

News Briefs

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

The Times of India – 21.6.2019

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. According to animal welfare organisation Heritage Animal Task Force (HATF), 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. Also, the farm owners keep the illegal power fences active at night by connecting it to the domestic power line, making it difficult for forest officials to detect them during inspections. “Illegal power fences are becoming one of the biggest killers of wild elephants in the state.

2. Sri Lankans charged over traffic in baby elephants

France 24 – 25.6.2019

A senior Sri Lankan conservation official was among eight people charged Tuesday in

a landmark case over the capture and sale of dozens of baby elephants. Wildlife experts say about 40 calves may have been stolen from their herds during a 10-year period and sold for around \$ 125,000 each. The deputy director of the Wildlife Conservation Department and seven others were charged with 33 counts of capturing and possessing baby elephants in 2014-2015.

If convicted they face up to 20 years in jail. The practice stopped when the current government came to power in January 2015 and launched a crackdown. Recovered animals were moved to a state sanctuary for elephant orphans. The super-rich consider having a baby elephant at home as the ultimate status symbol. It was also a tradition by aristocrats to keep the animals, which are paraded at Buddhist temple festivals.

The illegal trade has been blamed for the drop in the elephant population, with conservationists saying mother elephants were often killed so the calf could be taken. Elephant conflict with humans near wildlife sanctuaries has led to the deaths of 375 people in the past five years, according to official figures.

3. Elephants killed over 2,300 people in last five years: Environment Ministry (India)

The Hindu – 28.6.2019

Responding to a query in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Environment Babul Supriyo says that last year alone, nearly 494 persons were killed by elephants. Over 2,300 people in India were killed by elephants while tigers claimed over 200 lives in the last five years. Nearly 494 persons were killed by the elephants last year alone. Minister of State (MoS) for Environment, Babul Supriyo said 2,398 people have died since 2014 up to

March 31, 2019 due to human-elephant conflict with West Bengal recording the maximum 403 deaths in last five years. West Bengal was closely followed by Nagaland where 397 persons were killed by the elephants while 349 people died in Jharkhand.

“The management of forest and wildlife is the responsibility of concerned State governments and incidence of animal-human conflicts are reported in various parts of the country from time to time. “However, the details of people who lost their lives by elephants and tigers are given. Deaths due to other wild animals are not collated by the Ministry,” the Minister said in the Lower house. The Ministry also listed out the steps taken to avoid human-wildlife conflicts. It said a scheme has been initiated to augment fodder and water for wild herbivores in protected/forest areas where poor habitat is known as the cause of significant human-wildlife conflict.

4. To save the giant from extinction (Bhutan)

Kuensel – 6.8.2019

Although a charismatic species with its critical role in shaping the forest ecosystems, research concluded the Asian elephant continues to face threats of extinction globally. To maintain a viable population of elephants in an improved habitat with reduced human-elephant conflict in Bhutan, the Elephant Conservation Action Plan from 2018 to 2028 was launched on July 31. The action plan aims to prevent habitat loss and improve the existing elephant habitat conditions.

Crop raiding was found to be the most prevalent form of human-elephant conflict, causing socio-economic losses to farmers in the south. In retaliation, few elephants died as a result of food poisoning and electrocution. To curb loss of lives and crops, the action plan identified the cause of conflicts, mapped the conflict hotspots, and identified strategic action towards mitigating the conflicts.

With less than 50,000 individuals in the wild around 13 range countries, the Asian elephant is listed as an endangered species under

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Elephants are protected under Schedule I of the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan 1995. The national elephant survey 2017 estimated a population of 678 elephants in the southern foothills.

5. Indian elephants washed away by surging rivers as floods wreak havoc in Kerala (India)

RT - 11.8.2019

Even some of the most powerful animals on the planet are falling victim to relentless flooding in southwest India, where elephants were washed away by rushing rivers in the state of Kerala. Torrential rains have caused widespread destruction in Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra, leaving more than 100 people dead and forcing thousands to evacuate their homes. The Kuntipuzha river, which flows through Silent Valley National Park, is one of several waterways that have burst their banks. As it raged through the park it swept away everything that stood in its path, including elephants.

