

News Briefs

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1. Hanging solar fence to prevent jumbo menace (Karnataka, India)

The Star of Mysore – 2.1.2019

The installation of hanging solar fences by the Forest Department to prevent wild elephant menace in the fringe villages of Saragur Forest Range has been yielding good results and proving successful. The Department has taken up the installation of stainless hanging solar fencing in a big scale in the forest areas that borders villages.

As farmers and villagers residing near Nugu Dam backwaters and Chikkadevammanabetta areas were severely affected by jumbo menace, the Department decided to install hanging solar fence on a pilot basis in various parts of Saragur Forest Range. The Department has installed 15 to 20-foot high pillars every 15 feet from where stainless steel wires hang. The wires that dangle from these pillars do not touch the ground level.

Solar power is passed on to the wires and when an elephant comes in contact with the wires, it gets mild shocks that do not pose any danger to its life. The solar fencing designed to fight elephant menace, is proving extremely beneficial in the region. The solar fencing is slightly different from the way it is done at other places. This mild shock acts as a repellent for the intruding animal and it leaves the place as soon as it recovers.

2. 11 Sumatran elephants die in Indonesia's Aceh province throughout 2018

Xinhua – 3.1.2019

Eleven Sumatran elephants have died from poaching activities, conflict with humans and natural causes throughout 2018, lower than the

recorded 13 in the previous year. Head of Aceh BKSDA Sapto Aji Prabowo said regency that recorded the most death of the protected animal last year was East Aceh with 4 cases. It was followed by Aceh Besar with 3 cases. From the 11 deaths, 3 were caused by elephant conflicts with humans, 3 by poaching activities and 5 by natural causes.

Among the tragic elephant deaths were two in East Aceh and Bireuen regencies as they were found with their tusks already gone. One of them was allegedly being poisoned that led to its death. Risk of decreasing elephant population was growing due to expansion of plantation areas, shrinking their habitat and prompting them to commit conflicts with humans.

3. Elephants slaughtered by Sri Lankan trains a disturbing new trend

9 News – 7.1.2019

The massive development launched across the country to cater to the needs of tourists has contributed to a tragic outcome for Sri Lanka's endangered elephant population. A growing number of elephants in Sri Lanka are being slaughtered by fast-moving trains, as the animal's natural habitat has rapidly shrunk over the past decade.

Terrible and graphic images of pregnant female elephants and young calves killed by passenger trains have repeatedly emerged from Sri Lanka last year. According to Department of Wildlife figures, 15 elephants were killed by trains in 2018, almost more than double the previous year. Total elephant deaths in 2018 numbered 273, up from 256 in 2017.

Sri Lanka elephant experts are concerned the Sri Lankan government is not doing enough to protect elephants, which are a huge drawcard for millions of tourists who visit the country. Accusatory fingers are also being pointed at ill-disciplined train drivers failing to obey speed limits during the night, when elephants might be seeking warmth from the tracks.

4. Siren vehicle patrol in mobilisation to chase away rogue elephants in Jhapa (Nepal)

The Himalayan Times – 22.1.2019

The Division Forest Office Jhapa has mobilised an armed patrol team with siren-equipped vehicle, to chase away wild tuskers in Buddhashanti Rural Municipality. The safety measure was put in place after a herd of wild elephants continued demolishing houses of local people and eating up their crops.

Around 13 wild elephants inhabiting the community forest in the area were terrorising locals especially in the evening time, said Sitaram Bastola, a local of Buddhashanti Rural Municipality-3. He shared that the mobilisation of a seven-member armed forest security personnel with well-appointed vehicle from Division Office has given a respite to the local people.

5. Forest rangers work to drive away hungry elephants (Vietnam)

Vietnam Plus – 29.1.2019

Forest rangers of Dinh Quan district in the southern province of Dong Nai have been provided with equipment to monitor and drive away wild elephants that have been destroying local households' crops since the start of this year. The equipment includes a drone, night-vision binoculars, cameras, long-beam lights, hand-held loudspeakers, protective footwear, and raincoats.

