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Tamil Nadu Notifies Three Elephant Corridors Linking Hosur Forests to Karnataka

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ENVIRONMENT

GS3

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Tamil Nadu Notifies Three Elephant Corridors Linking Hosur Forests to Karnataka

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

Tamil Nadu notified three elephant corridors in late August 2026, linking the Hosur Forest Division with the forests of Karnataka. Together they cover over 10,300 hectares within the Cauvery North Wildlife Sanctuary, and they are the first tranche of the 41 ground-validated corridors the Madras High Court directed the State to notify without further delay.

THE THREE CORRIDORS

CORRIDOR	LENGTH	WIDTH	AREA
Jawalagiri to Ulibanda to Thaggatti	18.50 km	0.73 to 3.20 km	3,241.53 ha
Jawalagiri to Panai to Anchetty	20.90 km	0.80 to 5.00 km	6,881.47 ha
Billikkal to Jawalagiri	2.20 km	0.66 to 1.50 km	196 ha

All three lie **entirely within reserved forest and sanctuary boundaries**. The notification affects **no private land, no public land and no revenue village**, which is why this particular tranche was administratively straightforward. The order was issued by **Kakarla Usha**, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Climate Change and Forests.

The corridors form part of the **trans-Cauvery movement route** by which elephants cross between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, one of the most heavily used elephant landscapes in southern India.

THE JUDICIAL SEQUENCE THAT FORCED IT

This **background** is the part worth learning, because it is a clean example of a court removing an administrative excuse.

July 12, 2026. A Madras High Court bench of Justices N. Sathish Kumar and D. Bharatha Chakravarthy directed Tamil Nadu to **expedite notification of 41 ground-validated elephant corridors**.

July 31, 2026. The same court held that **removal of encroachments is not a prerequisite for notification**.

As **background**, the earlier Tamil Nadu Elephant Corridors Committee had placed **42** corridors in the public domain in 2024; **41** survived ground validation, which is the number the Court's direction uses.

In **context**, that second ruling is the operative one. The State's standing reason for delay had been that corridors could not be notified while encroachments remained inside them. The court's answer inverted the sequence: **notify first, then clear**, because notification is what creates the legal basis on which **encroachment** can be acted against. So long as the sequence ran the other way, delay was self-perpetuating.

The underlying ground-verification study started in 2025, on **February 8**, funded by the **State Planning Commission**, and reassessed the corridors earlier proposed by the **Tamil Nadu Elephant Corridors Committee**. "Ground-validated" is the significant qualifier: these are corridors confirmed by field survey of actual elephant movement, not merely drawn on a map.

WHY CORRIDORS ARE THE OPERATIVE REMEDY

A **corridor is not a park**. It is a strip of habitat connecting two larger habitat blocks, allowing animals to move between them. For a wide-ranging species it is the difference between one viable population and two isolated ones.

For elephants specifically, the case is unusually strong. An adult Asian elephant consumes on the order of 150 kilograms of fodder a day and ranges over hundreds of square kilometres seasonally. **No single Indian protected area is large enough to hold a genetically viable elephant population indefinitely.** When a traditional route is blocked by a plantation, a highway, a railway line or a settlement, elephants do not stop using it. They continue, and the encounter becomes conflict.

The conflict numbers are the justification. Human-elephant conflict in India kills roughly **500 people and around 100 elephants each year**. A very large share of those deaths occur on **traditional movement routes that have been fragmented**, which makes corridor protection a **human safety measure as much as a conservation measure**. That framing matters politically, because it converts corridors from a cost imposed on people into a protection extended to them.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The most important legal fact about elephant corridors in India is that they have no distinct **statutory status**. The **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** provides for **National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves**. It does not define a "corridor".

Protection is therefore assembled from whatever legal category the land already sits in: reserved forest under the Indian Forest Act, sanctuary notification, eco-sensitive zone declaration, or judicial direction.

That is exactly why this tranche was easy and the remaining 38 will not be. These three corridors lie entirely inside reserved forest and sanctuary boundaries, so the notification adds a management designation to land the State already controls. Corridors elsewhere in Tamil Nadu cross **revenue land, private plantations and settlements**, where notification means restricting existing rights, which triggers compensation claims, litigation and political resistance. **The first tranche is the easy case, and it should be read as a starting point rather than as a demonstration that the problem is solved.**

The Supreme Court's Nilgiris jurisprudence is the precedent to cite. In litigation over the **Nilgiris elephant corridor**, the Court upheld the State's power to notify corridors and to restrict commercial activity, including resorts, within them, affirming that the right to a viable habitat can prevail over established commercial use. That line of authority is what makes corridor notification defensible when it does affect private interests.

