

CHAPTER V.

FORESTS.

Conservancy dates from 1882—Characteristics of the forests—Their situation—Their varying nature—The Sandur leased forests—Kuppigalla experimental station.

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Conservancy
dates from
1882.

As in other districts, systematic conservancy of forest growth dates in Bellary from the passing of the Madras Forest Act of 1882.¹ Attempts had been made from the earliest periods of the Company's rule to make a revenue out of timber, and later on the receipts derived by the Jungle Conservancy Fund from seigniorage fees on dead wood, and on firewood removed for sale, were expended on the planting and maintenance of scattered topes, but nothing was done systematically to protect the natural forest growth of the district.

Characteris-
tics of the
forests.

This growth, as was only to be expected in so arid a tract, is nowhere luxuriant and in no part of the district is there any continuous area of large timber. Popular tradition says that much of the forest which used to exist has been recklessly felled, and it is at least very noticeable how much rarer thick growth is in the neighbourhood of towns and villages than in wilder parts. At present, the areas which have been constituted reserved forests contain little but scrub and grass, and their protection is undertaken less in the hope that they will eventually produce timber than with the desire to provide a reserve of fuel for the ryots and of grazing for their cattle. Of the annual forest revenue of the district only about one-seventh is derived from the sale of timber and bamboos (and much even of this represents money paid for trees standing on land newly taken on patta), while more than four-fifths are obtained from grazing fees, the sale of firewood and charcoal and such minor sources as fees for tapping date-trees, fruit (especially tamarind and custard-apples), tanning barks (especially tangédu, *cassia auriculata*), and so forth.

¹ I am much indebted to E. D. M. Hooper, Esq., Conservator of Forests, for assistance with this chapter.

The figures in the margin show in what taluks the forests chiefly lie and it will be seen

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Taluks.	Square miles of reserved forests and reserved lands.	Percentage to total area.
Ádóni	59	7
Alúr	25	4
Bellary	29	3
Hadagalli	46	8
Harpanahalli	86	14
Hospet	130	26
Kúdligi	209	25
Rayadurg	40	6
Bellary district	624	11

that most of them are in the western division of the district. They are nearly all comparatively small blocks, especially in the eastern taluks, and only half a dozen of them are over 10,000 acres in extent. Besides these tracts in British territory, the Bellary forest authorities also control and work 40,000 acres of forest on the Sandur hills which, on the recommendation of Sir Dietrich

Their situation.

Brandis, were leased from the Rája of that State in May 1882 for 25 years at an annual rental of Rs. 10,000.

The forests of the district, like its crops, naturally differ with the soil in which they grow and the rainfall they receive.

Their varying nature.

In the dry black cotton-soil areas the growth consists chiefly of babul, which rapidly sows itself in tank beds or wherever land of any depth is left waste. Many of the fields which remained untilled after the great famine of 1877 speedily became covered with a thick growth of it. The areas of shallower soil produce *prosopis* and *balanites*.

On the granite hills there is usually little depth of earth except in scattered pockets, but in these tamarind, custard-apple, babul, *cassia fistula* ("the Indian laburnum") and *acacia planifrons* ("the umbrella tree," which is so noticeable on the Fort hill at Bellary) grow with sufficient freedom.

On the moorland plains of red and mixed soils formed by the disintegration of the granite rocks, the growth, even in the damper western taluks, is usually poor, consisting largely of *dodonaea*, *prosopis* and *carissa*, but where the country consists of continuous stretches of hill and valley—as in the parts of Hospet and Kúdligi which adjoin the Sandur range—it is more varied and more valuable, containing *wrightia*, *vitis*, *zizyphus*, *ntm*, tamarind, a little coppice teak and some *anogeissus* and *Hardwickia*, while the valleys are often fringed with thick groves of date. This *Hardwickia binata* (yépi) is one of the most characteristic trees of Bellary. Its growth round Ánékallu, at the tri-junction of the Hadagalli, Hospet and Kúdligi taluks, where it has been specially cared for by the head of the village for many years, and that in

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the Chiribi reserve, through which the Kottúru-Kúdligi road passes (which was specially respected by the villagers at the request of a former Collector) is remarkable, but usually this tree is greatly persecuted, as it makes excellent fuel for iron-smelting, etc., produces a hard wood, and supplies (from the inner bark of its young branches) a fibre which is of much value for ropes. Moreover, for reasons which are not yet clear, it reproduces itself slowly and unwillingly, very few of the numerous self-sown seedlings which spring up after rain ever surviving to grow into saplings.

On the soil produced from the Dharwar rocks the forest growth is the most diversified of all. The Sandur hills are of this formation, and on them are found very numerous varieties of trees, some of which do not occur anywhere else for 100 miles round. Among the more valuable are teak, *Hardwickia*, *anogeissus* and some sandal. The Copper Mountain range is also of Dharwar rock, but here the rainfall is more scanty and the former depredations of the wood-cutters of Bellary town have prevented the existence of any thick growth. On the west side of it, however, is a block of *Hardwickia*, called the Malappanagudi block, which has been protected since 1876 and the size of the trees in which shows the capabilities of the soil. But in both these ranges the depth of earth is usually small, the rock lying very near the surface, and, though in the damper hollows in Sandur the growth is dense, the trees seldom attain to any size. These Sandur hills contain, nevertheless, the only real forest to be found in Bellary, Anantapur or the western part of Kurnool.

The Sandur
leased
forests.

The portion of them which has been leased by Government consists of the growth on the two main ranges which enclose the valley of Sandur and on the Dónimalai plateau at the eastern extremity of the more northern of them. The Rája retains the forest on the low ground and on the Kumárasvámi plateau at the eastern end of the southern range. The leased area is divided into three portions, namely, the north-eastern, area 16,011 acres, Ramandrug (14,785) and Dónimalai (9,204). The growth is best on the Ramandrug division.

Pecuniarily, the lease of these forests has not hitherto been a success. A depót for the sale of their produce is kept up at Tóranagallu, but the demand for fuel and timber from them is not large, as Ádóni town and the railway can be cheaply supplied from the Nallamalai forests in Kurnool, through which the line passes, while in Bellary town competition has occurred from the forests of the whole inam villages adjoining the Sandur hills and

(until recently) from the contractors felling in the portion of the Sandur range which remained under the management of the Rája. Indirectly, however, as is shown in Chapter VIII below, these forests have been of immense benefit to the cattle of the district in several recent bad seasons, as they are covered throughout with thick grass.

One of the greatest difficulties in the way of protecting them has been the constant fires to which they are subject. The thick grass greatly assists the spread of these, as in the hot months it becomes as dry as tinder and correspondingly inflammable.

Some at least of them, owing perhaps to the rich deposits of iron which the hills contain, are caused by lightning, three cases in which the forests have been seen to be so fired being on record.

Up to the present, no artificial reproduction has been attempted in any part of the district. At Kuppigallu in Adóni taluk an experimental station was established in 1892 to endeavour to ascertain what trees could be planted with the greatest prospect of success in the red and mixed soils. No very definite results have yet been arrived at except that with care and attention *albizzia Lebbeck* grows faster than any other tree which has been tried and that *Hardwickia* slowly establishes itself.

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Kuppigallu
experimental
station.