Nguyen Van Chieu, head of the district's forest ranger team, said about 14 wild elephants, in groups of two or three, have approached households in Hamlet 5, Thanh Son commune,

Dinh Quan district, to search for food, salt, and water. Since early 2019, there have been 11 incidents of elephants intruding upon crop fields of local households, he said, adding that Dong Nai's forest ranger department has built a 50 km electric fence system and is asking for permission to set up another 20 km to prevent wild elephants from coming into the area. Only some 100 wild elephants remain in Vietnam, with most living in Dak Lak, Dong Nai, and Nghe An provinces.

6. Thailand claims world's first cancer operation and intravenous chemotherapy for elephant

Thai PBS World – 21.1.2019

Thai veterinarians have successfully removed a 5-kg cancerous tumor from the intestines of a female elephant and, later, applied intravenous chemotherapy until the animal was cleared of cancer in what could be claimed as the world's first case of successful cancer treatment of an elephant.

Sarun Chansitthivech, manager of the Lampang-Krabi elephant conservation centre of the National Elephant Institute, has attributed the successful operation and follow-up intravenous therapy to good cooperation from veterinary faculties of Kasetsart, Chiang Mai and Chulalongkorn universities which have provided necessary equipment used during the operation process.

With the equipment sent from various veterinary faculties, the veterinarians found a big tumor in the intestines of Thongdee, which was eventually diagnosed as cancerous, said Sarun, adding that an operation was performed to remove the cancerous tumor.

7. Five elephants saved from muddy pond (Thailand)

The Bangkok Post – 19.1.2019

Five wild elephants, including three calves, were rescued safely from a farm pond in Khon Buri district on Saturday afternoon after getting stuck in the muddy water for hours. The drama

took place at a pond behind Nong Sai village at around 10 am on Saturday. Wichit Kitwirat, chief of Khon Buri district, led officials from Thap Lan National Park and soldiers to the site after being alerted by a local resident that five elephants had got stuck there.

Residents and officials believed the animals might have wandered over from the national park in search of crops at nearby farms and stumbled into the pond late Friday night. As the pond was deep and its edge was clay soil, it was difficult for the elephants to make their way out. Local residents joined officials in digging a pathway for the elephants to walk out as the animals looked exhausted. Initially, the elephants did not move as they appeared to be spooked by seeing so many people gathered around.

While trapped in the pond, the biggest elephant was seen trying unsuccessfully to help the smaller ones get out. Finally, at around 2 pm, the pachyderm noticed the new pathway and led the others out. Once clear of the pond, the five elephants were seen running through cassava farms and back to the forest.

8. Farmer sent to jail for electrocuting elephant (Tamil Nadu, India)

The Times of India – 31.1.2019

In a landmark judgment, the Coimbatore judicial magistrate court on Tuesday sentenced a farmer to two-year rigorous imprisonment for electrocuting a wild elephant in 2009. The electric fence on the farmer's field was transmitting high power than the permitted level, resulting in the electrocution of the elephant.

On March 3, 2009, forest officers found a wild elephant dead on a patta field owned by Raju Kumarappa Gowder at Periyanaickenpalayam. The carcass was lying right next to the electric fence erected around the field. During the postmortem it was found that the elephant was in good health but died of cardiac arrest. A portion of the trumpet also had burn signs, proving that it was a case of electrocution. The forest department also proved that the farmer had illegally powered

his electric fence with the electricity provided to him for domestic consumption.

9. Elephants' love for liquor takes a heavy toll on human life (Jharkhand, India)

The Gulf News – 2.2.2019

Elephants' love for alcohol has resulted in alarming rise in attacks on human population in recent months, prompting the authorities to advise them against storing intoxicants at home. The tribal villagers in Jharkhand have been surviving by brewing liquor from mahua, a forest product used for preparing liquor at home and available in plenty in the nearby forests.

But villagers' move to store these intoxicating stuff at home is now proving costlier as the rampaging elephants too have now developed a taste for these for this locally-made alcohol. The desperate tuskers are now attacking villages and damaging homes after smelling scents of this alcohol wafting through the air in the jungle, which is their homes. Unable to find them, the elephants either eat away the grains stored in the homes or kill the villagers, reports said.

On Saturday morning again, a herd of some 15 elephants attacked a village in Jharkhand's Simdega block and damaged five homes before eating away grains stored there. They also trampled one woman to death while other villagers managed to escape after listening to the alarms. In December again, a herd of 22 elephants raided many villages in three districts of Jharkhand and killed five villagers.

