



**Potential sites for setting up isolated rehabilitation facilities (sanctuaries) for captive elephants in
Tamil Nadu**

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About us:

Elsa Foundation is a non-profit charitable trust that focuses on the conservation of biodiversity, prevention of cruelty to animals, and animal rights issues of both domestic and wild animals. It opposes keeping wild animals in captivity.

We have been to several countries to study best practices and implement them in India.

The foundation supports various government bodies, in informed policy-making and decision-making on critical issues impacting biodiversity and the rights of animals.

Our work areas are research, advocacy, awareness, publication, support in policy and decision-making.

Website: www.elsafoundationcharity.org



Cover photo: Andiyappanur dam, lake and reserved forest, Tirupattur district, TN

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Other publications of the foundation that are related to this document



- ✚ Illegal capture and sale of elephants from North East to South India
- ✚ Living conditions of captive elephants and solutions to the problems
- ✚ Elephants are victims of human abuse



Illegal Capture and Sale of Elephants from North-East India to South India
Media Articles and Research Reports



Living Conditions of Temple, Private Elephants.
Solution to the problems



CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS ARE VICTIMS OF HUMAN ABUSE
Media Reports

Introduction

Isolated rehabilitation centres (sanctuaries) need to be developed in Tamil Nadu for rescued captive elephants with contagious diseases such as Tuberculosis. This place should NOT be the natural habitat of wild elephants. Such isolated facilities will prevent the spread of contagious diseases from captive elephants to wild elephants.

The place should be a large natural rainforest with plenty of shade and natural water facilities. The trees need to be green throughout the year. Natural water sources should be available in plenty, throughout the year.

Elephants' thermoregulatory mechanism is very poor, so they need to live in a forest that is less than 25 degrees centigrade throughout the year, Since climbing steep rocks and mountains is difficult for captive elephants, a large area of flat land is essential.

To identify such sites, physical visits to multiple locations were made during the summer season and two places were identified as suitable locations for rehabilitation.

Alternate facilities for rehabilitation of healthy rescued elephants

For rehabilitating healthy rescued elephants, the existing F.D. elephant camp facility in Anaimalai (Coimbatore district) can be used. Alternate sites can be identified in the Nilgiris biosphere range, Theni range and Kalakaadu Mundanthurai tiger reserve range (Tirunelveli).

Over a while, when the elephants get used to the terrain of the rehab sanctuary, a soft release approach of releasing them into the wild needs to be done.

Examples of successful captive elephant reintroduction into the wild in Botswana and Thailand are given in the foundation's detailed report on "Problems faced by captive elephants". These elephants were commercially exploited for tourism and begging.

Problems in an existing elephant rehabilitation facility at MR Palayam, Trichy

- A huge amount of money is wasted in developing this facility that is not suitable for elephants in any way

Comparing ariel views of MR Palayam, Trichy with alternate suitable sites



Trichy M.R. Palayam - Barren, hot, humid flat land without natural trees & water. Not suitable for animals



Tirupattur district, Andiyappanur dam & reserved forest is a rain water catchment zone surrounded by evergreen mountains. The lake water is perennial. The weather is very pleasant even during peak summer



Salem district, Anaivari Muttal forest

This is a rain water catchment zone surrounded by evergreen mountains on three sides

Perennial water source in the form of waterfalls and lake. Check dam helps in storing water in the lake

The weather is very pleasant even during peak summer

MR Palayam is a huge blunder

From the images presented in this section it is very clear that selecting MR Palayam (in the past) as a site for an elephant rehabilitation centre and for a new zoo is a huge blunder.

- Several crores of tax payers' money is wasted in such unsuitable projects
- Due to lack of water, day to day operations becomes very complicated.
- Several lakhs of money have to be wasted every year for buying water.
- The primary purpose of such facilities are rehabilitation of abused animals, but the animals in such facilities undergo enormous suffering every day with permanent water problem plus permanent hot & humid weather.

