

NEW BIOSPHERE RESERVES FROM INDIA, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AGASTHYAMALAI

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India being a country rich in biodiversity, with diverse bio-physical features promises immense scope for earmarking new sites as biosphere reserves for sustainable development involving local communities. Progress made so far includes the designation of 13 Biosphere Reserves till September 2002. Out of these, UNESCO has included three on the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (indicated in bold letters) as per details given in Table 1.

The following additional sites have been identified but are yet to be designated as Biosphere Reserves:

1	Namdapha	Arunachal Pradesh
2	Thar desert	Rajasthan
3	Little Rann of Kutch	Gujarat
4	Kaziranga	Assam
5	Kanha	Madhya Pradesh
6	North islands of Andaman	Andaman & Nicobar
7	Abujmarh	Madhya Pradesh
8	Amarkantak	Madhya Pradesh
9	Cold desert	Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh
10	Seshachalam	Andhra Pradesh
11	Chintapalli	Andhra Pradesh
12	Lakshadweep islands	Lakshadweep

Agasthyamala - New Biosphere Reserve

This site was designated as a biosphere reserve on 12.11.2001. At present, only the Kerala portion of the reserve has been designated and work is in progress to obtain a similar status for the Tamil Nadu portion.

Agasthya Peak (1,868m) is named after the sage **Agastya** who is closely linked to the culture of the people. The sage propagated the Sidha system of Medicine. The site is located in the Indo-Malayan Realm - the Malabar Rainforest Province and the Deccan Thornforest Province - and is highly rich in medicinal plants. About

2,000 species of flowering plants have been reported from the area, out of which 200 are endemic to the site. *Trichopus zeylanicus* sub sp. *travancoris* whose antifatigue properties are globally known, grows naturally in the region and is widely cultivated by traditional societies. A large amount of NTFP, including medicinal plants, are collected by the locals for their livelihood. The site has an area of 250 km² of untouched rainforest and the mountain system is separated from the main Western Ghats in the south of India.

The **core zone** (approx 1,000 km²) of the reserve includes the Neyyar, Peppara and Shenduruny wildlife sanctuaries in Kerala. The Kalakkadu-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu is also proposed to be included in the core zone.

The **buffer zone** (approx 1,500 km²) part of which is in Kerala has already been designated. The buffer zone in the Tamil Nadu portion is yet to be designated.

The **transition zone** (approx. 1,000 km²) part of which is in Kerala has already been designated. The transition zone in the Tamil Nadu portion is yet to be designated.

The site fulfills all the criteria of a biosphere reserve.

Table 1: Biosphere Reserves in India

Sl. No.	Name of the biosphere reserve and total geographical area (km ²)	Date of Designation	Location (State)
1	Nilgiri* (5520) UNESCO)	1.8.86 (Nov. 2000 by	Part of Wynad, Nagarhole, Bandipur and Madumalai, Nilambur, Silent Valley and Siruvani Hills (Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka)
2	Nanda Devi (5860.69)	18.1.88	Part of Chamoli, Pithoragarh & Almora Districts (Uttar Pradesh)
3	Nokrek (820)	1.9.88	Part of Garo Hills (Meghalaya)
4	Manas (2837)	14.3.89	Part of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darang Districts (Assam)
5	Sunderbans* (9630)	29.3.89 (Nov. 2001 by UNESCO)	Part of the delta of the Ganges & Brahmaputra river system (West Bengal)
6	Gulf of Mannar* (10500)	18.2.89 (Nov. 2001 by UNESCO)	Indian part of the Gulf of Mannar between India and Sri Lanka (Tamil Nadu)
7	Great Nicobar (885)	6.1.89	Southern most islands of Andaman and Nicobar (A&N Islands)
8	Similipal (4374)	21.6.94	Part of Mayurbhanj District (Orissa)
9	Dibru-Saikhowa (765)	28.7.97	Part of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia Districts (Assam)
10	Dehang Debang (5111.5)	02.09.98	Part of Siang and Debang Valley
11	Pachmarhi (4926.28)	03.05.99	Madhya Pradesh (Parts of Betul, Hoshangabad & Chhindwara Districts)
12	Khangchendzonga 19.92)	07.02.2000	Sikkim(Part of North and West Sikkim)
13	Agasthyamala (1701)	12.11.2001	Neyyar, Peppara and Shenduruny Sanctuary and adjoining areas in Kerala

* In the World Network of Biosphere Reserves