According to an official reports, more than 1000 people have been killed by the herds of elephant since the state was carved out of Bihar in November 2000.

10. Elephants face 'time bomb' in Bangladesh land clash with Rohingya refugees

Reuters – 6.2.2019

Standing atop an elephant watchtower on the outskirts of the sprawling Rohingya refugee

settlement in southeast Bangladesh, Nur Islam takes great pride in keeping his people safe. Islam is one of 570 Rohingya on the Elephant Response Team, known locally as the tusk force, who are on duty every night to look out for elephants coming into the camps.

After about 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar into Bangladesh 18 months ago and set up camp, they realized they were not only at risk from monsoons and cyclones but also elephants, as they were blocking a migration path, with 13 people killed in six months.

Raquibul Amin, Bangladesh representative for IUCN, said as a quick fix in February 2018 they built 95 towers and trained a team to watch, raise the alarm and guide elephants out of camps. Kutupalong, the largest refugee camp, was well known as a corridor for elephants moving between Myanmar and Bangladesh in winter to find food and shelter, breaking obstacles in their way which led to human conflicts.

Islam said his job was to keep watch at night and if he saw an elephant to call team members on duty in other watch-towers who would come to help drive the elephant out of the camp using megaphones and a high-powered search light.

11. Human-elephant conflict kills 1713 people, 373 pachyderms in 3 years (India)

The Hindu – 9.2.2019

In the three years between 2015–2018, human-elephant conflict caused 1713 human and 373 elephant deaths by unnatural causes, including electrocution and poaching. Experts say various factors, including habitat disturbance and urbanisation, could be the cause of the alarming rise in unnatural human and animal casualties.

Electrocution of elephants is a particular cause for concern in managing India's elephant population. Deaths caused by electrocution stood at 226, contributing to 60.6% of deaths since 2015. In comparison, elephant deaths by all other causes, including train accidents, poaching and poisoning, added up to 147.

Ajay Desai (WWF-India) explained that human-elephant conflict in West Bengal dates back three decades. "In the 1980s, elephants in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary would be confined to the Dalma hills, as food and water was available for them. When cultivation of paddy began in the plains near the hills, elephants began moving downwards to raid crops. Villagers chased them away and elephants began moving all the way to the southern portion of West Bengal," he said.

12. Sri Lanka gets its first data-based elephant distribution map

Mongabay – 15.2.2019

Researchers have now produced a countrywide, data-based distribution map of Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) for the country. This isn't just Sri Lanka's first such map, the researchers say it's also the first evidence-based distribution map of Asian elephants for any of the 13 range countries. Previous distribution estimates either covered smaller areas within host countries, or were based on "guesswork and conjecture,".

To find out where elephants occur in Sri Lanka, Prithviraj Fernando, an elephant expert at Sri Lanka's Centre for Conservation and Research, and his colleagues divided the country into a grid with nearly 2750 cells, each 25 km² in area. The researchers interviewed three residents per grid cell.

The majority of Sri Lanka's elephants live outside protected areas, the study found. There, they jostle for space with humans in landscapes consisting of forests and scrubland intermixed with farmland and villages and towns.

13. Wild elephants ravage coconut plantation in Pekanbaru (Indonesia)

Antara News – 18.2.2019

A herd of wild Sumatran elephants ravaged a coconut plantation in Pekanbaru, Riau Province, on Monday morning. Some 13 elephants entered the plantation. The elephants were first spotted by local residents, and they later entered Nababan's

plantation. Hundreds of seedlings and some 20 four-year-old coconut trees were eaten and damaged by the elephants. The wild elephants had entered and destroyed his plantations thrice so far.

In dealing with this human-elephant conflict, the Aceh Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) officers attempted to drive out the jumbo animals from the village area. However, the wild Sumatran elephants could still be spotted around the village's area that they had trespassed into several weeks ago.

14. Elephants in a reserve forest along India-Bangladesh border struggle for survival

Mongabay – 19.2.2019

A tiny reserve forest in Assam along a fenced stretch of the India-Bangladesh border is facing a unique predicament. Bereft of a male elephant, the population of six remaining border-cruising female elephants in the wildlife haven could soon collapse, warn researchers.

Reeling under human-elephant conflict, the Patharia Hills Reserve Forest, the size of Panjim, the capital of India's smallest state, is a mere 76 km²-slice, hugging Sylhet district in eastern Bangladesh. The reserve forest lies in southern Assam's Karimganj district.