Note: More details about the problems can be seen in the comparison table

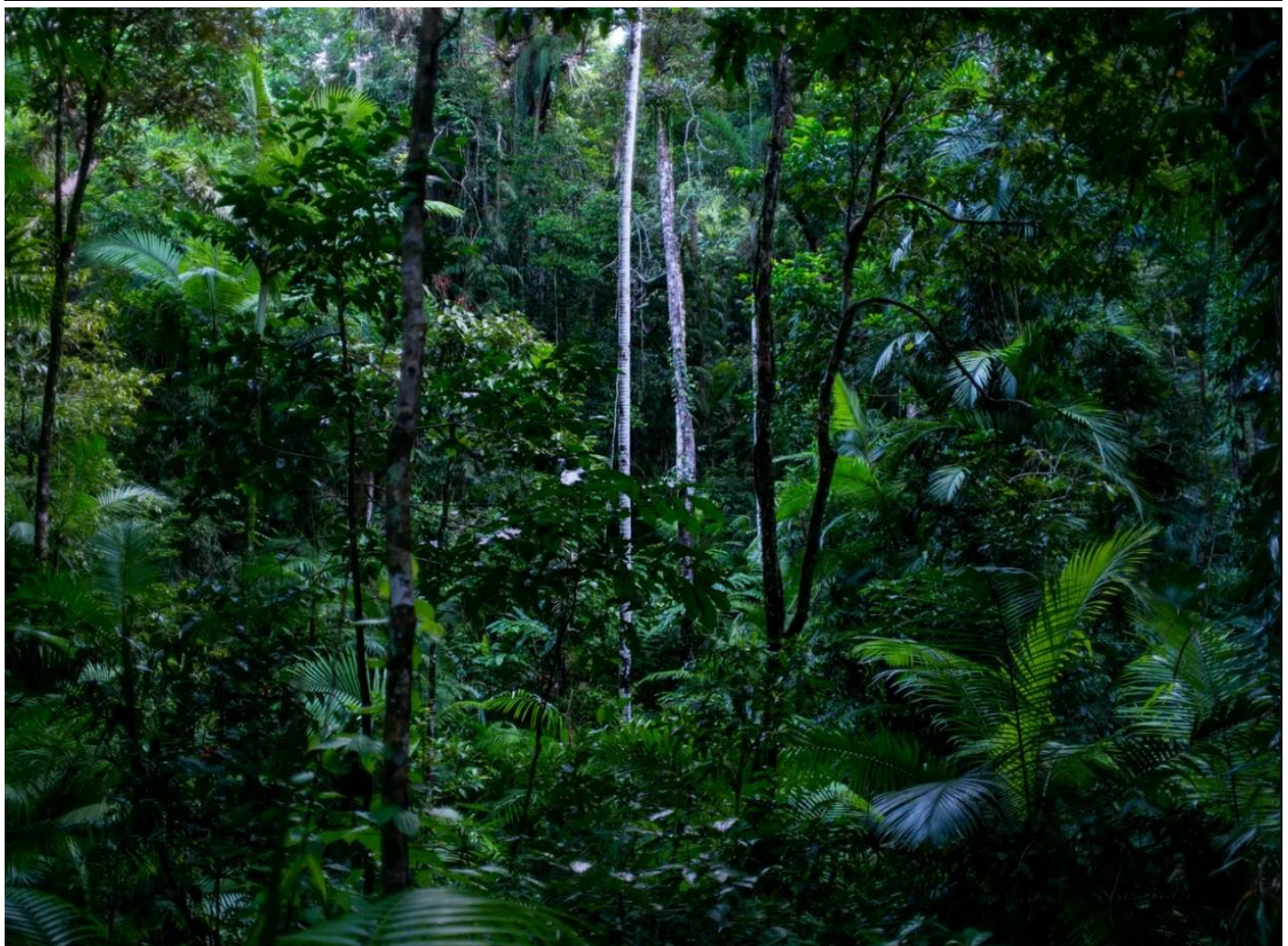
Comparison	
MR Palayam centre, Trichy	Identified Sites
<p>Rain forest & shade: This is not a natural rainforest. It has thin, tall single-species trees planted by the forest department that does not provide shade. Shade is very essential for elephants</p>	<p>Rainforest with several tall trees provides plenty of shade, cool weather, food source, scratch post,</p>
<p>Water Scarcity: Severe water scarcity is there, have to depend on borewells.</p>	<p>A perennial water source (lake) is there. Water supply throughout the year via mountain streams. Lake is located in the water catchment area of mountains. Dam acts as a barrier to prevent water wastage.</p>
<p>Natural water sources: There is a small stream of water behind the centre. There is no backside gate to reach this stream. This small stream is not perennial</p>	<p>Same as above</p>
<p>Weather: The weather is hot & humid</p>	<p>Weather is pleasant even in summer</p>
<p>Natural Habitat: Does not reflect the natural habitat of the elephants.</p>	<p>Reflects the natural habitat of elephants</p>
<p>Land Area: Very less area</p>	<p>Very large forest area</p>
<p>Food: Nil browsing opportunity as the tree barks here are not consumed by the elephants. Fruits and leaves that elephants consume are not there.</p>	<p>Plenty of opportunity for grazing and browsing with the availability of grass, fruits, leaves, and tree barks that elephants like and consume.</p>
<p>Using cognitive skills: There is not enough variety in the landscape for the elephant to use its highly developed cognitive skills. Using cognitive skills is very important for the elephants to remain mentally healthy</p>	<p>Large landscape with a variety of places, and waterholes to use cognitive skills.</p>
<p>Elephants suffering: Due to the problems listed above the elephants are subjected to enormous suffering on a daily basis, for their entire life.</p>	<p>Animals will have excellent physical & mental health due to the facts mentioned above.</p>

