

News Briefs

Compiled by Jayantha Jayewardene, Editor

1. Elephant in no-man's land leaves officials in a fix (India/Bangladesh)

Indian Express - 4.1.2011

KOLKATA - An elephant wandering in no-man's land — between the Indian and Bangladeshi border — in the dead of the night left the forest authorities and Border Security Force (BSF) in a fix in South Dinajpur district of Bengal.

As the forest authorities received the news of the wandering male elephant at 1.45 am on Monday, they had no choice but to wait. In the morning the forest officials informed the BSF officials and a flag meeting with the Bangladeshi counterparts was held.

Three Kunki elephants - trained elephants of the forest department - have been rushed to the spot to escort the elephant back to the Indian Territory. The elephant, however, solved the problem himself as it decided to return back at noon. "We were relieved when the elephant returned to Indian territory on his own. However, the area is densely inhabited and at present we are hoping that there should not be any untoward incident," said Sheelwant Patel, Chief Conservator of Forests (north Bengal).

2. Elephant subdued after terrorizing Cambodian village (Cambodia)

Monsters and Critics - 16.12.2010

PHNOM PENH - An elephant that killed its owner last week and then terrorized residents of a village in southern Cambodia has been subdued. The domesticated elephant named Sambo fled into a bamboo forest at Mon village in Kampong Speu province after stomping its owner to death. It then trampled farmland and chased local residents who responded by assaulting the pachyderm with sticks, knives and fireworks.

With the help of the Cambodian Forestry Administration, non-governmental organizations and three elephant trainers, Sambo was shot with tranquilizer darts Wednesday and subdued. Villagers said the elephant had killed at least three people in the past three years and had become markedly more aggressive since escaping into the forest last week.

'This is an insane situation,' Jack Highwood, the head of an elephant sanctuary in Monduliri province, told the Post earlier this week. 'There are 300 or more villagers scattered around the elephant in all directions, and the elephant is actively hunting them.' Highwood said it was unclear what the best solution would be for the elephant's future. 'A week ago or a time closer to the sad event of the elephant's killing of his [owner], we could have possibly taken it into our sanctuary, but now it knows how to chase and kill people, and it is a danger to humans and other elephants,' he said.

3. Elusive wild elephants captured on film in Cambodia

Our Amazing Planet - 22.12.2010

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has just released what may be the first high-quality professional footage of wild Asian elephants ever taken in the south Asian country. Decades of civil war and instability in the latter part of the 20th century made Asia's largest land mammal shy and difficult to observe directly.

Wildlife photographer Allan Michaud shot footage of the shy beasts on July 24 in the newly established Seima Protection Forest, a 2850 km² protected area along Cambodia's eastern border with Vietnam. "It does seem surprising that such a large animal is actually quite elusive, but they usually avoid humans," said Edward Pollard of WCS's Cambodia Program. "This new footage is a great visual confirmation that Seima is

vitaly important for biodiversity, as well as the protection of forest carbon.”

The footage captures images of a male Asian elephant casually feeding on grass on the margin of a road that runs through Seima Protection Forest, which contains a significant percentage of Cambodia’s elephant population.

In 2006, surveys that collected DNA from elephant dung revealed a population of approximately 116 animals within the protected area — but not a single elephant was seen during the study. Most of the images of wild elephants from the region come from camera traps. The film represents only the third elephant sighting along the Seima road in the past five years.

Researchers have noted that along with the recent elephant sighting, other species observed along the road include gaur (an Asian species of wild cattle), a monkey species known as a black-shanked douc, four other species of primate, and green peafowl, indicating that wildlife are adapting to the road.

4. Jumbos stranded due to floods (Sri Lanka)

Daily Mirror - 9.2.2011

More than 72 wild elephants have been detected marooned in the flood affected areas in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, Director General of Wildlife Conservation Department, Chandrawansa Pathiraja said. He added that 70 out of them were stranded in Manik Farm and Settikulam areas in Vavuniya. Two elephant calves have been detected in Singhapura area in Welikanda, and measures have already been taken to rescue those two, the Director General said.

