

News Briefs

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1. Two rare elephants killed for ivory in central Sabah (Malaysia)

Channel News Asia – 2.1.2017

Wildlife rescue workers in Sabah entered the new year in shock, as two wild bull elephants were killed by poachers near Segama River, Kawag Forest Reserve within a few weeks. The first bull was found on Dec 27, 2016 in the middle of an estate bordering Kawag Forest Reserve while the second bull, a gorgeous sabre-tusked bull named Sabre, was found on New Year's Eve.

According to satellite data, Sabre was killed on Nov 21, 2016. "On the day China banned ivory trade, we get two of our precious elephants murdered for their ivory. Our elephants are already threatened by habitat loss, development such as the planned road/bridge in Sukau-Kinabatangan. And if we add poaching for ivory, I don't give many years for the species to become extinct."

Meanwhile, wildlife veterinarian from the Wildlife Rescue Unit, Dr. Pakeeyaraj Nagalingam, who took part in the rescue and translocation of Sabre, said there are no words to express his sadness. He told Bernama that it looks like there is no safe place for elephants in Sabah anymore. "The relevant authorities who are responsible for enforcement of illegal wildlife poaching and other illegal activities must work harder and smarter if we want to conserve our wildlife in Sabah," he stressed.

2. Wild elephants kill 5 villagers in Myanmar's northeast

Anadolu Agency – 9.1.2017

Five villagers have been killed by rampaging

elephants in a village in Myanmar's mountainous Shan State, authorities said Monday. A herd of three elephants rampaged in Sint Kin village in Mong Mate Township of northeastern Shan before dawn Sunday, killing five villagers – including a nine-year-old boy – and destroying several houses, according to a local Forestry Department officer.

"Three women and a boy were killed by the elephants in the village," Swe Thein told Anadolu Agency by phone Monday. "A man was later found dead near a well outside the village," he said, adding that the man was also killed by rampaging elephants. Such deaths are not uncommon in rural areas in Myanmar, where deforestation has resulted in a rising number of conflicts between human residents and elephants. According to media reports, there were more than 70 such destructive encounters from 2010-2016, leaving at least 15 people dead.

Forest coverage in Myanmar – which lost almost 20% of its forests between 1990 and 2010 – fell from 58% of the country in 1990 to 47% in 2010, before dropping to 45% – or under 32 million hectares – in 2015, according to Forestry Ministry figures. The government estimates that there are currently around 3000 wild elephants left in Myanmar's jungles, down from 6000 in 1960-1970, and 4639 recorded in a 1991 census.

3. In a first, jumbo delivers twins in Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (India)

Times of India – 10.1.2017

The elephant and its two calves have been spotted in the automatic camera, fixed in the forest area as part of the wild life census survey." The footage shows a female elephant with her two calves. It

is the first time in the STR for an elephant to give birth to twins,” said a forest official. The officials said that they were monitoring the calves and the mother elephant’s movements closely. “The calves look healthy and we are closely monitoring their movements,” the officials said. Talking to TOI, S Sharavanan, Trustee, Wildlife Nature Conservation Trust (WNCT), said that only a healthy elephant could have delivered twins. An elephant is ready to have calves any time after 15 years. During its lifetime, it will deliver at least 13 times. A few years ago there were two twin deliveries, one in Mettupalayam and another in Anaimalai Tiger Reserve.

4. Kumki loses tusk after being attacked by wild tusker (India)

The Hindu – 19.1.2017

Sujay, 45, a male kumki elephant attached to Chadivayal elephant camp lost its tusk after an attack by a wild elephant on Wednesday. Forest Department officials said that Sujay could have been attacked by a wild elephant in musth (an aggressive behaviour born out of urge for biological ventilation).

The lone tusker trespassed into the compound of Chadivayal camp, breaking the fencing. Though eight forest staff were present at the camp, Sujay, who was chained, was badly attacked by the lone tusker. The right tusk of the kumki, which came off from the root, was found on the ground. The lost tusk had a projected length of three feet.

