

Conservation News

Sri Lanka

Re-introduction of the insurance scheme for mahouts

The Diyawadana Nilame of the Sacred Temple of the Tooth (The Dalada Maligawa, Kandy), Neelanga Dela Bandara plans to re-introduce the insurance scheme for mahouts following an unfortunate incident of a mahout named Mr. M. Piyasena killed by his elephant while he attempted to give it a wash. He was 59-year old father of four children. According to an eye witness, the elephant concerned was boisterous for a while forcing Piyasena to use the goad to control it. The elephant became so furious that he took the goad and broke it in two, before turning on the mahout. This was the second incident of elephants in captivity killing their mahouts within two months. In the past two years, more than six mahouts have been killed by enraged elephants in Kandy alone.

Source: The Sunday Times (Sri Lanka) November 6, (2005).

USA

Sanctuary receives Excellence Award

Riddle's Elephant & Wildlife Sanctuary has become the first recipient of the Institution of Excellence Award given by the Elephant Managers Association (EMA), which is a non-profit organization of professional elephant handlers, administrators, veterinarians, researchers and elephant enthusiasts. The award was handed out in the Fall of 2005 during the EMA annual conference hosted by the Portland Zoo in Oregon. The award was granted "for contributions to elephant training, research and care performed with professionalism, integrity and passion". The Sanctuary is operated by an Arkansas non-profit organization dedicated to preserving both Asia and Africa elephants. It offers permanent refuge to any elephant in need. The facility provides training and education in elephant management and conservation and conducts scientific study in the health and physiology of elephants.

Source: Log Cabin Democrat, December 24, (2005).

Workshop on Ultrasound and Veterinary Procedures

The 9th Ultrasound and Veterinary Procedures Workshop for Wildlife Veterinarians was hosted by the Riddle's Elephant & Wildlife Sanctuary in May 2005 at Greenbrier, Arkansas. World renowned elephant veterinarian Dr. Dennis Schmitt, assisted by the sanctuary staff, taught the course. Veterinarians from international elephant facilities (Canada, USA and Sri Lanka) attended the course and shared experiences.

Source: Pachyderm Periodical, 15: 3 (2005).

Gajah 24: (2006)

Elephant program at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoological Park

Elephants in North American Zoos number approximately less than 275 among 70 or so widely dispersed cities. AZA institutions attract over 150 million visitors, more than all professional sports combined. American Zoos have a unique ability to focus and educate these visitors on the critical conservation issues of this century. Within North America itself, there is tremendous need to establish breeding bull groups as management strategies to dramatically increase the captive population and improve genetic diversity. Captive elephants are not breeding fast enough to keep up with natural mortality. The Smithsonian Institution National Zoological Park can change all this now and make a critical leadership step. It plans to proceed with an ambitious plan to renovate its present elephant exhibit. The new facility will take up an 8-acre parcel of land at the Zoo, with approximately 3 acres of ground space for a group comprising 8 Asian elephants. In addition, the Zoo plans to expand its capability to conduct Asian elephant research and propagation by eventually developing a facility at its Front Royal campus - a 3,200 acre parcel of land that constitutes the Zoo's Conservation & Research Center.

Source: Smithsonian Institution National Zoological Park (2006).

Cambodia

Community participation in elephant conservation in Cambodia

As wild elephant habitat is eroded by the spread of cultivation and over exploitation of forest resources, wild elephants resort to feeding on crops. In this context, the resolution of human-elephant conflict to prevent death or injury on both sides, is no less important than the conservation of elephant habitat. A recent survey of Cambodian rural communities indicates that the work of Fauna & Flora International (FFI)'s Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) teams is already changing attitudes to Asian elephants. Community leaders interviewed by Tuy Sureivathana, one of FFI's local counterparts in Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, revealed that villagers no longer retaliate against elephants that raid their crops or damage their property. FFI team has been instrumental in dissuading people from using spring traps and even poison against the elephants. The mitigation of the HEC is a vital element of FFI's Asian Elephant Conservation Programme, which also works to prevent poaching, protect habitats and gather crucial scientific data.