Comparison of man-made forest with a natural rainforest



Above: Man-made forest (MR Palayam, Trichy). Thin trees, no shade, NOT suitable for elephants

Below: Nature-made rain forest suitable for elephants (representational image)



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Animals in Pachamalai hills suffer as percolation ponds, borewells go dry

TNN | Aug 24, 2014, 01.01 AM IST

TRICHY: Attempts of the district forest department to supply water to animals have failed as all the borewells they had dug have run dry.

During January, the forest department noticed an increase in incidents of animals straying into residential localities. Following this, the officials took steps to sink borewells and set up temporary water tanks along with hand pumps in the MR Palayam and Thuraiyur forest reserves. However, as the bore wells have gone dry, animals are left with no option but to go in search of water.

"An estimated amount of Rs 2 lakh was spent on borewells for providing water to animals in the forest," said a senior officer. However, with failure of rains and a long summer, the borewells did not get sufficient water putting the animals to hardship, he added.

Pachamalai and MR Palayam are the two prominent forest ranges in the district that have animals such as spotted deers and monkeys. But, these forests have been losing its valuable species due to draught and rising temperatures. Though there were some showers in recent days, forest officials say that they were not sufficient for the animals to quench their thirst.

The rising temperature has forced animals to come out of their habitat and stray into residential areas. Though percolation ponds are being set up in these ranges, inadequate rainfall has kept them dry.

Recently, a spotted deer was rescued by the fire and rescue personnel along with the forest authorities from an open well near Karattampatty, Thuraiyur located on the outskirts of the city. The two-year-old male spotted deer was found perched in a small stone in the open well at Sirukambur Road. In the past few months, instances of animals straying into residential localities are on the rise. At least 10 similar incidents have been recorded by the forest authorities in the last two months.

When existing projects need funds – money is wasted on starting new projects

There is a desperate need for funding and managing the existing elephant rehab centre and zoos. In this scenario starting a new zoo in Trichy for about 61 crores is a huge waste of money

In Salem and Vellore zoos the following positions are never filled. This is mandatory as per CZA's zoo recognition rules

- Veterinary doctor
- Education officer
- Curator

These zoos do not have the following facilities mandated by CZA's zoo recognition rules

- Large enclosures provide very basic living conditions for captive animals
- Veterinary clinic
- Medical equipment
- Quarantine facilities

Due to the non-availability of vet doctors, veterinary clinics and medical equipment a scenario of not treating the sick animals and letting them suffer and die is created.

Another scenario that is created is the non-isolation of animals with contagious diseases due to a lack of quarantine facilities. This leads to disease being spread among all animals in a cage/enclosure

The foundation's reports and representations about Vellore Zoo, sent to TN FD in 2022 provide the details of these critical problems.

When the existing projects (zoos & elephant rehab facilities) desperately need funds, a T.N. F.D. government note requesting Rs.60.60 crores for the initial 10 years cost for building a new zoo in Trichy was released

The portion of the Government Note requesting funds is given below

Accordingly, the cost has been worked out for various components such as formation of animal enclosures, construction of rest room, Ticket counter, Overhead Tank, other civil works, purchase of equipments, electrical works and water supply works etc., to be carried out in the Trichy Zoo. Based on the suggestion of the Expert Committee, a revised master plan has been prepared by the District Forest Officer, Trichy for ten years for Rs.60.60 Crore from 2016-17 to 2025-26 and submitted to the Central Zoo Authority on 10.02.2017 for scrutiny by the Central Zoo Authority Evaluation and

Criteria used for selecting the rehab locations

- ✚ Perennial water source
- ✚ The location needs to have a large lake with nearby mountains that act as a rainwater catchment area
- ✚ Perennial greenery in the forest
- ✚ No industrial / household water pollution. Water should directly flow from the mountains
- ✚ Water levels very high even in peak summer
- ✚ Pleasant weather even in peak summer
- ✚ No human encroachment.