“After hearing loud trumpeting sounds, our staff chased the wild elephant using crackers and torches. The wild elephant, a gigantic one aged around 40 and 11 feet tall, must be in musth as it broke the electric fencing. Following the incident, Forest Department officials rushed to spot and administered medicines to Sujay.

According to forest officials, the elephant is taking food and water after treatment. Following the incident, six more forest staff have been deputed at camp which also has another kumki named Pari (36). The forest officials are also observing the movement of the tusker that attacked Sujay.

5. Myanmar to launch elephant conservation project

Myanmar Times – 19.1.2017

Amid a dramatic rise in elephant poaching, the government is stepping up efforts to protect the tusked mammals with a new conservation project expected to be unveiled later this week. Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation U Ohn Win said the Myanmar Elephant Conservation Project will legislate against killing elephants, and will also include establishing a registry of both wild and domesticated elephants.

He added that the project has been drafted with urgency in order to crack down on the increase in elephant killing, and the trade in elephant parts. U Ohn Win said the project plans should contain the relevant laws, which can be used against those involved in the illegal killing of elephants.

In order to undertake long-term conservation, the project will make a list enumerating both wild and domesticated elephants. All elephant owners will be informed and require to register the animals with the ministry, according to U Ohn Win. The Ministry of Forestry estimates there are about 2000-3000 wild elephants in the country, including in sanctuaries and natural habitats.

The elephant conservation project will also seek to advance research on elephant, human-wildlife conflict caused by territory encroachment and how citizens can contribute to habitat preservation efforts. According to government records from 2010 to 2016, Myanmar lost a total of 133 elephants – 72 to natural causes and 61 to poachers.

6. Phuket elephants DNA tested to curtail trafficking (Thailand)

The Phuket News – 19.1.2017

Officials from the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department (DNP) yesterday took DNA samples from 67 elephants, including those that perform at the popular Phuket

FantaSea tourist attraction in Kamala, as part of a drive to crackdown on elephants trafficked onto the island. There are currently 222 elephants registered at 23 camps in Phuket.

“Today we checked four elephant camps with 32 elephants all used by Phuket FantaSea as well as 20 elephants at Pang Chang Hai elephant camp, 13 elephants at Kalim camp, and two elephants at Tritrang elephant camp,” Mr Supot said.

The DNA tests are part of a five-day campaign that began yesterday (Jan 18) to confirm the identity of all registered elephants on the island, including those used at tourist attractions and jungle-trekking tours, he explained.

The DNP teams, assisted Department of Livestock and Department of Provincial Administration officials, are checking identification certificates and microchip implants. “Officials from the Veterinary Research and Development Centre Southern Region are checking the health of the elephants and the conditions of their shelters,” Mr Supot said.

7. 11 hour operation to detach trunk from tusk (Sri Lanka)

Sunday Times – 21.1.2017

A tusker whose trunk had gotten stuck inside one of its tusks, rendering it unable to intake food for two days, was rescued by veterinary surgeons of the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC). The elephant, a 25-year-old tusker by the name of ‘Nandimitra,’ is known to frequent the area of the Sithulpawwa Rajamaha Viharaya.

After receiving information that the tusker’s trunk had been stuck inside one of its tusks, wildlife officers launched a two-day search operation to locate the animal. They were finally able to locate ‘Nandimitra’ last evening. The trunk was finally detached from the tusk after an operation lasting 11 hours. DWC officials say Nandimitra had attacked and damaged about 107 vehicles along the Sithulpawwa road, mainly due to pilgrims trying to feed the tusker.

8. Bangla fencing to keep M’laya jumbos away (Bangladesh)

Shillong Times – 31.1.2017

Bangladesh is fencing the hillocks near Garo Hills to stop infiltration of a different type. The forest department of the neighbouring country is using electric wires to cordon off the hillocks adjacent to Sherpur on the border near Garo Hills to prevent elephants straying into the villages in Bangladesh.

The elephants come from Meghalaya and enter border areas in Mymensingh, Sherpur and Jamalpur and destroy properties and crops. Wildlife experts say cross-border movement of elephants is hampered by border fencing because many areas are within the elephant corridor. The animals are forced to divert their route through human habitat. Over 50 people were killed and more than 500 injured in elephant attacks in these areas so far. 20 elephants were killed in counter attacks as well, according to official figures.