Due to the rainfall in the last few days the lives of three elephant calves were lost, Wildlife Department sources said. Making an appeal, the Wildlife Department has requested the people not to try anything to scare the elephants off as they would move back to their familiar grounds once the flood waters have started subsiding.

5. Sri Lanka plans first census of elephants

Agence France Presse - 16.2.2011

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka is planning its first ever census of elephants as the animals increasingly come into conflict with villagers, a top official said Wednesday. Government wildlife director Chandrawansa Pathiraja said a head count would start in August to aid better planning of conservation and minimise clashes between elephants and humans. “We will carry out the census within a 48-hour period,” Pathiraja told AFP. “We expect dry weather at this time.” He said a meeting of enumerators would be held next month to work out details of the census, and the department also hopes to rope in volunteers to help.

“We have had just over 200 elephants deaths last year,” Pathiraja said. “During the same period about 50 people were killed by wild elephants and we have seen this trend in the past three years.” Elephants are killed mostly by farmers whose crops are destroyed while marauding animals also raid villages in search of food. Sri Lanka’s elephant population is believed to have dwindled to about 4,000 from an estimated 12,000 in 1900.

Most of the jungles in Sri Lanka’s northern and eastern regions were inaccessible for wildlife authorities during the fighting between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels. However, with the ending of hostilities in May 2009, the wildlife department has begun managing some of the



Elephants at Kala Wewa, Sri Lanka
Photo by Palitha Anthony

animal sanctuaries and re-launched conservation efforts. Elephants are considered sacred animals in Sri Lanka, but they increasingly clash with villagers as habitat becomes scarce.

6. Ivory worth crores may be destroyed (India)

Deccan Chronicle - 22.2.2011

MYSORE - Tonnes of ivory worth crores may soon be destroyed. The Karnataka forest department has sought the permission of the Union ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) to set fire to the elephant tusks that have piled up in its custody over a period of 20 years after the international ban was imposed on sale of ivory to save the jumbos from poachers. Although the state had received in-principle clearance from the ministry some years ago when it made a similar request, the tusks were not destroyed for various reasons and so a fresh request was made recently, according to official sources.

Although forest officials refused to divulge the exact details of the seized ivory in their custody, it is believed that the Mysore depot has the largest elephant ivory stock in the country. "As elephant ivory is a non-tradable commodity following the world ban, we can't hold an auction or take the risk of keeping the stock secure due to the limited manpower at our disposal. According to government of India guidelines the tusks can only be given as gifts to army regiments on their request or destroyed before they are misused," explains Ajai Mishra, CCF and field director, Project Elephant.

Moreover, some stocks have fossilised, he reveals, adding that a few good pieces of ivory will be preserved to meet unexpected demand in case of any future policy changes. The department made the greatest number of seizures when forest brigand Veerappan was most active, killing hundreds of elephants in the region for their tusks. The Elephant Trade Monitoring System (ETIS), which tracks seizures of ivory and other elephant products on a global basis for the nations that have signed the Convention on

International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), says only Japan and China qualify as approved buyers of ivory from Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia, where limited commercial trade is permitted.

The international community has placed a request before CITES to lift the ban for one-time trade to clear the huge government-owned ivory stocks, but it is unlikely to be heard as the pressure from conservationists is said to be far too great.

7. Forest dept book shows ways to deal with wild jumbos (India)

Times of India - 28.3.2011

BHUBANESWAR - The Chandaka wildlife forest division has come up with a guide book describing the dos and don'ts for people after they spot wild elephants. This has been done to reduce man-elephant conflicts. The pictorial book graphically describes how to behave with wild elephants. It has been distributed among schoolchildren in and around the sanctuary.

"Elephant is a cool animal and does not attack without provocation or if there is no danger to it. If people maintain restraint and don't irritate the animal, then a huge damage to life and property can be avoided. The booklet is to create awareness among people about how to behave whenever they find any wild elephant in their locality," divisional forest officer (DFO) of Chandaka Akshaya Pattanaik said.

