

## **Project Update: September 2022**

Since October 2021, we have completed training the team in introductory ecology, various technology use (GPS, DSLR camera, range finder, data entry, data storage and sharing, poster designing in Canva, etc.) and field research techniques. Apart from the other two team members, who are also from Syamjith and Rajesh indigenous communities, one more member from the Ajesh indigenous community joined our team in December 2021. Initially, it required a little more time than I anticipated to train the team members, but it helped them to improve their capacity and confidence.

Between February 2021 and April 2022, we could only cover 25% of the forest study area to assess the lion-tailed macaque (LTM) status. The terrain is challenging, and to access most of the area the team had to camp inside the forest by making temporary shelters. The elephant movement and rain made it difficult to continue the survey and we had to pause. Because of the rain inside the rainforest, the canopy was not visible, and we temporarily stopped the survey. The unexpected rain started in mid-April 2022 (usually, rain in Kerala begins in June) continued, and we are expecting by the end of September 2022, when the rain stops, we will be able to continue the forest survey.

We completed the regular weekly survey through the Nadukani road to assess the safety of LTM on the road and find road crossing locations by surveying the road for the last 10 months. We recorded and observed LTM and Nilgiri langur (IUCN Vulnerable) on the road during the survey. We identified the critical locations where sign boards are needed based on the data we collected. Based on the identified sites, we have requested permission to install the signboards in the specified locations at the government office (panchayat office). There are two resident troops of LTM on Nadukani road and multiple Nilgiri langurs. All the time, except once, we observed LTM crossing the road through the canopy. On most of the road area, the tree canopy is connected. So, we decided not to install a canopy bridge there for now. The main threats to the LTM and other primates on the road are speeding vehicles, people feeding them (mainly bonnet macaques) and people dumping waste. Our team collaborated with a larger group to do a mass cleaning in Nadukani road with 350 students participating and cleaning the Nadukani road on 28th August 2022.

We designed the questions for the questionnaire survey with community participation, where anthropologist and team member Syamjith led the process. We designed two sets of questionnaires, one for the indigenous community members in the forest villages and one for the general public in Nilambur. We did an in-depth questionnaire survey related to the knowledge of LTM, awareness, and perception in 17 forest villages, including one of the last semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers' indigenous communities remaining in India, the Cholanayakan community. Since most of the team members are from indigenous communities, doing the questionnaire survey in these villages was easier. Ajesh and Rajesh led most of the questionnaire surveys since they knew their languages also. We are currently starting to analyse the questionnaire survey. With the second questionnaire, we conducted an offline survey with drivers, shopkeepers, and local people in the neighbourhood town of Nadukani road. Also, we circulated the same online through social media and WhatsApp groups, as well as in one event (Arogyamela- Health Exhibition) in Nilambur, where the government

put up an exhibition on health facilities. We got 30 respondents in an offline survey and 77 respondents through an online survey so far.

Ajesh and I got training under Payal Molur (nature educator in India) on doing education activities related to nature and species conservation. Ajesh and I co-presented our project and the importance of conserving LTM to a few students from the University of Cornell and Kotagiri during the NFLC (Nilgiri Field Learning Course) of Keystone Foundation. We plan to train a few indigenous women to do the LTM awareness and education outreach programmes in forest villages and a few schools in the coming days. We are also planning to conduct a workshop with a group of indigenous people to prepare a community conservation plan for LTM in the coming days.

The team members have attended training under Sanjay Molur (Zoo Outreach Organisation, India), Payal Molur, and Mayank Shukla on various topics this year. Mayank Shukla is helping the team to manage the Instagram page and train selected community members to manage the Instagram page and in outreach material creation. Our Instagram page for spreading the need for conserving LTM – 'lrmconservation' has 74 followers, and we regularly post videos about LTM facts and project updates on the page. Indigenous community members will entirely manage the page after the next 2 months. So far, we have published one book chapter about LTM and one Newsletter article on the LTM project.

#### Challenges:

- Initially, training the team members took a little more time than I expected.
- Unexpected rain, which started in mid-April 2022, halted our forest survey due to poor canopy visibility and elephant movement.
- Difficult terrain in most areas is very steep, and elephants are present on most tracks; thus, pre-deciding the transect became difficult.

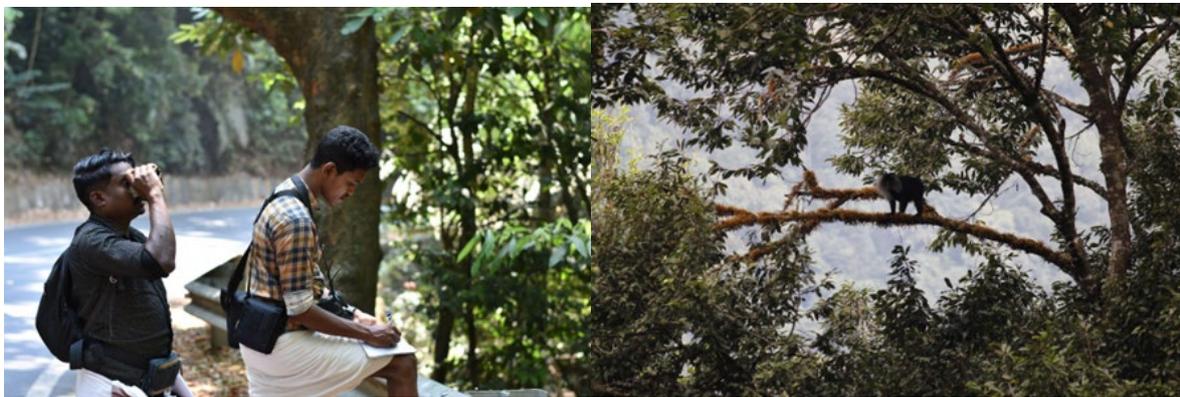
#### Way forward:

- We will continue the forest survey once the rain stops, expected from the end of September 2022.
- Analysing the questionnaire survey of forest villages, the questionnaire survey of the general public, Nadukani road survey data, and forest survey data.
- Creating more outreach materials and training the selected indigenous community members to manage the Instagram page in the future.
- Training a few selected people from each forest village or indigenous community to conduct LTM awareness education programmes.
- Conducting LTM conservation awareness education programmes in the villages and schools.
- Conducting a workshop with indigenous community members to prepare a community conservation plan for LTM.
- Writing reports, journal articles and popular articles based on our findings from our study.

Photo Documentation of some of the activities:



Left: The core team: From left to right- Rajesh R, Asish M, Syamjith PK, Ajesh M. Right: Team doing questionnaire survey with an indigenous community (Cholanayakan) member (© Asish M)



Left: Team doing LTM survey in Nadukani road. Right: Lion-Tailed Macaque in its fruit plant- *Cullenia exarillata* from Nilambur (© Asish M).



Left: People feeding Nilgiri Langur in Nadukani Road. Right: Mass plastic cleaning program in Nadukani Road (28/08/2022) (© Asish M)



Left: Team exhibited their project work and invited people to scan the qr code of the online survey in Arogyamela (Health Exhibition) organised by the health department in Nilambur. (© Anagha C). Right: Ajesh presenting the project and importance of LTM to the NFLC class and Keystone staffs (16/03/2022) (© Asish M)



Left: Team planning their survey in the forest (© Anagha C). Right: Team during a break while doing the forest survey (© Rajesh R).



LTM crossing the Nadukani road through canopy (© Asish M).