A fragmented herd of six, all-female elephants move between the two countries using this section, passing through the reserve forest, fringed by paddy fields and tea gardens. Their migratory corridor runs from Bangladesh side of the reserve forest (RF) to neighbouring states of Mizoram and Tripura traversing the RF in Assam, the study says.

The last male elephant died around 2012. The appeal to government authorities and NGOs is to aid translocation of a male elephant to the reserve forest to stabilise the population, otherwise, the population may collapse. There were 30 to 40 elephants in 1984. From that figure, the numbers came down to seven or eight, about seven to eight years ago and now there are only six of them.

15. How a sugar-loving elephant took India's conservation efforts to tusk (Tamil Nadu, India)

The South China Morning Post – 25.2.2019

A wandering wild elephant raiding crops in southern India has put the country's conservation efforts in the spotlight. The animal, nicknamed Chinna Thambi was captured in late January near human settlements that are close to a wildlife corridor in the state of Tamil Nadu. Relocated to a forest more than 100 km away, the 25-year-old male elephant then walked all the way back to the spot where he had initially been caught.

The crop-raiding elephant was captured the second time by luring him with his favourite food of jackfruit and sugar cane in a seven-hour-long operation. The elephant's preference for fields over forest has been a source of tension in recent weeks, with the drama playing out on social media and in newspaper headlines as Indians call for better conservation measures.

The case eventually reached the Chennai High Court, which ordered that the animal be taken into captivity. "He's almost a domestic animal now," said Ganesan, field director at Anamalai Tiger Reserve. "Chinna Thambi is docile and does not attack humans, unlike other wild elephants. He even prefers daylight to darkness in captivity."

16. Across China: Wild elephant's "hit and run" in Yunnan Xinhua

Xinhua – 27.2.2019

Wang, a resident of Jinghong City in southwest China's Yunnan Province, was attacked by the male elephant on Wednesday morning near the Wild Elephant Valley, a tourist attraction in Yunnan's Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture.

"I was picking vegetables in my field, when the elephant ran towards me all of a sudden," Wang said. "When I tried to run away the elephant rolled me in its trunk and lifted me off the ground. I grabbed a tusk and screamed, scaring the

elephant away”. After Wang scared the elephant away, she painfully crawled to a highway 10 m away, stopped a passing car and went back home. Her husband later called police, and sent her to a hospital. Her injuries are not life-threatening, according to doctors.

Wang is the latest victim to suffer an attack from the wild species in Yunnan. Last year, a villager was injured by a wild Asian elephant while picking mushrooms.

17. An endangered giant: Asian elephants spotted in rural Chinese village

CGTN – 6.3.2019

Since the first sighting of an elephant in Heishan village, southwest China’s Yunnan Province in May 2014, villagers have encountered wild Asian elephants, an animal listed under China’s class A protection, with increasing regularity. “The elephants usually come here and every time they come they will stay here for a couple of days and sometimes for a month or so,” said Yang Suoqie.

In China, Wild Asian elephants are only found in the south of Yunnan province. The main problem that these giants face is the competition for sources in populated Yunnan. Human-elephant conflicts inevitably occur. Officials have launched conservation-based policies to decrease the conflicts. They confiscate all firearms, compensate farmers for their financial loss, build fences and encourage farmers to grow crops that elephants don’t like.

So far, the population of the wild Asian elephant in China is around 300. It has been listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species since 1986.

18. Forest department to use drones to track rogue elephants in Hassan (Karnataka, India)

The Deccan Chronicle – 7.3.2019

The Hassan forest department plans to use a night vision drone to keep tabs on the movement

of elephant herds, especially in the Sakleshpur region, where they often stray into human habitats, leading to frequent man-animal encounters. Forest officials hope to deploy two more drones during the day as well to help them drive the straying jumbos back into the jungles.

Elephant researcher, Vinod Krishnan of the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), finds the night vision drone a safe option to locate elephants at night, pointing out that they can now be tracked even under a canopy of trees without causing them any harm.

The Forest Department had in collaboration with NCF started sending bulk SMS alerts to residents in Alur and Sakleshpur taluks on elephant presence in their areas a couple of years ago and had also installed signboards on their movement to curb man-elephant conflict in the region.