Along with some basic information about elephant behaviour, the book mentioned the dos and don'ts. If a wild elephant enters human habitation always chase them away in groups. Don't irritate the pachyderms by throwing light on them and use crackers, drums and cymbals to annoy them. Give way to elephants if you confront. Always run downwards in hilly areas. If elephant chases you then throw your clothes on it to divert its attention. If elephant raises its ears and trumpets then it is getting ready to attack, so run away to any secure place. Immediately inform forest officials about presence of elephants.

Keep the habitation well-lit and use loud sound to frighten elephants. Don't attack elephants by pelting stones or throwing arrows, don't offer food to elephants to start worshipping. Don't store country liquor at home and so on. "People know all these things but still sometimes they do some mistakes that cause man-elephant conflict leading to loss of life and property. The book will remind people about some of the key rules," Pattanaik said.

The book also contains popular adages and maxims associated with elephants. "Only through involvement of local people and creating awareness among them, man-elephant conflict in the sanctuary has reduced a lot. So it is important to make them cautious and alert," he said.

Every year, 50 elephants and equal number of animals die due to man-elephant conflict across the state, sources said. Besides, the state provides compensation of nearly Rs two crore for damage to life and property due to the conflict.

8. Are elephants scared of spice? (India)

The Independent - 2.3.2011

Assam is home to one of the largest remaining viable populations of Asian elephant. Around 5500 of the beasts live side-by-side with a growing human population. Here, the expansion of agriculture and logging has fragmented the elephants' habitat and led to increasing human-elephant conflict and the animals follow their trunks in search of food.

Elephants have a much keener sense of smell than humans and when dried crushed chillies are mixed with used engine oil and soaked onto pieces of cloth which are then tied onto the fences surrounding the crop fields, the elephants see red and turn away from the noxious fumes. The same elephants are also attracted to the villages by the smell of home-brewed rice beer.

To deter them from rampaging through the houses in search of a tasty tippie, the villagers are using "chilli balls" – dried, crushed chillies mixed with elephant dung and water and then left

to dry. When the elephants approach the village the balls are lit and emit an acrid smoke, which is detested by the elephants and drives them back to the forest.

Conservation project leader, Alexandra Zimmerman, who works out in the field, explains: "It's not just a matter of controlling elephant movements – it is also about stimulating the desire of the villagers to find a workable and economic solution to the problem." The low-tech nature of the mitigation methods enables communities to implement the methods themselves with a minimum of training.

9. Slump in Kaziranga jumbo count: Census (India)

Times of India - 8.3.2011

JORHAT - The 2011 elephant census brought poor news for the Kaziranga National Park with a decrease in 128 jumbos from 2008's count. The number of elephants in the park stands at 1165 at present. Out of the total number, 297 are male elephants, 460 are female and 226 are calves. Sexes of another 182 elephants have not been identified during the census operation. Reduction in the number of animals inside the park has been attributed to several causes other than death or poaching. The animals often stray to adjacent forests in search of food and thus the counts fluctuate. "The jumbos stray to near by areas for food. The animals also roam about in all quarters belonging to the forest range areas," a senior forest official said.

Asiatic elephants are found in large numbers in the Kaziranga National Park. The pachyderms are mostly found in the northern part of the park. They roam around in all the areas belonging to the four ranges namely Kohara, Bagori, Burapahar and Agoratoli of the park. The park authorities had started the census on February 20 with a week-long programme. The national park was divided into 81 parts for smooth operation of the census.

Earlier reports of elephant census had shown increase in the number of jumbos in the park.

According to the survey of the state forest department, the national park had 1,206 elephants in 2005 census which increased from 1,048 in 2002 census. During the first elephant census conducted in 1972 only 430 elephants were spotted in the park. According to the 2005 survey report, the combined Kaziranga National Park and Karbi Anglong hills area have 1940.

10. Wild elephants destroy banana crop (Malaysia)

Bernama.com - 26.3.2011

A herd of four wild elephants has destroyed over 2,000 banana plants in Kampung Batu 8 here over the past three weeks, causing huge losses for more than 30 farmers. The farmers' attempt to frighten away the animals by exploding firecrackers and setting bonfires proved futile. Over the past week, Wildlife Protection and National Parks Department personnel failed to trace the elephants which often came to the banana plantation only at night.