9. Wild Elephants Invade Chinese Village in Search of Food (China)

Sputnik International – 8.2.2017

Fourteen hungry wild elephants in search of food invaded a village in Yunnan province in southwest China. The elephants were present in the vicinity from January 26 and wandered near the fields and farmland in search of food. The elephants trampled a few chickens and geese on a farm, roamed the highway and ate the village’s crops. Police sent out special personnel for alarm announcements, traffic police warnings and evacuation of local residents. The government used a drone to track the escaped animals.

Wild Asian elephants in China are protected animals. They mainly live in the county of Xishuangbanna Dai, as well as in the cities of Payer and Linking in Yuannan province. Due to the lack of food in winter months, the animals are forced to leave their territories in search of food in nearby villages. According to the Forestry Administration, from 2011 to 2015 in there

were 48 thousand cases of elephant invasions in Yunnan province. Due to such incidents 18 people died, 27 were injured and the economic damage amounted to almost \$14 million.

10. Malaysia: Elephants lost 70% of territory to human encroachment – study

Asian Correspondent – 10.2.2017

Elephants in Malaysia have lost nearly 70% of their roaming territory in human-dominated landscapes in the country over the past 35 years, according to a study on the “alarming rate” of encroachment into wildlife territory. Caroline Christine Russell, of conglomerate Sime Darby Berhad, said the research carried out by the Management and Ecology of Malaysian Elephants (MEME) project also recorded significant findings on the behaviour and ecology of the Asian elephant in forested areas of Malaysia, as well as their interactions with people.

She said alarmingly, conservationists started the new year with jarring news of the poaching of two Pygmy Elephants roaming protected areas in the eastern state of Sabah. Last month, she pointed out, Indonesian authorities seized ivory worth US\$ 6700 in North Kalimantan, believed to be from Malaysia. Poaching appears to be an emerging threat to the Asian elephant population in Malaysia, a grave concern for all,” she said.

In an effort to save the gentle giants, the foundation is extending support for the MEME project with a RM 1.9 million commitment for another three years from January this year until December 2019. This is the sixth year of support for the MEME project to preserve Asian elephants in Malaysia. YSD first sponsored the MEME project in January 2012, committing RM 3.36 million until December 2016.

11. Elephants turn TB carriers: India plan to wipe out disease by 2025 may be hit

Times of India – 21.2.2017

India plans to eradicate tuberculosis by 2025, five years before the WHO target of 2030. However,

the target can be realised only if *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is controlled both in humans and animals. Elephant is one of the animals known to carry the human TB bacterium. That TB has been found in wild elephants too may widen the scope of TB control strategy. TB control focus should include captive and wild pachyderms too.

It is not clear how many wild elephants have been infected by TB, as the latest research focussed only on the dead pachyderms. There have been several cases of TB infection passing on to humans from elephants in captivity. Though TB bacterium is also present in cattle and wild animals, it is a different species of the *Mycobacterium*. The authorities of Nehru Zoological Park are silent on whether or not the elephants in the zoo underwent tests for TB diagnosis.

Another researcher Dr. Susan K Mikota, director of veterinary programmes and research, Elephant Care International, USA said TB can be transmitted between elephants and humans.

12. Sri Lanka to hike damages for elephant attacks

Business Standard – 22.2.2017

Sri Lanka’s Cabinet on Wednesday approved to grant a higher compensation to victims of wild elephant attacks in the island country. Compensations would be paid for damages caused by wild elephant attacks on individuals and properties, Xinhua reported. Following a proposal by Wildlife Minister Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, the government decided to increase the compensation paid for human deaths and permanent disabilities from the current Rs 200,000 (estimated \$1200) to Rs 500,000 (estimated \$3300). Several persons are killed in Sri Lanka each year in wild elephant attacks while those living in dry zones, especially in the south, have their properties damaged in such tusker attacks.

During the past 12 years, an estimated 1464 elephants have been killed, while 672 persons have lost their lives in elephant attacks.

