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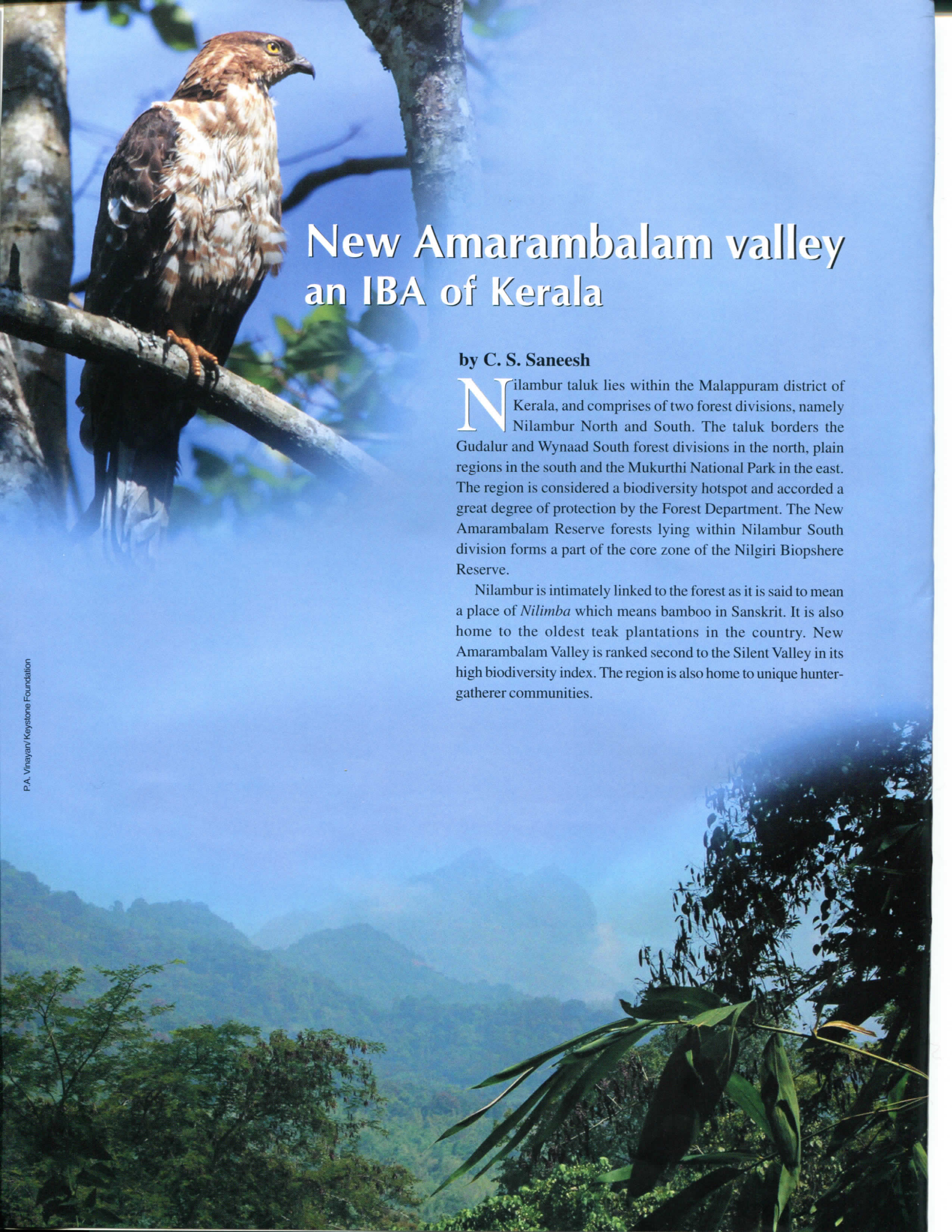
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New Amarambalam valley an IBA of Kerala

by C. S. Saneesh

Nilambur taluk lies within the Malappuram district of Kerala, and comprises of two forest divisions, namely Nilambur North and South. The taluk borders the Gudalur and Wynaad South forest divisions in the north, plain regions in the south and the Mukurthi National Park in the east. The region is considered a biodiversity hotspot and accorded a great degree of protection by the Forest Department. The New Amarambalam Reserve forests lying within Nilambur South division forms a part of the core zone of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

Nilambur is intimately linked to the forest as it is said to mean a place of *Nilimba* which means bamboo in Sanskrit. It is also home to the oldest teak plantations in the country. New Amarambalam Valley is ranked second to the Silent Valley in its high biodiversity index. The region is also home to unique hunter-gatherer communities.



Malabar Grey Hornbill, a resident bird, endemic to Western Ghats

P.A. Vinayan

Located at the edge of the massive Nilgiri mountains with altitudinal variations ranging from 50 meters to more than 2500 metres above sea level, the forest forms a contiguous belt with the Silent Valley National Park. This, coupled with very high rainfall, has contributed to making Nilambur a botanist's paradise.

The Nilambur forests provide the western part of the district as well as Kerala state with a large number of rivers and streams. The most important river is the Chaliyar with a length of more than 169 kms. The rivulets flowing in Nilambur region that drain into the Chaliyar include Karimpuzha and Cherupuzha which flow from the Amarambalam valley.

The West Coast Tropical Evergreen Forests are seen in and around the Kundah Hills of New Amarambalam reserve at an elevation of 800-1250 metres with a rainfall regime of over 2500 mm. The West Coast Semi-Evergreen Forests are found on an altitudinal range of 500 to 800 metres and occupy a niche between wet evergreen and moist deciduous forests. The region has a high diversity of fauna. Elephants, Bonnet macaque, Barking deer, Mouse deer, Civets, Sambar deer, Spotted deer, Tiger, Leopard, Sloth bear, Lion-tailed macaque, Malabar



Asian Paradise Flycatcher, a common winter visitor to the lower areas

P.A. Vinayan



Keystone Foundation

Karimpuzha Stream originates from the woods of New Amarambalam Reserve



P.A. Vinayan

Brown Shrike, a common winter visitor

Giant squirrel, Great Pied hornbill, Porcupine, Monitor lizard, Pangolin, Wild dogs, are commonly seen in the plantations and forests of this division. Tall trees in the valley provides place for nests to near threatened birds such as Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* and Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*. Large variety of *Ficus* spp. supply fruit to hornbills and Nilgiri Wood Pigeon (Vulnerable). River Chaliyar is a fishing ground for Darters (Near-Threatened) and cormorants.

Keystone Foundation (IBCN Partner) is an NGO (www.keystone-foundation.org) working in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve for the past 15 years. One of its resource centers is located in Nilambur at the entrance to the New Amarambalam valley. As part of the Bees, Biodiversity and Livelihoods project which was supported by the Darwin Initiative, UK, studies on indigenous bees were undertaken in the area. While on these surveys bird sightings were also recorded and a checklist prepared between August 2006 and November 2008. A total number of 111 species have been recorded so far.

Contact Address:

Keystone Foundation
Grove Hill Road, P.B. Box 35, Kotagiri
Tamil Nadu 272277

Email: saneesh@keystone-foundation.org