Trained bull elephant in the Bago Yoma Mountains of Myanmar
Photo by Peter Leimgruber

Farmer Yaakob Saad, 60, said his crop of 250 plants was destroyed. "I resorted to various measures to scare them away but in vain. They destroyed the plants far away from the hut where we kept watch," he said. Another farmer, Roslan Saad, 38, said the dogs, which the farmers used to frighten away the elephants were chased by the pachyderms. Osman Abd Razak, 52, said he feared that their plantations would be wiped out by the elephants unless something was done by the Wildlife Protection and National Parks Department.

11. Tourists to Myanmar warned not to buy ivory souvenirs amid crackdown on illegal trade

The Associated Press - 4.3.2011

YANGON - Tourists who buy ivory souvenirs in Myanmar risk having them confiscated as part of a crackdown on the often brazen illegal trade, media reported Friday. While the wildlife trade monitoring group, TRAFFIC, has cited Myanmar as a hotspot for elephant and ivory smuggling, foreigners are rarely arrested for possession of antiques or banned wildlife.

Forestry officials quoted in the 7-Day News Journal said that authorities are aware that handicraft shops in the two biggest cities, Yangon and Mandalay, openly sell ivory goods, despite laws aimed at protecting elephants and banning the sale of elephant parts. Ivory is often carved up into sculptures of Chinese deities, combs, chopsticks and other souvenirs.

"Forestry department officials will open investigations and take action against the illegal ivory trade," an official was quoted as saying. The weekly is privately run but, like all media in Myanmar, is subject to heavy censorship. Officials speak anonymously for fear of retribution.

The report cited a 1994 law that lists elephants as endangered species and bans the killing or hunting of the animals and the sale of elephant parts. Violators can face up to seven years imprisonment and a 50,000 kyat fine (\$50). "If a foreign tourist is found in possession of ivory

handicrafts on departure at Yangon International Airport, the items will be confiscated,” the official was quoted as saying.

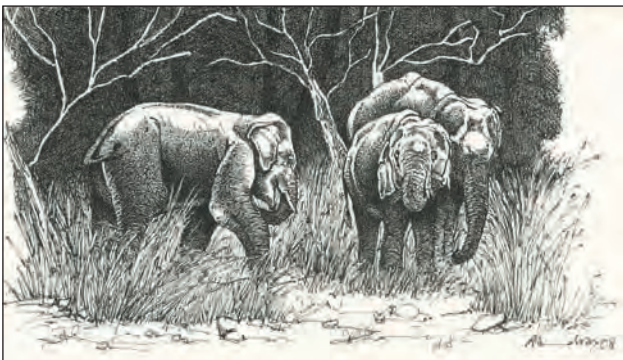
12. Poisoned elephants in Indonesia?

Global Post - 28.3.2011

A villager closes his nose as he stands next to a dead elephant at Serba Jadi sub-district in East Aceh, Aceh province, on December 10, 2010. Three endangered Sumatran elephants have been found dead after their herd rampaged through a village in western Indonesia. The cause of the animals' deaths is being investigated but a local conservationist said they might have died after eating poison intended for wild boars. There are up to 3350 Sumatran elephants remaining.

Who would snuff out an elephant? Perhaps villagers who've suffered repeated elephant stampedes. In December, the pachyderms barged into their fields, devoured their crops and even looted their homes, according to the Jakarta Globe. That was the motive behind five other elephant deaths the previous month. In the same province, Riau. (Authorities don't appear to suspect poaching, which is also a threat to Sumatran elephants.)

The latest elephant body dropped in Riau last weekend, right in the middle of the street, the Jakarta Globe reports. This one, an adult female, likely succumbed to severe malnutrition and hydration instead of poison -- though a villager interviewed by the Globe said her ears were scarred from hurled stones. Sadly, she left behind two young calves.



