



W.P.No.27356 of 2019

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 14.08.2026

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CORAM :

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE N. SATHISH KUMAR

AND

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE K. RAJASEKAR

W.P.No.27356 of 2019,
W.M.P.No.24518 of 2025, W.M.P.No.23020 of 2025 &
W.M.P.No.37000 of 2024

W.P.No.27356 of 2019

Mr. S.Muralidharan
S/o.Mr.P.Sivalingam, 2A, 3rd Main Road,
Kottur Gardens, Chennai-600 085

Petitioner(s)

Vs

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and
Chief Wildlife Warden, Department of Forests,
Govt. of Tamil Nadu,
No.1 Jeenis Road, Panagal Buildings,
Saidapet, Chennai-600 015 and 80 Others

Respondent(s)

*[R79 to R81 suo motu impleaded vide this
order dated 14.08.2026 in W.P.No.27356 of 2019]*

W.M.P.No.24518 of 2025

S.Muralidharan

... Petitioner (s)

Vs



W.P.No.27356 of 2019

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and
Chief Wildlife Warden, Department of Forests,
Govt. of Tamil Nadu, No.1 Jeenis Road,
Panagal Buildings, Saidapet,
Chennai-600 015 and 65 Others

... Respondent(s)

W.M.P.No.23020 of 2025

S.Muralidharan

... Petitioner (s)

Vs

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and
Chief Wildlife Warden, Department of Forests,
Govt. of Tamil Nadu, No.1 Jeenis Road,
Panagal Buildings, Saidapet,
Chennai-600 015 and 65 Others

... Respondent(s)

W.M.P.No.37000 of 2024

S.Muralidharan

... Petitioner (s)

Vs

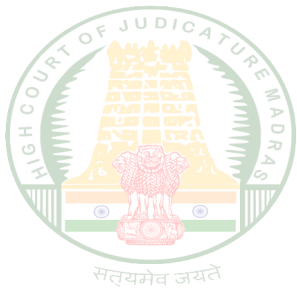
Principal Chief Conservator Of Forests And
Chief Wildlife Warden, Department of Forests,
Govt. Of Tamil Nadu, No.1 Jeenis Road,
Panagal Buildings, Saidapet,
Chennai-600 015 and 64 Others

... Respondent(s)

W.P.No.27356 of 2019 :

For Petitioner : Mr.Muralidharan (P-IN-P)

For Respondent(s): Mr.K.Surendar,
Special Government Pleader,
Mr.Mohammed Fayaz Ali,
Special Government Pleader and
Mr.G.Abraham Prabhu, Additional Government Pleader



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for RR1, 3 & 5

R2 – Deleted vide Court order dated 09.01.2021 in
W.M.P.No.4685 of 2021 in W.P.No.27356 of 2019

Mr.B.N.Suchindran,
Standing Counsel for R4 (TNPCB)

Mr.V.Chandrasekaran, Senior Panel Counsel for R6

Mr.S.P.Chockalingam for R7

Mr.L.Jaivenkatesh, Standing Counsel for R8

Mr.Richardson Wilson for RR9 to 11, 16 to 45

RR 12 to 15 - No Appearance

Mr.N.Muralikumaran,
Senior Counsel for M/s.MCGAN Law Firm
for RR 46 to 49

Mr.L.Palanimuthu for RR 50 to 64

Mr.M.Purushothaman for RR 65 & 66

Mr.Ramasamy Meiyappan for R67

R68 – Returned unserved (Insufficient Address)

Mr.V.Jayaprakash Narayanan for RR 69 to 73

Mr.K.S.Punithan,
Standing Counsel for R74 (TTDC)

Mr.N.R.R.Arun Natarajan,
Standing Counsel for R75 (HR & CE)

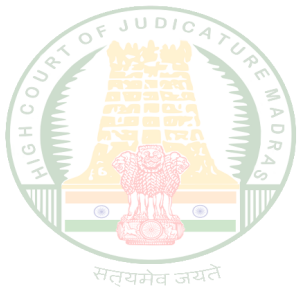
Mr.Harishankar for Mr.G.Gokul for R76 & R77

Mr.D.Ferdinard for R78 (Coimbatore Corporation)