- ✚ No industries nearby that can pollute the air and also create continuous noise.
- ✚ Multiple waterholes spread across the forest
- ✚ No slippery rocks, dangerous slopes and cliffs
- ✚ Abundance of natural food sources that elephants like and consume.
- ✚ Availability of large vehicle travelling paths in the periphery of the forest, to supply food and to monitor the elephants.
- ✚ Shallow water at waterholes makes drinking and bathing easy
- ✚ Large landscape of flat forest land, providing several kilometres of walking opportunity
- ✚ The presence of tall trees and large bushes provides plenty of shade
- ✚ Wet mud bath locations.
- ✚ Elephants should be independent of mahouts.
- ✚ No predators.

- ✚ No wild elephants
- ✚ It is good if facilities are existing for the usage of rehab centre staff.
- ✚ ECO tourism development opportunities

**The two forest sites described in the report satisfy all these criteria
Information about the landscape, streams, plants, trees & fruits
collected from tribals using the forest area.**

**In both the locations ECO TOURISM can be developed by taking
tourist in boats / build watch towers to see the elephants visiting
the waterholes.**

Satellite images are collected from Google Earth

**Drone images and various other images in this report are collected
from various YouTube channels**

Site-1: Andiappanur Dam and Reserved Forest (Rank-1 due to large area)

Andiappanur Dam & Reserved Forest

Foothills of Jawadhu Hill Range, Eastern Ghats

Thirupattur District

Tamil Nadu

Flat land area – 725 acres (Excluding mountain terrain)



Aerial view - Dam water surrounded by lush green forests and mountains on three sides

Mountains on three sides convert the valley in to rain water catchment area

Location survey done twice during peak summer (March & June 2022)

Andiyappanur lake and waterhole images



(above & below) Lake with perennial water source due to the dam + catchment area.

Multiple easy-to-access & safe waterhole paths for the elephants, in the entire





Andiyappanur:

(left & below)

Lake with perennial water source due to the dam + catchment area.

Multiple easy-to-access & safe waterhole paths for the elephants, in the entire landscape



Andiyappanur dam front view



A partial list of trees, plants and fruits that elephants eat and found here

Tribals collect the following fruits from this forest and sell them.

Tourist can see some of these fruits sold on the main road that leads to the dam.

Fruits

- Wood apple / Elephant apple
- Tamarind
- Ziziphus Jujuba

Tall Trees

- Tamarind
- Wood apple

Shrubs

- Albizia Amara



Feronia Elephantum Correa (a.k.a.) Limonia Acidissima

Common name: elephant apple (or) wood apple

(representational image from the internet)



Ziziphus Jujuba fruit (Tamil:Elanthai) (Image from the internet)



Albizia Amara (Tamil: Arappu / Oonja) (Image from the internet)



Anadiyappanur forest:

Large tamarind trees are found in abundance in this forest

Tamarind trees are sources of

- **Shadow**
- **Fodder (leaves)**
- **Fruits**
- **Scratch post for the elephants**
- **Maintaining a cool weather**

(representational images from the internet)

Andiyappanur-Facilities for rehabilitation centre staff and public



At the entrance of dam: A large park and buildings for staff to stay



Top view of dam and garden



Andiappanur dam garden





Andiyappanur dam: Building for rehab staff to stay (above) and bathrooms (below)



Anaivari Muttal Forest, Water Falls and Lake

Foothills of Kalvarayan Hill Range, Eastern Ghats

Attur, Salem District, Tamil Nadu

**Flat forest area: 225 acres plus
(Excluding forests on mountain slopes)**

Lake area: 40 acres



Non stop water flow in the water falls even during peak summer

Images

All forest & water bodies images were shot in peak summer, in the middle of March 2022



Entrance of Anaivari Muttal Forest, Water Falls and Lake



Abundant flow of water in the waterfalls, during rains



Anaivari Muttal forest - complete greenery even in peak summer



Muliple safe paths around the lake provides easy access to water source for elephants



Anaivari Muttal Forest, Water Falls and Lake



Muliple safe paths around the lake provides easy access to water source for elephants



Anaivari Muttal - Road running on one side of the forest can be used as a monitoring route



Satellite images: Anaivari Muttal Forest, Water Falls and Lake.