19. Sanctuary plan for Myanmar elephants in captivity to save them from conflict or performing for tourists

The South China Morning Post – 18.3.2019

Not long ago, elephants hauling logs through the jungles of Myanmar – home to the largest captive population of Asian elephants – for the country’s thriving timber trade were a common sight. However, in 2014 the government imposed a ban on the export of raw timber, allowing only high-end finished timber products to be sold abroad. Almost overnight, the nearly 3000 elephants employed by government-run Myanmar Timber Enterprise, and their mahouts, were made redundant.

With no funds made available to care for the animals, many were forced to work for unethical tourism operators, put through cruel training to perform, or simply released into the wild.

Surviving life in the wild is tough for domesticated elephants. Hunting of elephants is rife, with poachers targeting them for their tusks and skin which, when ground into a powder, is a key ingredient in traditional medicine. Many have also died at the hands of villagers after

wreaking havoc in rural communities and tearing up farmland.

Now, however, hope is in sight after a historic agreement was signed in March between The Elephant Project and the Myanmar government to relocate elephants from areas where they can come into conflict with humans.

The project will start by relocating 10 to 15 animals to designated safe zones, but the Elephant Project has ambitious plans to provide sanctuary for many more of the country's captive elephants. A total of 5520 live in captivity, almost double the 3000 elephants estimated to live in the wild in Myanmar.

20. Wild elephant kills one in SW China

Xinhua – 26.4.2019

A wild Asian elephant killed a villager in southwest China's Yunnan Province, according to local authorities. The victim, surnamed Ming, was a 37-year-old resident in Qiaojia County, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Region, who was attacked by a wild Asian elephant in a mountain forest on his way to work at around 6:40 am. Two of Li's co-workers were riding motorcycles with him when the accident happened, and they reported to local police after rushing out of the forest. Local authorities have strengthened surveillance of the hit-and-run elephant and warned residents to stay alert.

Wild Asian elephants are under Class A protection in China, with a population of about 300, mainly scattered in Yunnan. With strengthened protection efforts for the environment and wildlife, the number of wild Asian elephants has been growing in recent years.

21. Elephant herd, trapped in tank, rescued in Kodagu (Karnataka, India)

The Hindu – 11.4.2019

A herd of five wild elephants, including a calf, which was trapped in a water tank on a private land in Palangala village in Virajpet taluk of

Kodagu district, was rescued by the staff of Forest Department. The elephants were desperate to get out of the tank and had struggled for hours since dawn. This is the third such incident this month in the region. On receiving information, the staff reached the spot to rescue the herd. Though there was no danger to the elephants as the depth of the water was hardly 5 feet, the herd, including the largest member, could not get out of the steep tank, and had started to panic.

They used an earthmover to level the embankment and the elephants were able to walk out of the tank and race towards the jungle. He said the nearest forest was about 1.5 km from the spot, though the deemed forest lands, including the Devara Kadus or sacred groves, were about 50 – 100 m from the spot.

22. Wild elephants in danger (Bangladesh)

The Daily Star – 20.4.2019

A big portion of the wild elephant population in southern Cox's Bazar is at risk of being wiped out, experts say. The mammals are confined to small patches of hilly forests in Inani-Shilkhali area as Rohingya settlements have taken over their migration corridors that lead to parts of Bandarban and Myanmar. Elephant corridors are strips of land that the large animals use to move from one habitat patch to another.

According to the 2016 elephant census conducted by IUCN, 63 wild elephants were found in the south forest division of Cox's Bazar while another 205 were spotted in the country's other regions, including Bandarban, Sherpur and Mymensingh. The elephant is a critically endangered species in Bangladesh, shows the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

There are two major corridors for elephant migration in the south division. Both are now blocked due to unplanned settlements and establishments. More than one lakh acres of forestland fall under the jurisdiction of the Cox's Bazar forest department (south division). The IUCN has no data on the north division, he mentioned.

As the refugee camps were set up on the elephants' migration corridors, at least 15 people were killed in wild elephant attacks in and around the camps in the last year. One lakh Rohingyas need to be shifted elsewhere if the elephants' migration corridors are to be cleared. Already trained around 600 Rohingyas to work as volunteers, who would deal with wild elephants that come near the camps. The wild elephants will be more vulnerable in the near future if the government does not take steps to prevent the refugees from collecting firewood from the forest.

