

## Topography

Kanyakumari Forest Division forms the southern part of Agasthiyamalai region and is located between the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary of Kerala and the Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu. It encompasses the southern most forest tracts of the Western Ghats. The tract has its significance in possessing peculiar types of micro-habitats due to its geographical location, physical structure and varying altitudes. At Varaiattumudi, the Western Ghats ridges turn almost towards east until it reaches the Mahendragiri peak and again continues towards south in scattered hillocks until it reaches ground level at Nilapparai near Vattakottai. Moreover, the Kanyakumari Forest Division has a peculiar constitution of the eastern, western as well as southern slopes of the Western Ghats into its territory. The terrain is undulated with steep valleys and ridges rising above 1000 MSL at many places like Varaiattumudi, Samikuchi, Inchikadavu, etc. It has an overall altitudinal range of about 50 MSL to 1650 MSL at Mahendragiri peak. A number of vegetation formations like Grassland-*Shola*, Tropical evergreen forests, Reed brakes, Riparian formations, Swamps, Moist and Dry Deciduous forests, Scrub Jungles, Reservoirs, Secondary growth and Plantations of various kinds could be seen in this region. Grassland-*Sholas* found on the slopes of high ridges forms a number of first and second order streams that supply to the two major rivers of the district, Kothaiar and Pazhaiar.

The nature of vegetation formations together with climate and physical features of the landscape contributes to the habitat pattern of a region. The habitat pattern in turn determines the character and distribution of life forms of a given area. Biodiversity of a tract thus depends largely on the number of microhabitats available within the region. The tract of Western Ghats under the Kanyakumari Forest Division is particularly rich with its large number of microhabitats due to its exposure to wide range of climatic conditions and its southern most geographic position in the subcontinent. Microhabitats provide specific conditions favourable to different species for feeding, nesting, roosting, etc., and thus biodiversity of the area will be high.

## **Climate and rainfall**

The general climate of sanctuary is pleasant. Both the south-west and north-east monsoon winds, the proximity of the sea and the dwindling heights of Western ghats greatly influence the climate. In Kanniyakumari rainfall is distributed over four seasons, (a) south-west monsoon (June-Sept) 37 % and 33.7 rainy days (b) north-east monsoon (Oct- Dec) 37.9% and 26.5 rainy days, (c) winter (Jan-Feb) 2.7% and 2.7 rainy days and (d) the hot weather summer seasons 21.7 % and 16.8 rainy days. In the hill region the rainfall is uniformly distributed in both monsoons and maximum rainfall occurs during October and November. On the whole this district gets an average annual rainfall of 1369.5 mm with 79.7 rainy days.