Arrow on top indicates the road on the periphery of the forest. This can be used as monitoring route



Anaivari Muttal Forest: Above-Eco Tourism Center. Below-Eco hut for staying

Anaivari Muttal - Facilities available

1. Ecotourism centre
2. Eco hut for staying
3. Toilets
4. Drinking water
5. Motor-Boating
6. Park

Note: The available space near the park can be used for building houses for mahouts. Vet clinic.

Anaivari Muttal - Advantages

- ✚ Greenery is all over the forest even during peak summer
- ✚ Plenty of water is available even during peak summer
- ✚ Lake acts as a storage reservoir. Lake acts as a water source backup, in case water flow from the mountain stream is less
- ✚ Natural spring water flows from the mountain throughout the year
- ✚ Flat forest area of 225 acres plus, for easy movement of elephants
- ✚ Thar road at the periphery of the forest can be used for patrolling and monitoring
- ✚ Existing buildings can be used by mahouts, and vet doctors.

A protected contact model is a must




In the rehab facility, the elephants need to be free of human control. Whenever needed, the elephants need to be handled with a protected contact method. Captive elephants, due to enormous abuse by the mahouts, live with a constant fear of humans.



Protected contact checking at NGO Wildlife SOS, India



Clockwise:

-  Blood sample collection from ear
-  Working on foot pad
-  Humane soft touch method using a stick with soft ends, to touch and teach the elephant, the protected contact method

Eco-tourism development for funds generation

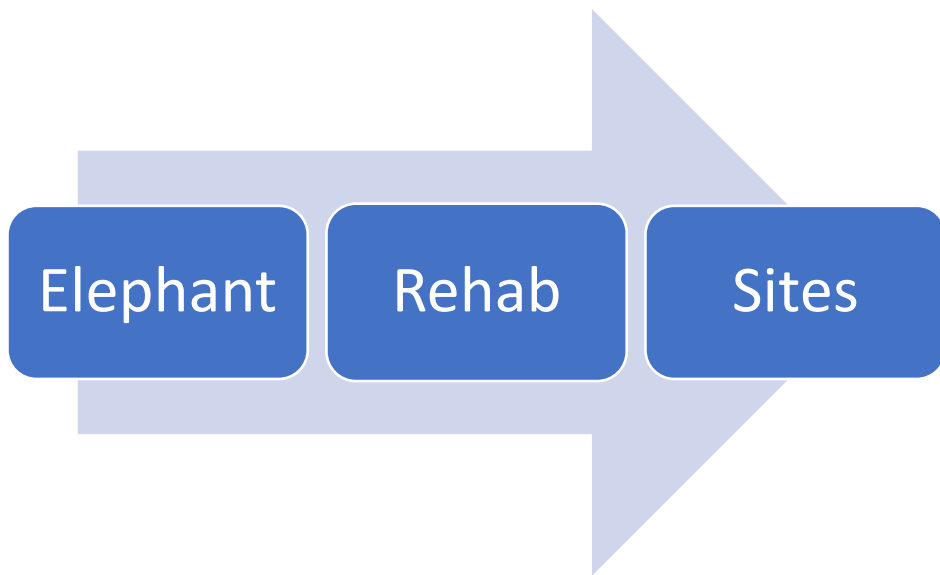
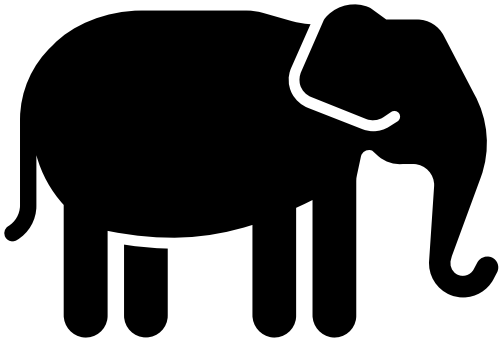
If an elephant rehab centre is developed in these recommended locations, then, tourists can be charged for seeing the elephants via the motorboat ride (or) by standing on a watchtower. Such planning will ensure getting a good source of funds, for managing the rehab facility.

Conclusion

Seeing every idea as a problem and not doing anything for rehabilitating the elephants, will lead to lifelong suffering of elephants in captivity, with no relief. It will also be a violation of the laws.

On the other hand, a positive initiative such as the one recommended in this document if done (even with initial hurdles), would become a role model facility for other states to follow. The learnings in such a facility can be converted to “Best Practices” for other rehab facilities.

Such rehabilitation will reduce the enormous cruelty inflicted on commercially exploited captive elephants. We hope such positive initiatives are considered with due importance and executed at the earliest.



Elsa Foundation