Video shared on Twitter shows two or three of the majestic animals failing to fight against the rushing waters and being swept downstream. Monsoon rains, which fall from June to September, are a vital lifeline for Indian agriculture as they deliver 70% of the country’s rainfall. However, they also leave a trail of death and destruction in their wake every year. Last year, Kerala experienced its worst flooding in 100 years, claiming more than 200 lives.

6. India sees alarming fall in wild jumbo population

The Asian Age - 13.8.2019

With forests being encroached in the name of infrastructure development, the intimate connection between the wildlife and diverse ecosystem is constantly being disturbed. The deep wildlife crisis in the country is illustrated by the current situation of Asian elephants. Elephants enjoy the highest status of Schedule I species

in the Wildlife Protection Act of India, 1972, but unfortunately situation on the ground is completely different.

“It is disappointing that today, only about 27,000 wild elephants live in the country, as against a million a decade ago, which is a 98% fall in the population. India is home to over 50% of Asian elephants in the world, making it the last stronghold of these majestic creatures. They face the threat of shrinking forest ranges, habitat defragmentation, poaching, captivity, and anthropogenic pressure,” claimed Mr Kartick Satyanarayan. “Captivity of elephants is associated with the cultural history of India and is accepted. But it masks the sad reality of illegal live elephant trade across the country. Captive elephants are found to be suffering from health issues, like foot rot, arthritis and compromised nutrition. These elephants are worked to the point of exertion and once their health problems hinder their movement, they are disposed of,” he said.

The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 forbids the capture of new calves for captivity. Access to veterinary aid is a rarity, and the Wildlife SOS has been bringing critical medical aid to distressed elephants through its mobile veterinary unit.

7. Elephants are still dying at an alarming rate in Nepal

The Kathmandu Post – 13.8.2019

Even as the world marked World Elephant Day on Monday, pledging to protect the endangered species, Nepal continues to lose its elephant population at a rate faster than any other country that is host to the Asian elephant species. The country has an estimated population of 100 to 150 elephants, but every year, two to three elephants are killed in retaliatory actions by local communities, according to Dinesh Neupane, On average, Nepal is losing two percent of its elephant population every year, he said.

What makes these deaths more dangerous is that these fatalities are not due to natural deaths or poaching. All these elephants die in retaliatory acts: when locals shoot elephants that have

strayed into their property. Elephants are also electrocuted to death in electric fencing that locals put up to keep them away. Therefore, all these deaths are because of the negative interactions between elephants and humans.” These ‘negative interactions’, or human-elephant conflicts, are a major concern for elephant conservationists in the Tarai. Migratory herds from India also enter the Nepali plains, primarily in the east.

“Only 5.4% of the elephant’s historical and native habitat remains in the country. Much of their natural habitat has been fragmented due to human settlements and agricultural farmlands. We’ve also damaged their historical migratory routes,” said Neupane. “We have 45% forest cover and six protected areas in the Tarai but the forest areas are not connected, forcing the elephants to pass via human settlements and agriculture land.”

8. First-of-its-kind step! Seismic sensors, thermal cameras to check Indian Railways’ train-elephant collisions (India)

Financial Express – 14.8.2019

First-of-its-kind step to save elephants! In a bid to prevent elephants from being hit by Indian Railways’ trains passing through Rajaji Tiger Reserve (RTR) in Uttarakhand, authorities have come up with a plan. Soon, seismic sensors and thermal cameras will be installed near railway tracks to warn the train drivers of animal movement. This advance detection system will be installed along railway tracks passing through the reserve’s 18-km Kansro range, where in the last three decades, more than two dozens animals, mostly elephants, have been killed by trains.

A total of ten seismic sensors and thermal cameras will be installed along the railway tracks at six points in the range. The advance detection system will detect the slightest movement of the animals and inform officials at the central server facility. The data from the system will be reviewed at the facility and after confirming the presence of an elephant in the range, alerts will be generated for patrolling staff, the train’s loco pilot, the RTR administration and the nearest station.

The installation of the system has become all the more important following the electrification of the railway tracks passing through the range.

