

Odisha govt rapped for delay in notifying elephant corridors

Rise in numbers: As per the latest census figure, Odisha had 1,976 elephants in 2017, 22 more than that in 2015. File photo: Lingaraj Panda

The National Green Tribunal has expressed extreme disappointment over the lethargic pace of notifying elephant corridors — fixed paths which connect traditional elephant habitats — in Odisha.

Adjudicating the case filed by the Wildlife Society of Orissa, Justice S. P. Wangdi, judicial member, and P. C. Mishra, expert member, of the NGT, Eastern Zone Bench, directed the Odisha government to give a specific timeframe for completion of processes before publication of the notification in respect of the elephant corridors.

Legal sanctity

In 2010, the State government had identified 14 corridors, which would not only have helped the elephants move without any disturbances, but also increased chances of exchange of genetic diversity interchange. Later, another nine corridors were identified. However, the government has been dilly-dallying in notifying the corridors that would have given legal sanctity for their preservation.

“The State government on January 13, 2017, had categorically stated that the work of assessing habitat viability and ground-truthing of the already identified elephant corridors had been handed over to the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation (ANCF). The report in respect of which was expected to be received by early 2017. This has been repeated by the government in the subsequent affidavit filed on February 20,” the order says.

“Today being September 12, which falls in the later part of 2017, it was expected that the work would be completed by this time. On being questioned as to whether the report has been filed or not, the government submits that it has not yet been submitted but, as per instructions, it is expected within the first week of October,” says NGT’s last Tuesday’s order.

Further complications

“Every day’s delay in doing so, would give rise to further complications and a situation may so arise when traditional elephant corridors would be non-existent leading to their gradual extinction. We may remind ourselves that this earth is not for the survival of human race alone,” said the NGT.

“We expect the Odisha government, one of the States where the elephants survive as their traditional abode, shall take immediate steps for protection of this gentle giant,” emphasises the tribunal in its order.

Shankar Pani, counsel for Wildlife Society of Orissa, said the NGT also came down heavily on the State government for its inaction over illegal commercial operations in two identified elephant corridors.

As per the latest census figure, Odisha had 1976 elephants in 2017, 22 more elephants compared to 2015. During the past five years (since 2013-14), elephants have come out of forests regularly in 26 of the 30 districts.

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