Two design points deserve attention. First, **corridors are useless if they are not functionally continuous**: a strip that narrows to a few hundred metres at a highway crossing is only as good as the underpass or overpass built there, and India's record on wildlife crossing structures on linear infrastructure is uneven. Second, corridors that cross **State boundaries**, as these do between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, require matching notification on the other side. A corridor notified unilaterally protects half a route.

The unresolved policy question is compensation. Where corridors do cross private land, the choice is between acquisition, which is expensive and slow, and restriction without acquisition, which imposes an uncompensated cost on the landholder and invites litigation. **Payment for ecosystem services**, under which landholders are paid to maintain land in a permeable state, is the instrument most discussed and least used.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; **environmental impact assessment**; biodiversity.

Prelims angle: the Asian elephant's IUCN status and Schedule, Project Elephant's launch year, the National Heritage Animal declaration, the Cauvery North Wildlife Sanctuary and the categories of protected area under the WLPA are all directly examinable.

Mains angle: *"India protects habitats but not the connections between them."* Argue that the absence of a distinct statutory category for corridors is the structural gap, and that human-elephant conflict is best framed as a human safety consequence of fragmentation.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

THE NOTIFICATION:

Three corridors, notified late August 2026, in the Cauvery North Wildlife Sanctuary, Hosur Forest Division, Tamil Nadu.

Jawalagiri to Ulibanda to Thaggatti: 18.50 km, 0.73 to 3.20 km wide, 3,241.53 ha.

Jawalagiri to Panai to Anchetty: 20.90 km, 0.80 to 5.00 km wide, 6,881.47 ha.

Billikkal to Jawalagiri: 2.20 km, 0.66 to 1.50 km wide, 196 ha.

Total: over 10,300 hectares, entirely within reserved forest and sanctuary boundaries. No private land, public land or revenue village affected.

Order issued by Kakarla Usha, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Climate Change and Forests.

Ground-verification study started in 2025, on February 8, funded by the State Planning Commission.

THE JUDICIAL BACKGROUND:

July 12, 2026: Madras High Court directed Tamil Nadu to expedite notification of 41 ground-validated elephant corridors.

July 31, 2026: the court held that removal of encroachments is not a prerequisite for notification.

Bench: Justices N. Sathish Kumar and D. Bharatha Chakravarthy.

THE ASIAN ELEPHANT:

Elephas maximus. IUCN Red List: Endangered.

Schedule I, Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. CITES Appendix I.

Declared National Heritage Animal of India in 2010.

India holds the largest population of Asian elephants, well over half the global total.

Project Elephant launched in 1992; Project Tiger in 1973.

MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) is the CITES programme; India participates.

Gaj Yatra is the awareness campaign associated with corridor protection.

HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT:

Roughly 500 human deaths and about 100 elephant deaths a year in India.

Principal causes of elephant mortality outside natural causes: train collisions, electrocution, poisoning and poaching.

CONSTITUTIONAL HOOKS:

Article 48A: Directive Principle requiring the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.

Article 51A(g): Fundamental Duty to protect and improve the natural environment and to have compassion for living creatures. The Madras High Court's corridor jurisprudence rests on both.

PROTECTED AREA CATEGORIES UNDER THE WILD LIFE (PROTECTION) ACT, 1972:

National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary, Conservation Reserve, Community Reserve.

There is no distinct statutory category for a corridor. Protection is derived from the underlying land status.

Eco-Sensitive Zones are notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, not the WLPA.

INSTITUTIONS:

Project Elephant Division and the Elephant Task Force under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

National Board for Wildlife, chaired by the Prime Minister, under the WLPA.

Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun: the technical agency for corridor and population studies.

Elephant Reserves are administrative designations under Project Elephant and do not carry the statutory force of a National Park or Sanctuary. This is a common trap.

WATCH THE TRAP:

The Asian elephant is Endangered; the African savanna elephant is Endangered and the African forest elephant is Critically Endangered. Do not transfer the status across species.

Elephant Reserves are not statutory protected areas. Only the four WLPA categories are.

This notification is the first tranche of 41, not the completion of the programme.

Project Elephant is 1992, Project Tiger is 1973. These years are frequently swapped.

Sources: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Wildlife Institute of India, IUCN Red List

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