23. Villagers trained on elephant repellent techniques (Nagaland, India)

The Eastern Mirror – 5.4.2019

Basing on information about the presence of wild elephants numbering around 30 with 3 calves under Woroko village area jurisdiction in Wokha district, Wildlife Division, Dimapur, organised a training programme on mitigation of human-elephant conflict in Woroko village council hall on April 3.

The team demonstrated various elephant repellent techniques which included erecting fences with ropes and pieces of cloth greased with dried chilly and tobacco powder, lighting blocks of dried chilli to emit a choking smoke, catapult to projectile fire cracker etc to ward off the wild elephants from human habitation, plantation areas and fields.

A press release stated that the elephant repellent materials were also distributed to the villages. The release stated that demonstration on mitigation techniques and distribution of elephant repellents materials were carried out to prepare the villagers minimise and prevent loss of lives and properties.

24. Sanctuary chief spurns idea for taming Kanchanaburi's roving pachyderms (Thailand)

The Nation – 11.3.2019

The head of Salak Phra Wildlife Sanctuary in Kanchanaburi, where wild elephants have

caused problems for their human neighbours, has rejected the idea of giving the animals new sources of food nearer the communities, fearing it would only invite more risk. Paitoon Intarabutra said he attended a public meeting on the issue to point out that there had been no further problems so far this season.

He said rangers dispatched to survey water sources within the sanctuary found there was ample for the animals throughout the dry season. There were also vast stretches of grassland where they can graze, which he pointed out was a preferable choice than introducing food sources close to communities. Paitoon said he would recruit outside help to erect electrical barriers in areas prone to invasions by elephants and rangers would patrol regularly to ensure public safety.

25. Several small steps: Elephant calves caught on camera in Cambodia

Phys.org – 30.4.2019

First, the good news. Footage from the 46 camera traps deployed by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) in Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains is giving us a privileged insight into the lives of the Asian elephants that roam through in one of the continent's last remaining forest wildernesses. Genetic analysis of elephant dung undertaken by our partner, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, leads us to believe that the core population in the southern Cardamoms comprises around 50 elephants. And our camera traps have provided us with intimate footage of some of these magnificent beasts, including their calves.

Unfortunately, our monitoring has also revealed that the remaining elephants are under severe pressure, not least from the growing use of snares, a disturbing trend linked to the increased urban appetite for bushmeat. Asian elephant calves are particularly vulnerable; their smaller legs mean that they are more prone to serious injury from wire snares, and they are more likely to die of their wounds. One baby elephant caught on camera in late 2017 walked with a pronounced limp and had a badly swollen foreleg – apparently the result of a deep wound inflicted by a snare.

26. Yunnan to build elephant “dining area” to solve human-elephant conflicts (China)

Xinhua – 9.3.2019

Southwest China’s Yunnan Province will build a “dining area” for wild Asian elephants to solve conflicts between the endangered animal and local residents. The dining area will be located in a 137.5 ha habitat area for 18 wild Asian elephants in Menghai County of Xishuangbanna.

An elephant habitat reconstruction project will also be launched, while the 51-hectare dining area will grow corn, sugarcane, bamboo and bananas. “Protecting the lives and property of local residents is key to Asian elephant conservation, which is also the most difficult part,” said an official with the forestry bureau.

Wild Asian elephants, mainly found in Yunnan, are under Class A protection in China. With stronger environmental and wildlife protection efforts, the number of wild Asian elephants in the country has grown to about 300.

27. Can palm oil plantations be elephant-friendly? (Malaysia)

Eco-Business – 6.5.2019

Oil palm plantations in the state of Sabah, Malaysian Borneo can lose millions from damaged crops due to elephant raids, while smallholder farmers can lose their livelihoods overnight to an elephant herd. Elephants may be killed in retaliation, with 25 pygmy elephants found dead in Sabah this year, and over 100 elephants deaths in the last eight years.

As conflict between humans and elephants worsens as demand for palm oil pushes farmers further into elephant habitat, what does the future look like for this endangered species? Switzerland-based non-profit Earthworm Foundation, formerly known as The Forest Trust, has established a partnership between palm oil farmers and the government for the steps to take when elephants enter plantations.

