

## Obituary

### Dr. Kalayansundaram Ramkumar (4.8.1978 – 1.6.2021)

Vivek Menon

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Dr. Ramkumar was a colleague of mine for over 14 years, a member of AsESG for this past quadrennium and a stout defender of elephants for all his two score and three years of life. His death due to COVID at such a young age was a terrible shock to all of us and we at AsESG pay homage to his departed soul.

Ramkumar hailed from Thittai village near Sirkazhi in the Mayiladuthurai District, Tamil Nadu. With a Master's degree in Wildlife Biology from A.V.C. College, Mayiladuthurai and a PhD from Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, he joined WTI in 2007-08 and added value with his in-depth knowledge on looking at wildlife (especially elephants) and connectivity at the landscape level. He worked with us for 14 years till he passed on 1st June 2021 due to Covid. He was 43 years of age and leaves behind his wife and two very young children.

Firmly believing that land-use management is key to long-term conservation of elephants and minimising human elephant conflict, he worked relentlessly to identify and secure elephant corridors in India and their protection. He was instrumental in mapping the elephant corridors in India in phase-2 and was the co-editor of the publication "*Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors of India (2nd Edition)*", the most preferred reference for managers and researchers for securing corridors and elephant conservation in India. He also played a pivotal role in securing the Thirunelli-Kudrakote (Wayanad) corridor in Kerala and worked till his last day to secure the Mudahalli corridor in the BRT-Sathyamangalam landscape. He has authored several research reports, papers and popular articles.

Symbolizing the animal that was so close to his heart, he was indeed a gentle giant and strongly defended his observation and rational for defining an area as a corridor. His fierce passion for the species took him across the country looking for corridors, HEC mitigation and other elephant conservation issues.

Ramkumar was a person of diverse interests. While his colleagues knew him as a dedicated field professional and conservationist, he was "Ram" to the ones who worked closest with him. He was a fun loving person, enjoyed music and dance, had a passion for cooking and his friends remember him as a very caring and affectionate person.

The sudden passing of a person with whom one has worked for more than a decade is not just sad but also a grim reminder of the reality of this pandemic around us. His untimely passing is a great loss to elephant conservation and is deeply mourned by Wildlife Trust of India and the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. His work and contribution towards elephant conservation will always be remembered.