Source: FFI Update 2 (2005).

 Kenya

Elephant translocation

The elephant population in the Tsavo National Park in the 1960s numbered 40,000. However, poaching for ivory has since reduced the numbers to less than 7,000. In August 2005, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) began rounding up 400 of the 700 elephants in Shimba Hills and moving them to Tsavo East, a much bigger park in southern Kenya with the hope of repopulating the national park. Family groups were selected for translocation by marksmen in helicopters who fired tranquilizer darts at their targets, before loading the elephants into a giant steel crate for the 300 km journey. KWS hopes to track the relocated elephants using GPS collars, fitted to the matriarchs who led each family. The operation will cost the KWS about \$ 3 million, and is welcomed by the villagers near Shimba Hills who complain that elephants regularly stray from the park and raid their crops. A previous attempt in 1996 to translocate about 30 bull elephants from Shimba Hills to parkland about 65 km away resulted in the animals becoming disoriented and trekking back towards the coast, eventually reaching another forest reserve further north. Conservationists are divided in their views about such massive translocations of elephants. Daphne Sheldrick who runs the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust feels that the money could be better spent in erecting a proper barrier fence. Besides, moving elephants from such lush habitats in Shimba Hills to the dry area of Tsavo East national park, may be harmful. But KWS is of the view that unless the overcrowding is eased, elephants will continue to break down barriers.

Source: Jeevan Vasagar in Guardian Weekly, September 2-8, (2005).

 South Africa, Mozambique & Zimbabwe

World's biggest Transfrontier Park

An initiative of the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), the proposed Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park will be the world's biggest animal kingdom covering an area equivalent to half of Scotland and crossing the borders of South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. These countries are merging three game reserves, thereby creating a 35,000 sq. km conservation area that will expand eventually to cover 100,000 sq. km. The project has been praised as an example of regional cooperation and sustainable development, raising foreign investment and creating much-needed jobs. But some people are not happy. In Mozambique, people from Salani village fear that they will no longer be the hunters but the hunted. Some villagers complain that animal rights have taken precedence over human rights, while others are waiting to see what happens.

Source: Kristy Siegfried in Guardian Weekly, Oct. 28-Nov.3, (2005).

 Malaysia

Asian Elephant Range States Meeting

The Meeting of the Asian Elephant Range States was held on January 24-26, 2006 in Malaysia. The meeting commenced with an inaugural session, where Dr. Holly Dublin - the Chair of IUCN Species Survival Commission delivered the key note address, followed by addresses made by the Director General of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Malaysia (Perhilitan), and the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE). Dr. Dublin highlighted the importance of this meeting, considering the participation of all 13 range states of the Asian Elephant at this occasion to discuss conservation issues relating to the Asian Elephant. The DG of Perhilitan highlighted several issues related to the conservation of Asian Elephants, and stressed the need for dialogue and collaboration between range states. Subsequent to the inaugural session, Dr. Dublin gave a general introduction to the meeting, stressing that the objective was to initiate a dialogue among range states to discuss issues and experiences, and develop consensus towards achieving long-term conservation of Asian Elephants. Dr. Meenakshi Nagendran from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Asian Elephant Conservation Fund highlighted the participation of all 13 range states at this meeting as a great achievement and stated that this was a good opportunity for the range states to discuss the whole range of issues related to the conservation of Asian Elephants, and she indicated that the USFWS would be able to help implement some of the follow-up actions suggested at this meeting through their grant programme.

The key issues highlighted were (a) population management, such as addressing cross border problems, is hindered by information gaps on distribution and population status; (b) lack of standardized methods for population survey and monitoring leading to a lack of good quality data about population distribution and status; and (c) dangers of designing conservation strategies based on guesses about population sizes and trends (efficient allocation of resources for conservation of Asian elephants requires much better data). The recommendations included the need to establish a standardized database on the status and distribution of the Asian Elephant; and the update of existing information through well-designed field surveys using modern peer-reviewed techniques.

Source: AsESG Co-Chairs (2006).