Mr.P.T.Ramkumar, Standing Counsel for Railways

Amici Curiae

1. Mr.C.Mohan, Advocate
2. Mr.T.Mohan, Senior Advocate
3. Mr.M.Santhanaraman, Advocate
4. Mr.Rahul Balaji, Advocate



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ORDER

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AI Cameras along Railway Tracks to prevent elephant death :

With regard to the implementation of AI Cameras along the Railway tracks to prevent elephant deaths due to train accidents, pursuant to the instructions and repeated orders, though the Southern Railway provided five underpasses, now, the Forest Department has also put up AI based Cameras along the railway tracks and the same is working well. In fact, the moment any elephant passes through the Railway track, the AI based Infra Red Camera (night vision camera) detects the same and sends information to the control room, which in turn, will give a message to the loco-pilot, thereby, preventing any accident or death of elephants. In view of the system being put in place, it is stated that elephant deaths have considerably reduced in Tamil Nadu.

2.However, a concern is raised before us that the system is not put in place along the railway tracks passing through Kerala viz., Valayar – Palakkad. It is also brought to the notice of this Court that recently, on 12.08.2026, a train has run over an elephant and calf in Palakkad and both the elephants had died.

3.Since forests are continuous and animals are moving between two States, in order to avoid any such mishap and to prevent elephant deaths in the railway



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tracks, we are of the view that the system that is being implemented in Tamil Nadu should also be extended to the railway tracks passing through Kerala State also.

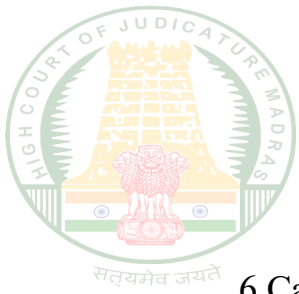
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For this purpose, we deem it fit to *suo motu* implead the following officials of the Government of Kerala as respondents in W.P.No.27356 of 2019 :

1. The Secretary to Government,
Forests and Wildlife,
Government Secretariat,
Thiruvananthapuram,
Kerala 695001.
2. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) &
Chief Wildlife Warden,
O/o.The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) &
Chief Wildlife Warden,
II floor, Vanalakshmi, Forest Headquarters,
Vazhuthacaud, Thycaud P O,
Thiruvananthapuram,
Kerala 695014.
3. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO),
Divisional Forest Office,
Palakkad Forest Division,
Olavacode PO, Palakkad,
Kerala 678002.

4.Registry is directed to issue notice to the newly impleaded respondents, returnable by 18.09.2026.

5.The Southern Railway is directed to file a report with regard to the recent train accident that occurred on 12.08.2026, in which an elephant and its calf were run over by a train.



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6.Call on 18.09.2026.

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G-Square :

7.With regard to G-Square, a status report has been filed today by the District Forest Officer, Coimbatore Division. The same indicates that, while granting No Objection by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (HoFF), Chennai, vide reference No.TS4/10174/2013, dated 17.04.2013, and TS4/45515/2013, dated 02.12.2013, it is clearly indicated that a distance of 150 to 200 metres should be maintained as an intervening buffer, within which no work or activity shall be undertaken. The Board Standing Orders also prohibit the assignment of land up to the boundary of reserved forests, but a belt of vacant land, two or three chains wide, should be left unassigned between the reserve boundary and the land to be assigned.

8.The status report filed by the respondents clearly indicates that the area is frequented by elephants and that, in such circumstances, a distance of 150 to 200 metres is required to be retained as a buffer, within which no work or activity shall be undertaken. The status report is recorded.



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9.The State Government shall also file their response with regard to our earlier order dated 12.09.2025, directing the State to declare certain areas along the elephant corridor in Coimbatore as a No Development Zone (NDZ). Further, with regard to the planning permission sought by M/s. G-Square and the nature of the development proposed to be undertaken, a report shall also be filed before this Court.

10.Meanwhile, the Forest Department shall ensure that no power fence is erected by anyone and that no construction is undertaken in the area adjoining the reserved forest.

11.Call on 18.09.2026.

Illegal Resorts in Anaikatti area/Elephant Protection :

12.At the request of the learned Special Government Pleader, call the matter on 21.08.2026 for filing the inspection report with regard to illegal resorts in Anaikatti area.



