

ELEPHANT MANAGEMENT IN CAPTIVITY

BIRTH OF A MALE ELEPHANT IN CAPTIVITY IN SRI LANKA

The birth of the first male baby elephant occurred on 13 September 1989. It was born in captivity at the Morahena Kottawa Estate belonging to our family. The female when she gave birth to the male calf was 18 years of age. The bull elephant that sired the offspring was about 20 years of age belonging to the Pasgama Devalaya (= Temple) in Aranayake.

The she elephant was treated with local medicine under the supervision of the elephant veterinarian, Mr Niyanpalawa. The assistance of a veterinary surgeon was sought once for treatment when the womb appeared to be festering, just one week after the calf was born.

The calf was suckled by the mother while she was fed mainly with kitul (a kind of palm tree), Jak (*Artocarpus* sp.) leaves, grass and branches from local trees such as *Ficus religiosa*, *Cocos nucifera* etc. About 100 kg of the above varieties were given to the mother every day. Only a very limited quantity on sweet food such as banana, papaw and pineapple was given daily. The calf was wormed when it was 4 months old and later when it was 8 months old. By the time the calf was 6 months old, it began to try feeding on what the mother was being fed.

By October 1989, the calf was 1.1 m high. When the baby elephant was about 6 months of age, it was chained close to the mother. During the first 4 months, it was kept inside the camp to protect it from the weather. From the age of one month onwards, the calf was bathed along with its mother. At about the age of 6 months, the calf was already well on its way to understand a few commands from the mother's mahout! Now he seems to understand very well the commands given by the mahout.

The first public performance of the baby elephant was its participation at the Bellanwila Temple's Esala Perahera (a magnificent procession of elephants held annually both in Kandy as well as in Colombo), where he performed very well indeed. After the ceremony, both mother and son were taken to Bandaragama where the Chief mahout resides. Now the baby elephant and its mother are being looked after by the Chief mahout.

by Wawita Siripala

(This information from Mr Siripala was passed on to the Newsletter by Mr Vasantha Nugegoda).

REGIONAL NEWS:

1. SRI LANKA

ELEPHANTS SLAUGHTERED IN CIVIL WAR

Elephants, which are widely regarded by Sri Lankans as a national symbol, have become the latest casualties of the war between the government and Tamil separatist guerrillas.

Guerrillas seeking independence from the majority Sinhalese community killed 50 elephants between January and August. The director of wildlife conservation, S.W. Kotagama, says this is the highest kill rate in recent times.

Not since the days of British rule, when elephants were killed for sport and to protect crops, has there been such slaughter.

Experts estimate that there are no more than 3,000 elephants in the country, compared with 10,000 at the turn of the century.

Tamil separatists have been felling timber in the forests of the north and east to build fortifi-