

## 7. SRI LANKA

# ENHANCING THE SURVIVAL OF ELEPHANTS

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Excerpts from an address delivered at the FAO Regional Expert Consultation on Management of Protected Areas in the Asia-Pacific Region. 10-14 December 1990. Bangkok, Thailand.

In Sri Lanka, the elephants are to be found mainly in the low country Dry Zone. In 1969, the elephant population was estimated to be between 1,745 and 2,455 animals. A subsequent estimate in 1987 indicated that the elephant population may have increased to between 3,051 and 3,435 animals. The general feeling is that the true number might be in the range of between 2,500 and 3,000 animals. In any case, the crux of the present problem is that the animals are raiding crops and causing much damage to both man and cultivation.

The solutions to resolve these elephant-human conflicts in Sri Lanka need to be worked out carefully with much thought given to the survival of the elephants on the one hand and the safety of the people and their crops on the other hand. The future management of the Protected Areas in the Dry Zone will have to be improved to accommodate and contain the elephants that are at present marauding crops and attacking human beings. The broad recommendations are: —

1. To increase immediately the food and water resources available in the selected Protected areas. In this respect, the following areas have been identified for development in 1991: — Yala North (Blocks III and IV), Kahalle-Pallekulla Sanctuary, and Maduru Oya, Wasgamuwa and Wilpattu National Parks. These areas have been highlighted as the country's major centres of conflict between man and elephant.
2. To drive the elephants into the areas that have been identified previously.
3. To retain the animals within the target areas by using electrified fences, if necessary.
4. To capture and domesticate any excess animals and also to establish semi-domestic breeding centres. Troublesome elephants with proven crop-raiding records would be the first to be captured and domesticated.

All these would mean a complete change of the approach to Wildlife Conservation Management in Sri Lanka. It would also signify a massive investment in money, material and manpower.

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