Removal of Solar Panels in Ukkadam and Valankulam Lakes :

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13.A report filed by the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, is placed before us. The following observations have been made by the said Institution:

“3.Observations and Trends :

3.1.That there are eight ecologically and hydrologically interconnected lakes situated within the Coimbatore corporation boundary, and all of them are associated with the Noyyal River. Many species of birds, particularly the migratory birds travelling very long distances, use different lakes for different purposes and keep moving between the lakes, hence these urban lakes cannot be seen in isolation. However, for the present report and as mandated by the Hon'ble High Court, we are considering only two lakes (or else it would require extended time and resources which will have to be taken up anyway in the near future).

3.2.That the Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) in these two lakes are not functioning, and the untreated wastewater freely flows into the tank/lake, which makes it highly polluted and unhealthy for all aquatic living forms, including birds.

3.3.That, as per the State of India Birds (SoIB) dataset, a total of 183 bird species have been recorded at Ukkadam Lake, comprising 126 resident and 57 migratory species. Of these, eight species are classified as globally threatened, including two as Vulnerable (Curlew Sandpiper and River Tern) and six as Near



Threatened (given in Appendix 1).

3.4. That as per the State of India Birds (SoIB) dataset, a total of 104 species have been recorded at Valamkularn Lake, comprising of 86 resident and 18 migratory birds. Of these, four species are threatened, with one listed as Vulnerable (River Tern) and three as Near Threatened (given in Appendix 1).

3.5. That four groups of birds classified based on foraging/ habitat preference were dominant in both the lakes and these were (1) deep-water foragers or divers (e.g. ducks, geese, cormorants, darters, terns, etc.), (2) shallow water feeders or mudflats/marshy land feeders (e.g. sandpipers, plovers, egrets, herons, etc.), (3) floating vegetation-associated birds (e.g. jacanas, swamphens, moorhens, etc.) and (4) reeds/tall grass associated birds (e.g. rails/crakes, munias, weavers, etc.).

3.6. That the overall avian composition is now dominated by woodland species, with a few generalist wetland birds (e.g. purple swamphen, pond heron, purple heron) and human-commensal species rather than the wetland-dependent birds. This shift clearly indicates the transformation of the wetland ecosystem into a land manicured for recreational use.

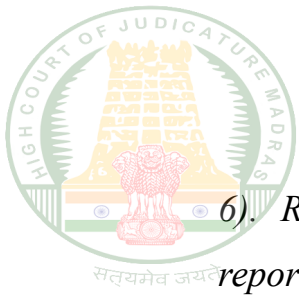
3.7. That in Ukkadam Lake, many wetland-associated species have shown a moderate to major decline in reporting frequency since September 2018 (Appendix 2). Affected species include the Spot-billed Pelican, Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Common Teal, Little Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Redshank, Little Stint, Whiskered



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Tern, Eurasian Spoonbill, and Western Marsh Harrier. Nearly 78% of high-priority waterbirds listed in the SoIB dataset showed reduced reporting frequency in the lake. Furthermore, three high-priority birds (Curlew Sandpiper, Slender-billed Gull, and Little Tern) were newly reported after the implementation of the SCP, but have not been reported since 2021. Several species (e.g., Pin-tailed Snipe, Greater Flamingo, Kentish Plover, and Oriental Skylark) showed stable reporting frequencies across two phases, but have not been recorded at all after 2023. Threatened species (River Tern, Black-tailed Godwit, Spot-billed Pelican, and Indian Roller) also showed a declining trend in reporting frequency (Appendix 3) in the lake. Similarly, three endemic species to the Indian subcontinent have not been recorded since September 2018 (Appendix 4).