13. Wild elephants sleep just two hours a night

The Atlantic – 1.3.2017

In April 2014, Nadine Gravett tranquilized two female elephants and fitted them with actiwatches. These small devices—the scientific version of Fitbits—record movement, and researchers can use them to measure how well volunteers are sleeping. They're usually worn around the wrist, but that's not an option when your subjects' limbs are literally elephantine. So Gravett had to implant them in the females' most mobile appendages—their trunks.

The skin around the middle of the trunk is so thick that the implants went unnoticed, and quietly recorded the animals' movements for a month. By analyzing their data, and looking for five-minute windows when the trunks were still, Gravett could deduce when the elephants were asleep. And she found that they slept for just two hours a day on average—the lowest duration for any animal thus far recorded.

“Sleep is such a weird behavioral state,” says Paul Manger from the University of Witwatersrand, who led the study. “For animals, the main things in life are eating, reproducing, and not being eaten—but when we're sleeping, those things fall away. Sleep supersedes a lot of our survival instincts. We do know a lot about it in lab animals, but we don't know a lot in exotic species.”

As a very rough rule, and for reasons that are still unclear, bigger mammal species tend to sleep less than smaller ones. Captive elephants reportedly sleep for just 3 to 7 hours a day, but for their size, you'd expect them to get even less. Proving that is hard, though. Elephants can sleep standing up, so it's difficult to eyeball whether they're awake or asleep, especially if you're tracking them through the bush at night. Brain activity sensors would give better answers, but an elephant's anatomy makes it exceedingly risky to surgically implant such devices. So Manger and Gravett settled for the actiwatches instead. They also fitted satellite collars onto the animals to track their whereabouts later.

14. Deadly garbage dumps pose elephantine problems (Sri Lanka)

Sunday Times – 5.3.2017

An elephant which had been regularly eating garbage at Manampitiya died last Saturday after suffering from a sickness for a month. This well grown male, about 20 years of age, was part of a herd that fed on garbage from a dump at Manampitiya. It had fallen ill in the third week of January. A veterinary surgeon and a team of wildlife officers tried to flush out any non-digestive materials from its stomach. At first they pulled out about 15 kg of polythene in a day and over a month about 30 kg were removed.

Dr. Pramuditha Devasurendra who had treated the elephant, rejected the idea that the polythene was the cause of death. He said toxic bacteria in rotting food may have been the cause. “The garbage pit contains lots of lunch sheets with rotten food. Deadly bacteria can grow on the food. This is main reason for the death of the elephant.” A post-mortem did not find any polythene in the bowels of the dead elephant. Its liver and spleen were damaged.

Meanwhile, Dr. Prithiviraj Fernando, estimates that there are at least 50 locations where elephants come to forage at the dump. Dr. Fernando said piles of vegetables, over ripe fruit, flour, rice, bread and the like are more nutritious than what is found naturally. Elephants, which rummage for these at the dumps, are in better health, he said. But he said every day 500 elephants may be eating garbage. “In a year, how many of them would die as a result? How does this compare with other ‘unnatural’ causes of elephant deaths? Such as being shot, hakka patas, injuries from trap guns and nooses, train or vehicle accidents, starving to death inside parks after being driven in and restricted with electric fences,” he asks.

15. New DNA system helps combat wild elephant trafficking (Thailand)

The Independent – 7.3.2017

It is illegal to traffic wild elephants into captivity.

Thailand has a new national DNA database of all captive elephants. It has shown its worth this week by proving two young elephants in a Thai tourist camp often frequented by UK tourists in southern Thailand are not in fact the offspring of captive elephant parents as claimed. This significant finding proves that the DNA registration system is working and could be the first of many incidents of this nature.

Last October, Thailand introduced a new law for all elephant owners to adopt a DNA registration system. The system will help better track captive elephants and prevent elephants being smuggled from the wild and disguised as captive elephants, fuelled by the lucrative tourist industry. To date over 3440 captive elephants - almost 99% of the animals' total documented population in Thailand - have already been registered for DNA checks to help verify their identity and origins, with the remainder of captive elephants to be completed by the end of this month.

With less than 50,000 Asian elephants left in the wild today, this crucial milestone will help protect both captive and wild elephants and ensure that the wild population doesn't continue to be further fragmented.

