

How rogue tusker Arikomban was finally captured

After capture, the pachyderm will be fitted with a GPS collar to track its movements and relocated to another forest region, as per a Kerala High Court directive.

By: [Explained Desk](#)
New Delhi | April 29, 2023 20:19 IST



Rogue tusker Arikomban was finally captured by forest officials and is currently being transported to an undisclosed forested area under sedation. (Express Photo by Jomon George)

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finally been captured.

The elephant wreaked havoc in the human settlements of Chinnakanal, Santhanpara and Bodimettu, raiding the ration shops for rice and other grains. It has been responsible for trampling as many as 11 people to death over the years.

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“From 2005 to 2013, as many as 34 people had been killed in elephant attacks in this region. Possibly, Arikomban would be the habitual killer among them. He has been in the region for nearly 18 years,” a forest official told *The Indian Express*.

Capturing the mammoth mischief-maker

Capturing rogue elephants is no easy task. Arikomban's capture too posed various challenges and not all of them were posed by the pachyderm itself.

Last month, realising Arikomban's strong penchant for rice and rice bags at PDS shops, forest officials **erected a dummy ration shop** to lure the tusker before darting it. They planned to convert it into a *kumki* (a trained, captive elephant used in operations to trap wild elephants) which has been common practice.

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However, the forest department could not go ahead with the plan due to an interim stay by the Kerala High Court. Acting upon a petition by animal lovers, the court directed forest officials to relocate Arikomban in the wild, rather than keep it in

A team of 150 forest officials led by chief veterinary surgeon Dr Arun Zachariah darted the rogue elephant with five tranquiliser shots after finally locating the elusive elephant. Despite this, Arikomban doggedly resisted his captors until finally being overpowered with the help of four *kumki* elephants. It was then loaded into a lorry and fitted with a GPS collar. It is currently being taken to an undisclosed location where it will be released in the wild.

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“The mission team worked under adverse conditions to capture Arikomban ... We shall transfer the elephant to an undisclosed location as per the court order”, Kerala Minister Minister AK Saseendran said in a press conference.

Notably, this is not the first time that the forest department has tried to capture Arikomban, to end the elephant menace. In 2017, Arikomban was fired with tranquilliser shots, but the animal escaped into the wilderness.

Shifting elephants shifts conflict

The High Court’s intervention has been a source of fierce debate in the ongoing Arikomban saga. Directing forest officials to relocate rather than capture the elephant, the HC claimed that relocating Arikomban to a food rich forest, with a radio-collar around its neck, should be enough to assuage any concerns regarding the risk he may pose to locals.

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However, [available scientific evidence suggests otherwise](#). Availability of “natural food” is no guarantee that an elephant will not raid standing crops. Furthermore, using a radio collar round the clock drains its battery too soon. To avoid frequent immobilisation to refit collars, locations may at best be tracked every hour — enough time for a bull elephant to spring a few surprises within a radius of 5-10 km.

While very few elephants actually end up attacking humans, “when a male repeatedly crosses that line, he is best removed before he becomes a bad influence