3.8. That in Valamkulam Lake, the reporting frequency of wetland-associated species, such as the Whiskered Tern, Garganey, and Little Ringed Plover, has shown a declining trend after the implementation of the scheme. Furthermore, two species-the Common Teal and Common Kestrel-have not been reported from the lake since 2017. Notably, a few species, including the Northern Shoveler, Western Marsh Harrier, Little Stint, Eurasian Spoonbill, and Marsh Sandpiper, were only reported after the implementation started, despite the overall declining trend. Most of these sightings occurred before 2020, with a reporting frequency of just 1%. This pattern suggests that these birds may have used the lakes temporarily when human activity was minimal during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Both threatened species, the River Tern and Spot-billed Pelican, showed a declining trend in reporting frequency (Appendix



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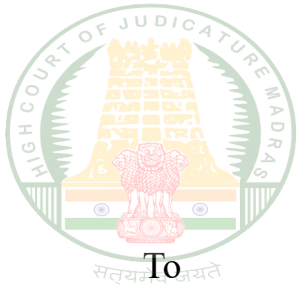
6). *Regarding the endemic species, there is a steady decline in reporting frequency, except for a few woodland and open-habitat species such as the Common Hawk-Cuckoo, Indian Peafowl, Black-rumped Flameback, Purple-rumped Sunbird, and Pale-billed Flowerpecker (Appendix 7)."*

14. Considering the serious lapses noted by the Institution, we direct the authorities, first, to set right the Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in Ukkadam and Valankulam Lakes forthwith and prevent untreated wastewater from flowing freely into the lakes. Further developmental activities, including the ongoing and proposed projects, shall be halted until the Wetland Management Plan is implemented.

15. Call on 18.09.2026. Meanwhile, let an inspection be conducted and a report be filed by the respondents.

(N.S.K., J.) (K.R.S., J.)
14.08.2026

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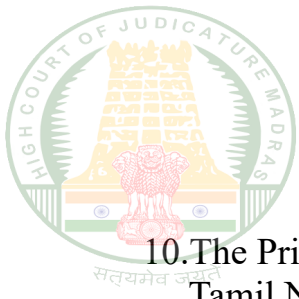


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To

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- 1.The Principal Secretary,
Department of Forests And Environment,
St. George Fort, Chennai 600 009.
- 2.The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,
(Head of Forest Force),
Forest Head Quarters,
Guindy-Velachery Main Road,
Velachery, Chennai – 600 032.
- 3.The District Collector,
The Nilgiris, Ooty,
The Nilgiris District.
- 4.The District Collector,
Coimbatore.
- 5.The District Forest Officer,
Kodaikanal, Dindigul District.
- 6.The Assistant Director of Rural Development,
Coimbatore.
- 7.The Commissioner,
Department of Geology and Mining,
Thiru.Vi.Ka.Industrial Estate, Alandur Road,
Guindy, Chennai-600 002
- 8.Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change,
Indira Paryavaran Bhavan, Jorbagh Road, New Delhi-110 003
- 9.The Superintending Engineer (Coimbatore North),
Tamilnadu Generation and Distribution Limited (TANGEDCO),
Tatabad, Coimbatore.



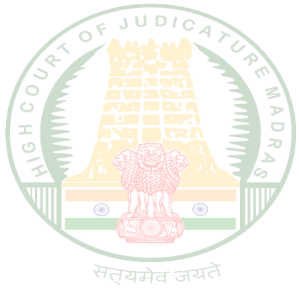
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10. The Principal Secretary/Chairman,
Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board,
No.76, Mount Salai, Guindy, Chennai- 600 032
11. The Managing Director
Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation
Wallajah Road, Chennai – 600 002.
12. The Director,
Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department,
No.119, Uthamar Gandhi Salai,
Nungambakkam High Road,
Chennai – 600 034.
13. The Special Government Pleader (Forests),
Madras High Court, High Court Campus,
Chennai 600 104.
14. The Commissioner,
Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation,
Coimbatore.
15. The Commissioner,
Tiruppur Municipal Corporation,
Tiruppur.
16. The Secretary to Government,
Forests and Wildlife,
Government Secretariat,
Thiruvananthapuram,
Kerala 695001.
17. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) &
Chief Wildlife Warden,
O/o. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) &
Chief Wildlife Warden,
II floor, Vanalakshmi, Forest Headquarters,
Vazhuthacaud, Thycaud P O,
Thiruvananthapuram,
Kerala 695014.



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18. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO),
Divisional Forest Office,
Palakkad Forest Division,
Olavacode PO, Palakkad,
Kerala 678002.



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N. SATHISH KUMAR. J.
AND
K. RAJASEKAR. J.

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