16. Number of wild elephants in Thailand on the rise Pratch Rujivanarom

The Nation – 13.3.2017

The number of elephants in the wild in Thailand is increasing by up to 10%, according to the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department (DNP). DNP deputy director-general Adisorn Noochdumrong revealed the good news for conservationists on Thai Elephant Day. Adisorn said the number of wild elephant was rising at a rate between 7 to 10%. Areas that had seen the most marked increase in wild elephants were the Western forest in Thungyai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary and Eastern forest in Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai forest complex.

“This is the outstanding outcome of our efforts to protect the forest ecosystem and conserve wild elephants. We have worked at reintroducing the

wild elephants to the forest and building up food sources for the elephants in the forest,” Adisorn said. “We are happy with this success but will still continue our efforts to preserve our national symbol and let the elephants live peacefully with the people.”

17. First successful artificial mating in endangered Asian elephants in China

Global Times – 23.3.2017

Chinese researchers have for the first time used artificial breeding techniques to breed a baby Asian elephant. The Asian elephant is a first-class national protected animal that inhabits Southwest China's Yunnan Province, where the cub was delivered. A female elephant Weilai delivered the healthy 106 cm male cub on March 16 after 22 months' pregnancy, news portal chinanews.com reported Wednesday. The birth was engineered by the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

The cub is reported to be in stable health. “Having delivered a cub in 2010 in natural breeding, Weilai never got pregnant again although she went into heat several times,” Bao Mingwei, a veterinary from the center was quoted as saying. Bao said they detected Weilai's hormone level and chose the best timing for her to mate with a male elephant Pailun in 2015.

Over the past ten years, employees from the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center have successfully bred three Asian elephants through natural mating. The birth of this cub has opened a new era in breeding Asian elephants with the assistance of new technologies.

18. RTI nails anthrax lie in elephant deaths at Similipal Tiger Reserve (India)

Times of India – 2.4.2017

It is not just anthrax, which killed 16 elephants at Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in the past two and half years. Contrary to claims by officials at Similipal, information obtained under RTI revealed that out of the 16, only five died due

to anthrax. Blood samples of all 16 elephants were sent for test at the Animal Disease Research Institute in Phulnakhara, Cuttack, out of which 11 turned out to be negative, the RTI pointed out. Of the five positive cases, three were from STR and two from Baripada forest division. This indicates that 11 elephants didn't die due to anthrax and poaching - by electrocution trap or poisoning - could be the reason behind their deaths.

The ADRI data seems realistic. Had the anthrax spread, as is being claimed by the Forest Department, it could have been an epidemic. It could have spread to the cattle in the nearby habitation area and other prey animals. But there has not been a single instance of anthrax spreading to other animals," WSO secretary Biswajit Mohanty said.

19. Khao Yai takes action against visitors who taunt elephant (Thailand)

Bangkok Post – 4.4.2017

Khao Yai National Park has filed a police complaint against a car owner seen on video taunting a wild elephant into chasing his vehicle. Park chief Kanchit Srinoppawan said on Tuesday that authorities had examined a video clip posted on Facebook on Monday and concluded that the Camry sedan driver in the footage had intentionally challenged an elephant walking on a park road to chase his car, just for fun.

"It can't run faster than my Camry," the driver says and laughs in the two-minute video, as a woman in the car films an elephant coming towards them. "It never catches up with me," the driver said. "It's fun, it's fun." The clip also shows the car stopping twice waiting for the elephant to come closer. It is not clear when it happened. The clip drew negative comments from viewers.

The maximum punishment is one month in prison and a fine of 1000 baht. The driver had also violated another law against cruelty to animals, it said. Mr. Kanchit did not mention the woman seen filming the elephant. Wild elephants are frequently seen on the roads up to Khao Yai National Park.

20. Killer elephant shot on rampage (Cambodia)

Khmer Times – 10.4.2017

Mondulkiri provincial authorities have shot and killed an elephant two days after it trampled its owner to death. The elephant destroyed seven houses before it was shot. Provincial governor Svay Sam Eang ordered police to kill the animal when it walked out of the forest and terrified villagers as it destroyed homes.

