

**Encountering Wildlife:  
Conflicts, Care, and Conservation in a South Indian Forest**

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This research takes place in the fragmented forest landscape of Wayanad, Kerala, South India, which has become a last refuge for globally threatened megafauna such as the elephant and the tiger. My work asks what it means for a great diversity of people to live together with endangered and dangerous mammals at the forest boundary in times of rapid biodiversity loss and species extinction. Violent clashes between wildlife and people living and working at the fringes of Wayanad's protected forests have become a troubling part of everyday life. Fatal attacks by tigers and elephants, as well as crop raids by numerous other animals have repeatedly triggered riots and antiwildlife agitations against the region's conservation regime. Forest officials report increasing incidences of arson, sightings of poisoned elephant bait, cases of electrocution of wild animals with self-made high-voltage fences, and the shooting of small-shot charges against elephants.

Combining approaches from environmental history, political ecology, feminist science and technology studies, and multispecies ethnography, this project explores critical encounters between wildlife (most importantly elephants and tigers) and people (conservation biologists, forest workers, state officials, elephant mahouts, and farmers) in close proximity to the wildlife sanctuary. I argue that the age of the Anthropocene calls for an ethnographic and historical attentiveness to the ways in which human history, sociality, life, loss, and death are deeply entangled with other life forms, in this case elephants, tigers, and their companion species. My work situates contemporary human-wildlife conflicts in the context of Wayanad's forest history, where postcolonial species such as teak, eucalyptus, the invasive shrub *Lantana Camara*, and working elephants have played important roles in shaping the political ecologies of conservation. My ethnography aims to make visible hidden histories of more-than-human work and emerging relationships of care in conservation—a field that is increasingly turning to “crisis science” in times of extinction. In this way, the project also searches for possibilities of conviviality and hope in times where “species clash.”