The programme includes educating farmers in Ulu Muanad in Beluran, Sabah, on elephant biology, so they understand that the animals are entering their plantations because their forest homes have been cut down.

28. Injured pygmy elephant nursed back to health (Malaysia)

The Star Online – 3.6.2019

An injured juvenile male pygmy elephant, which villagers thought was dead, is being nursed back to health. The elephant was found by Perdana Estate workers in Sabah’s central Telupid district, after which they alerted wildlife rangers. Sabah Wildlife Department director Augustine Tuuga said rangers went to the site and were surprised to find that the elephant was still alive.

“It turned out that the elephant had a wound on its back that was infested with maggots. Our rangers and vets immediately treated the wound as the elephant could not even stand,” he said when contacted. Tuuga said the elephant was aged between five and seven years and that they were not sure what had caused the injury.

The elephant was still not able to stand on its own. Once it is well and can walk, it will be released back to the wild. Borneo Pygmy elephants are critically endangered animals. It is estimated that there are no more than 1500 of them left in the world.

29. To minimise deaths, geophones along railway tracks to tap elephant movement (Uttarakhand, India)

The Times of India – 16.6.2019

In a bid to avert incidents of elephants being killed by speeding trains, scientists and wildlife experts in the state have started laying geophones along railway tracks, frequented by the animal, which will trigger an alert whenever it senses a pachyderm movement. The frequency data is then sent to a central server, which is monitored by the patrolling teams.

A geophone is a ground motion transducer that is used by geophysicists and seismologists to convert ground movement into voltage. Bivash Pandav, senior scientist, Wildlife Institute of India, said, “We used movements of elephants at Rajaji National Park to gauge the effectiveness of the device. The geophones gave us a specific kind of signal whenever an elephant came close to the railway tracks. We are using the Earthquake Warning System which is deployed alongside Delhi metro lines.”

The pilot project, aimed at minimizing elephant deaths along railway tracks, is being conducted between Kansro and Motichur railway stations. Notably, 26 incidents of elephant deaths have been reported in the past three decades on this stretch, infamous as the ‘killer track’.

30. Deadlier than guns: Explosive bait haunts Sri Lanka’s elephants

Mongabay – 20.6.2019

Residents of the farming village of Irudeniyaagama in Sri Lanka’s North Western province were taken by surprise last week when they saw a wild elephant calf trying to enter a house. They gave chase, but instead of returning to the nearby forest, the calf next tried to find shelter inside another house. A closer look showed that the calf’s mouth was split open and all its teeth shattered. It had an infected wound with pus oozing from it.

The injury was caused by an improvised explosive device hidden in fodder bait used by villagers to hunt animals. Known locally as hakka patas, or “jaw exploder,” these devices are a combination of gunpowder and fragments of metal or rock packed tightly together. When bitten into or crushed inside an animal’s mouth, they explode, shattering the jaw and destroying the tongue and other soft tissue. The resulting infection can spread down through the esophagus, often leading to extremely painful deaths.

Unable to eat or drink, the victimized elephants gradually become weak and unable to follow the herd. They are soon left behind. If there is a

water hole nearby, they take refuge in them or, in cases like Irudeniyaagama, elephants would come closer to human settlements.

31. Illegal electric fences turn jumbo killers in Kerala (India)

The Times of India – 21.6.2019

Illegal high-voltage electric fences increasingly being put up around farm lands have turned into death traps for wild jumbos in the state. In a latest instance, the post-mortem of the carcass of a 25-year-old tusker found dead in a farmland at Kurichiad in Wayanad has revealed that the animal was electrocuted on an illegal power fence set up by a local resident. The elephant was found dead near a plantain farm 200 m away from the forest boundary.

According to animal welfare organisation Heritage Animal Task Force, as many as 16 wild elephants have been electrocuted this year in the state. Forest officials said instead of the solar-powered direct current energizer fences that are supposed to be used many people are connecting their fences to the domestic power lines leading to electrocution of wild animals.

While the normal electric fence gives the animals a sharp and short shock to animals, the illegal power fences connected to 220 V domestic power lines can be fatal even to large animals like elephants. Many people have been resorting to illegal power fences as solar fences require regular maintenance and often elephants break the fences using branches of trees.



Elephants in Minneriya National Park (Sri Lanka)