The bull elephant named A Tork was more than 70 years old and had worked in the tourist industry for many years. Its owner, Cheung Tiem, 45, took him when he was young from the forest where he had been living wild. The elephant threw Mr. Tiem off his back and stomped on him in a fit of anger during the mating season.

According to Fauna and Flora International, there are now between 400 and 600 wild elephants in Cambodia, with the main concentration in the southwestern Cardamom Mountains and the eastern plains of Mondulkiri province.

21. Training for estimating elephant numbers conducted (Karnataka, India)

The Hindu – 29.4.2017

The Forest Department, on Saturday, conducted a training programme for field staff and volunteers for estimation of elephant numbers exercise scheduled to be held from May 16 to 19 across the country. Around 360 field staff and 60 volunteers participated in the programme, where senior officers of the department and researchers in wildlife offered training.

Dileep Kumar Das, Director, Elephant Project, said the estimation is conducted once in five years. The exercise would include one indirect and two direct methods. Sample block count and waterhole count are the direct methods, while line transect dung count is the indirect method. During the four-day estimation, the first would be spent providing basic information about the terrain and forest blocks to be covered.

On the second day, volunteers and staff would take up the counting of elephants spotted at respective blocks along the GPS location and other details of the mammal. Line transect dung count would happen on the third day, where elephant dung in the respective blocks would be counted. On the final day, participants would sit at one point such as a water hole, salt lick point or an open area and take photos of the elephants visiting these places. They would classify the elephants they spot on the basis of gender and age during the estimation, the experts said.

22. Safety worries as wild elephants steal from trucks (Thailand)

The Nation – 30.5.2017

Aggressive wild elephants are robbing fruit trucks and raising safety concerns in Prachuap Khiri Khan's Hua Hin district. Several people have recounted scary moments when giant pachyderms have come so close to them that they have been afraid they may cause physical harm.

Suwan Kaewpontrang, a pineapple agent, said: "Two nights ago, a big elephant with tusks cut in front of my truck and blocked my way. Then, it used its trunk to grasp pineapples into its mouth." He said the giant pachyderm knocked a wing mirror off and dented his six-wheeled truck.

He said they could not call for help because the cell-phone signal was dead. Fortunately, a police car drove past the incident and helped alert officials of the Kaeng Krachan National Park who rescued the family.

23. Tigers kill six elephants in Kerala's Wayanad as drought triggers fierce water war (India)

Hindustan Times – 6.6.2017

Eighteen elephants have died in Kerala's Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary over the past four months, including at least six in tiger attacks that officials say could have been triggered by bitter turf wars over scarce water.

Officials say large-scale migration of animals from nearby Bandipur and Mudumali wildlife parks to the Wayanad sanctuary in search of water amid a debilitating drought have probably brought things to a head. While six elephants were killed by tigers, two tusked elephants died fighting each other. Tiger attacks on elephants are rare because the latter move in large herds.

"This year Wayanad is witnessing a mass influx of wild animals. Naturally high density of animals is bound to trigger intense fights between them," said Wayanad wildlife warden Dhanesh Kumar.

Wayanad witnessed 12 elephant deaths during the corresponding period last year. The current drought has been caused by successive failed monsoons. The southwest monsoon was deficient by 33.7% and the northeast monsoon less by 60%. A majority of the state's 44 rivers are also either dry or near-dry.

24. Captive elephants in Burma may be released to boost numbers

The Times – 10.6.2017

Hundreds of unemployed elephants in Burma, laid off from the once-booming timber trade, have emerged as potential saviours of the animal population. One of the largest surviving wild elephant populations in Asia is being pushed to the brink as hunters feed demand for their hides in neighbouring China.

Burma has just over 1000 left in the wild. Among the solutions being discussed is a proposal to release captive elephants, laid off after a slump in the timber trade, back into the wild. Burma has the world's largest captive elephant population, at about 5000.

Campaigners have spotted an opportunity. Three thousand of the captive elephants are state-owned. Many of the 2000 privately held animals are kept in poor condition, however, and it is these that activists are targeting.