Drawing by Arnab Roy

The deaths have become so frequent that the World Wildlife Fund has offered to set up a human-elephant conflict resolution team. Who's the blame here? It's easy to blame this poisoned elephant epidemic on villagers. But they've suffered too. In Indonesia, where many get by on just \$2 a day, an elephant feeding frenzy in your fields could literally prevent someone from feeding their kids. The real problem, a local conservation officer told the Globe, is the clearing of nearby forests. A starving elephant is unlikely to turn down an unguarded field of crops. This string of elephant deaths isn't even native to Indonesia. The Times of India reports on a "growing tussle for land" between elephants and locals in the country's northeast. Death toll: four elephants. Suspected cause of death: poisoning.

13. Government to do away with jumbo translocation (Sri Lanka)

Daily News - 4. 4.2011

The Wildlife Conservation Department has decided to do away with elephant translocation with immediate effect considering the negative impact it has caused to both humans and elephants, a spokesperson of the Department told the Daily News yesterday. She said that previous translocation attempts had proved to be unsuccessful. "The elephants had somehow tried to find a route to go back to their previous location. Translocation can affect the behaviour of the elephants. In return they become aggressive and encroach villages", she said.

She said that elephants would only be translocated if all other means of controlling them within their habitat failed. Translocation will be done according to set guidelines made by the Department officials with the coordination of experts on elephants. She noted that the elephant death reported in Siyambalagamuwa last November after the Department's attempt to translocate it made the authorities to come to this decision. "Hereafter they will only be moved to Lunugamvehera National Park which has a special elephant ground. It also contains a complete trench and electrified fence round the park. We will ensure habitat enrichment within

the park to provide them easy access to water and food”, she explained.

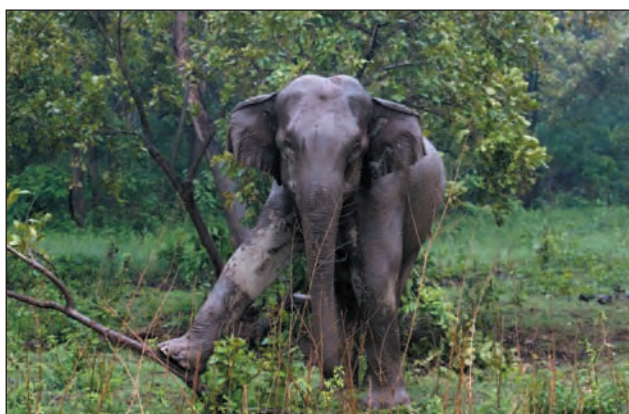
She also said that electric fencing of a total length of over 2000 km is available in the country. The Department plans to extend this to another 600 km during this year. Accordingly, electrified fences will be constructed in Northwestern, Southern, Eastern, Central, Yala and Mahaweli wildlife zones. She observed that the majority of human-elephant conflicts were reported in Northwestern and Mahaweli wildlife zones.

14. Dead elephant found in Dak Lak (Vietnam)

Thanh Nien News - 5.5.2011

Dak Lak Province authorities have incinerated the body of a baby elephant found in Yok Don National Park last Wednesday. Nguyen Con, Yok Don park ranger, said they found the decomposed elephant, weighing around 100 kilograms, at the section No. 290. He said it was a newborn elephant but they couldn't identify the cause of the death. Con said several herds of wild elephants have recently been near the residential areas in Buon Don District, threatening the crops and safety of local residents.

Vietnam had around 2000 elephants in the mid-90s but the number has plunged to between 70 and 100 because of relentless poaching and deforestation, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Nguyen Van Truong, director of Yok Don National Park,



Adult female from Corbett National Park
Photo by Christy Williams

said that there have been 219 cases of illegal deforestation within the first four months this year, an increase of 51 more cases than the same period last year.

At a meeting with Dak Lak People's Committee last month, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development said he was “sure that there have been wrongdoings and collusions” between officials in charge and poachers. Lu Ngoc Cu, chairman of Dak Lak People's Committee, said that many residents had reported directly to him about ongoing timber poaching. They even tipped him on which forces to bust, because they assumed that some local officials may have colluded with the poachers.

