

## FOLLOW THE HOWL

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

The Golden Jackal photographed at Ponnani beach in 2015 | Photo Credit: [Dhruvaraj S](#)

The jackal does not exactly have a glorious track record. Even in fables, it is the wily trickster. For villagers and those living in semi-rural areas, it is often the culprit who steals their bounty. So, it is safe to say the jackal has never been portrayed as a shining example of virtuousness.

“But when was the last time you heard their howls?” a group of wildlife researchers in Kochi, wonders. Their non-governmental organisation, Aranyakam Nature Foundation, has initiated an online survey to collect information about the creature’s distribution. The common jackal, known as the golden jackal, is believed to have dwindled in number.

“Though stories about the animal are rife in folklore and popular culture, and it was commonly seen in villages and rural areas, there is uncertainty about it now,” says wildlife expert and chairman of Aranyakam Nature Foundation, P S Easa. “We want to understand the animal better and its distribution patterns in Kerala,” he adds.

The survey, which encourages people from all over Kerala to participate, contains basic questions about the jackal, such as when the last time the respondent saw a jackal or heard its howl was, the region where he or she spotted it, their number and such.

A community-driven survey will yield better results as it would be practically impossible to visit places across the State, Easa says. In Malayalam, the survey can be accessed on Aranyakam’s website and was announced through print and visual media and shared as Whatsapp messages.

Though the jackal falls under the ‘least concern’ category in the IUCN Red List (International Union for Conservation of Nature), it is no longer a ubiquitous presence in the countryside.

Since there have not been many in-depth studies about the animal, Aranyakam decided to launch the survey, hoping the responses would throw some light on issues such as the animal’s habitat and people’s attitude towards it.

Launched in the first week of January, the survey will be open till February 15. “We have already received 1,800 responses from across Kerala,” Easa says. The team is looking at gaps, especially places such as Alappuzha, Neriya Mangalam and Idukki, as not many sightings have been reported from these areas. “The larger aim involves setting up a conservation plan,” Easa says.

The numbers of the animal will serve as a biodiversity indicator, says Dhruvaraj S, managing trustee of Aranyakam. The survey will also reveal information on the vegetation, elevation and population density of the regions covered.

The Indian golden jackal (*Canis aureus indicus*) is a sub-species of the golden jackal (*Canis aureus*), and is known by many names in Kerala, some of the popular ones being *kurukkan*, *kurunari*, and *oolan*. A shy and elusive nocturnal animal, the jackal is highly adaptable in nature. Its proximity to human habitations ensures a steady supply of food — it eats anything from fruits to insects, birds and smaller animals such as wild hogs.

Considered a wild animal as per the Schedule III of the Wildlife Protection Act of India, 1972, the jackal, however, is seen mainly in the undergrowth and bushes of the semi-urban and rural landscape. “Urbanisation that leads to the clearing of undergrowth could have led to the loss of their habitat which resulted in a reduction in their numbers,” says Dhruvaraj.

The findings of the survey will be published on Aranyakam’s website, publications and scientific journals. Aranyakam, based in Kochi, works towards the conservation of flora and fauna in the non-protected areas.

*If you hear a jackal or better still, see one before February 15, log on to [aranyakam.org/kurukkan/](http://aranyakam.org/kurukkan/). Past sightings can also be entered.*

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