

CORRIDORS OF DEATH: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON ELEPHANT DEATHS ON TRACKS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

The death of five elephants, four of them cows, caused by trains colliding with them, and all within a week, has again highlighted the gaps in efforts to reduce man-animal conflicts in the country. On November 26, [the first accident occurred near Madukkarai in Coimbatore district](#), Tamil Nadu that has seen many an elephant death on a rail track stretch that extends up to Kanjikode, Kerala. The second accident was near [Jagiroad in Assam's Morigaon district](#), four days later. Both accidents were at night. Elephant deaths in railway accidents are not new in India. A reply by the Project Elephant division of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in May to a set of RTI questions highlighted reasons other than natural causes as having led to the [killing of 1,160 elephants](#) over 11 years ending December 2020; 741 deaths were due to electrocution; railway accidents accounted for 186 cases; poaching 169 and poisoning 64. The pattern of train accidents involving elephants has been studied by different stakeholders, including the Railways, Forest and Wildlife Departments and activists, especially with regard to the Madukkarai stretch. That a greater number of casualties getting reported are in elephant passages has been confirmed by the C&AG in its latest compliance audit report on the Ministry of Railways.

There are effective solutions in the case of two causes: electrocution and train hits. Installing hanging solar-powered fences, as has been planned in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and planting citronella and lemon grass, as done in Golaghat district, Assam, to deter elephants are some of the large-scale options. The authorities should ensure that there are no illegal electric fences or barbed wire fences, which, instead, can be replaced with the solar powered ones. Needless to say, the participation of local communities is crucial. The critical role elephants play in biodiversity conservation must be highlighted, especially to those living in areas close to elephant corridors. The Environment Ministry and Ministry of Railways should also expedite proposals for elevated wildlife crossings or eco-bridges and underpasses for the safe passage of animals. A finding of the C&AG was that after the construction of underpasses and overpasses in the areas under the jurisdiction of East Central and Northeast Frontier Railways, there was no death reported. The authorities should also expedite other recommendations made by the C&AG such as a periodic review of identification of elephant passages, more sensitisation programmes for railway staff, standardisation of track signage, installation of an animal detection system (transmitter collars) and 'honey bee' sound-emitting devices near all identified elephant passages. Of the 29,964 elephants in India, nearly 14,580 are in the southern region, and the State governments concerned and the Centre need to find lasting solutions to the problem of man-animal conflicts.

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