15. Elephant tramples man to death at Aceh farm (Indonesia)

Jakarta Post - 21.6.2011

BANDA ACEH - A rampaging elephant killed a rubber plantation worker on Monday in Pante Ceureumen, Aceh, officials said the following day. Nur Yasin, head of Pante Ceureumen, told the Jakarta Globe that the attack occurred around 3 pm at the Sari Inti Rakyat plantation in Menuang Kinco village. “All of a sudden an elephant came running out of the forest at the edge of the plantation, knocked down the foreman and started trampling him,” he said. “Some plantation workers tried to shoo the animal away, but it didn't work.” He said the victim, Khalidin, 40, died at the scene due to severe injuries.

Ramli, the village head, said four workers nearby were unwilling to try to stop the attack because they were scared of getting trampled as well. “None of them dared go near the elephant,” he said. “They were afraid that they'd be next.” He added that the body was removed from the scene only after the elephant had returned to the forest two hours later. Nur said this was the latest in a long list of human-elephant incidents in the area. He said despite the loss of lives and property as a result of the animals running rampant in farms and villages, authorities had failed to do anything to prevent more attacks from happening. “We've sent several letters appealing to wildlife

authorities to relocate the elephants, but they have yet to respond,” he said.

16. Dak Lak sets up elephant conservation center (Vietnam)

Thanh Nien News - 17.7.2011

The Dak Lak Province authorities have decided to set up an elephant conservation center as the number of pachyderms have dipped to critical levels in the Central Highlands. The center will operate under the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to protect both wild and domestic elephants, the Dak Lak newspaper reported Friday. The center’s major tasks would be to improve elephants’ health, monitor their population and habitat, raise awareness of elephant conservation and propose actions to minimize conflicts between wild elephants and local residents.

“Recently, many elephants have been poached or harmed because their tail hair has been a profitable commodity, besides their tusks,” the paper said. The number of tamed elephants in Dak Lak has decreased from 502 in 1980 to 166 in 1998 and to around 50 now. The number of wild elephants, living in the forest between Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces is very small and “insignificant”.

17. Forest dept to use bees to stop jumbos (India)

Deccan Chronicle - 23.4.2011

Honeybees may look humble but can drive away a marauding pack of wild elephants. This is no Aesop fable but a new strategy being mooted by the desperate forest department to protect fringe populations and their assets from crop-raiding tuskers. After having experimented with many ideas - ranging from electric fencing to playing recorded tiger growls — the new method aims at building a fence of bee-hives along the habitats, especially where elephant corridors lie close to farms and colonies.

The possibility of scaring elephants with buzzing bees was mooted by Dr. K.P. Sreekumar, professor

and Head Research Co-ordination, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University. Dr. Sreekumar is the winner of the ‘Ig Nobel’ prize for developing a formula to calculate the weight of an elephant using the circumference of its front leg. “My recommendation is based on its success in Kenya and Sri Lanka,” he said. “In both places, farmers attested to the fact that bee-hive fences did deter elephants. This is a safe and economical strategy.

18. Wild elephant kills refugees (Nepal)

Independent Online - 27.7.2011

KATHMANDU - Two Bhutanese refugees died in eastern Nepal when they were trampled by a wild elephant, the state news agency RSS reported. The elephant ran amok in the Beldangi UN refugee camp in the Jhapa district as villagers tried to chase it away from their corn fields, RSS quoted the district police as saying. The two men who were killed were in their 60s and 70s and were attacked in their huts.

Wild elephants often enter villages in Nepal in search of food. In another recent similar incident, a wild elephant killed a woman last month in the central district of Chitwan. More than 70,000 Bhutanese refugees live in UN camps in the Jhapa district, 500 km south-east of Kathmandu.

The first influx of Bhutanese refugees into Nepal began in the 1990s when more than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese of Hindu background who had lived in Bhutan for centuries were expelled.



Playing baby elephants (Sri Lanka)
Photo by Vajira Wijegunawardane