaiamman Temples

• Kattalagar Temple dedicated to lord Vishnu attracts pilgrims on Saturdays and New Year’s day. The temple can be reached only by a 5 km hike up the mountain.

• Pachaiamman Temple dedicated to local forest goddess is at ground level and can be reached by vehicle. It attracts about 2,000 pilgrims on weekends.
WTI/GPN Proposal for Srivilliputhur

- A proposal is being worked out to lease 250 acres of land belonging to Andal Temple contiguous to the Shenbagathope sanctuary.

- This will provide an extension of the preferred habitat (orchards) for the grizzled giant squirrel.

- The distribution of squirrel population to be monitored, an environmental learning centre to be set up and path to the temple cordoned off to prevent spill over into the reserve.
Satyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary and Tiger Reserve

- **Satyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary and Tiger Reserve** in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve is an important wildlife corridor between the Western and Eastern Ghats and acts as a link between them allowing gene flow between the two habitats.

- The sanctuary declared in 2008 covers an area of 1,411 sq kms and is the largest wildlife sanctuary in Tamil Nadu.

- The sanctuary is home to large number of elephants and Bengal tigers and many other animal species as well as flora.
Satyamangalam Bannari Amman Temple

• The sanctuary houses the famous Bannari Amman Temple which temple has acquired ~ 50 acres of land from Forest Department for temple premises and to provide facilities for pilgrims.

• The temple attracts pilgrims mainly during the festival season from February to June, which also coincides with summer vacation and results in a large number of visitors.
WTI/GPN Proposal for Bannari Amman Temple Area

- Keep about 50 acres of Bannari Amman temple land free from plastic, foam and other unwanted material by developing a strategy for reducing the volume of garbage and ensuring its proper disposal.

- To raise awareness levels of pilgrims, shop owners and temple authorities to ensure a ban on use of plastics and effective enforcement of ban.

- Involving Temple authorities, Forest department, local governments, local people, Volunteers, NGOs and other wildlife enthusiasts for sustainable implementation.

- To formulate an action plan for management of the site belonging to the temple.
**Gir Forest National Park/Wildlife Sanctuary**

- **The Gir Forest** in the state of Gujarat was established in 1965 with a total area of 1,412 sq. Kms (about 258 sq. kms for the fully protected area National Park and 1,153 sq. Kms for the Sanctuary).

- It is the sole home of the Asiatic lions – 523 according to the 2015 Census.
Girnar Hills

• The Gir National Park houses the Girnar Mountain range, which is considered sacred and an important pilgrimage site for Hindus and Jains.
• The Maha Shivaratri fair and annual Girnar Parikrama pilgrimage are the most popular festivals attracting about a quarter of a million people.
• An estimated 20,000 pilgrims also visit the Kankai temple and camp in the forest area for 5-6 days at that time.
BHUMI/GPN Proposal for Girnar

• To reach the local educational institutions to create awareness by organising nature camps.

• To develop a detailed curriculum to provide education at school level regarding the environmental issues and to create awareness to the students.

• To develop proper coordination among the stakeholders including forest department, local government departments, temple authorities and local people.
Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary** is in southern Karnataka <100Kms from Bangalore. was established in 1987. The Sanctuary spans an area of 1027 sq kms. The Cauvery River passes through it

- The sanctuary consists of dry deciduous forest and is rich in various species of plants and animals
Hanuman Temple at Muthati

- The Cauvery wildlife sanctuary houses a settlement called Muthati on the banks of Cauvery river. This place has association with the epic Ramayana and there is a temple dedicated to lord Hanuman.

- The site is also being used for immersion of the ashes of dead people in the river.

- The Hanuman temple attracts pilgrims from surrounding rural areas who prepare food using fire wood and they also dispose waste improperly on the river banks.
ATREE/GPN Proposal for Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

- Co ordinate with forest department, district administration, local government, temple authorities, shop keepers and NGOs to regulate pilgrimage.

- Enforce ban on plastics within the sanctuary.

- Conduct IEC campaign in the local villages about the rules to be followed in sanctuary during the pilgrimage.

- Monitor impact on plant and animal species within the sanctuary.
Arunachala Hills

- An offshoot of the Eastern Ghats in NW T.N.
- Once covered in lush forests, became rocky and barren from fires and deforestation
- Streams stopped flowing and animals and trees that once thrived here disappeared
Arunachala’s Religious Significance

- According to legend, Siva manifested as a pillar of light that became the Arunachala hill
- Every year, in Nov- Dec, thousands of devotees take embers in pots from a fire lit at the Arunachala temple at the base of the hill along with ghee and camphor to fill a massive cauldron at the top of the hill where a massive fire is lit
Forest Way Program for Restoration of once-thriving biodiversity

- Intense fire fighting including those set during pilgrimage
- Planting of native tree species
- Conserving rain water, improving water table
- Crowd management during Deepam festival including collection of flammable materials at base of the hill
- Create corridors to surrounding forest area
Approach taken by ARC/ATREE/GPN to pilgrimage in PAs

- Studying impact of pilgrimage on wildlife and the environment.
- Identifying the local partners who can support ARC/ATREE/GPN activities.
- Supporting the preparation of plan of action for managing pilgrimage.
- Informing local stakeholders including district administration, forest department and NGOs about issues and actions.
- Conducting IEC campaigns in the local villages.
- Facilitating frisking of visitors at the entry point to eliminate plastic bags.
- Conducting a socio economic survey of the pilgrims and ecological survey in the reserve.
- Providing additional manpower for solid waste management and sanitation.
- Marshalling volunteers to guide pilgrims and oversee the solid waste and sanitation management.
- Final report on the lessons learnt from the festival for future use.
Lessons learned from implementation

Positives

- Local authorities, forest department, temple authorities and NGOs are usually aware of the problems and are willing to work with us.
- Some pilgrims were influenced by the IEC campaign.
- Youth especially volunteers might have taken away some lessons.

Challenges

- Influx of very large numbers of pilgrims during festival times.
- Lack of cooperation from people who feel their economic interests are affected mainly shopkeepers and the temple management.
- Strict enforcement of rules difficult at ground level given the numbers and wanting to avoid confrontation which often leads to police complaints and court cases to divert enforcers.
- Mind set of pilgrims who are used to discarding waste improperly and open defecation.
- Pilgrim feeding of wild animals and improper waste management attracting wildlife to temple vicinity to feed on garbage.
Way Forward

• Make an inventory of temples situated in Protected Areas.

• Develop GIS maps to track changes over time.

• Develop a set of guidelines for effective management of pilgrimage in protected areas with special attention to solid waste management and sanitation.

• Identify local partners to implement the ARC/ATREE/GPN approach.

• Create a network of implementing partners and build their capacity.

• Document experiences and share information for greater impact.

• Use social media to scale up outreach.
THANK YOU

Jayshree Balachander

10/9/2015