9. Conflict escalates between humans and elephants (China)

China Daily – 22.8.2019

When Wu Junhui visits Nanha, a community in Yunnan province, he always attracts crowds of curious villagers, whether he arrives in the small hours or during the day. Wu monitors elephants by using unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, and the first question the residents ask him is if he has seen one animal in particular, which some villagers refer to as the “naughty one”. The male Asian elephant, which Wu estimates weighs more than 2 metric tons, is worthy of its reputation. On Aug 4, it entered an urban area of Mengla county, where the Nanha community is located in Manzhuang village. Videos uploaded to the internet by local residents show the animal roaming the streets, leaving huge footprints in some unpaved areas, and even trying to climb over a low wall. These incidents are just two examples of the seemingly escalating conflict between humans and wild elephants in China.

In the past three decades, the number of elephants in China has doubled to about 300, and since 2013, they have caused more than 60 deaths and injuries. Damage to property caused by the animals from 2011 to last year is estimated at more than 170 million yuan (\$ 24.2 million), according to the Yunnan Forestry and Grassland Administration. Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture, is one of the elephants’ primary habitats. They can also be found in Pu’er and Lincang, Yunnan. Since 2014, the Yunnan provincial government has taken out insurance coverage against damage caused by wild animals.

Yunnan has also established 11 nature reserves with a total area of about 510,000 ha. Xiang Ruwu, head of the wildlife protection division of the Yunnan Forestry and Grassland Administration, said, “They have become important shelters for Asian elephants.” Nanha lies next to the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, which

includes seven subreserves that cover a total of more than 240,000 ha.

10. Positive steps for Asian elephants facing skinning threat

Phys.org – 22.8.2019

Researchers say Myanmar in particular has seen a devastating uptick in elephant deaths to feed the market for body parts. While these markets for non-ivory elephant products are still poorly understood, researchers believe the main driver is demand for medicinal products. To create these products elephant skin is ground to a powder and then combined with elephant fat to produce a paste used to treat skin fungi and infections, as well as intestinal disease in people. Elephant skin is also being used to make bracelets, with the subcutaneous fat layer cured and polished into beads and worn as jewellery.

The Asian elephant is officially classified as endangered and faces a perfect storm of threats. Habitat loss and expansion of human settlements and agriculture is leading to increasing conflict and elephant deaths. New markets for elephant parts, if unchecked, will compound the dangerous environment in which the species has to survive and will push it even closer to the brink of extinction.

The good news is that yesterday/on Wednesday governments provisionally agreed to expand international controls on trade in Asian elephants. This would mean that all countries involved in trade in Asian elephants would be required to take action—including strengthening legislation and enforcement—to prevent illegal trade in their parts and derivatives.

11. Country’s third elephant sanctuary will be built in Perak, says minister (Malaysia)

Malay Mail – 7.9.2019

The government will set up an elephant sanctuary on an area spanning 100 ha in Perak at a cost of about RM20 million. Minister of Water, Land and Natural Resources Dr. Xavier Jayakumar

said the move was part of an ongoing effort to conserve elephants, which were increasingly threatened due to human-elephant conflicts. “The government, in collaboration with the state government of Perak, has approved the proposal for the construction of the new sanctuary, which will be implemented under the 12th Malaysia Plan.

“A total of 1,118 complaints on human-elephant conflict have been recorded in Peninsular Malaysia between 2016 and 2018. It is estimated that there are 1,680 elephants in the peninsula, while about 2,000 are in Sabah and Sarawak. He also expressed his appreciation to the private sector, non-governmental organisations and private individuals for their help in the conservation of elephants and other wildlife and hoped that more would do the same.

EXIM Bank, for instance, sponsors RM 55,000 under its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative by providing two prosthetic legs for a female elephant named Elly as well as medicine and equipment for managing baby elephants.

12. Orphaned elephants find new home in Bago camp (Myanmar)

Myanmar Times – 17.10.2019

Nine orphaned elephants are now living comfortably in their new home in Winkabaw Elephant Conservation Camp in Bago Region, which used to be a logging area operated by state-run Myanmar Timber Enterprise. When the new government took over in 2016 and stopped timber production in the Bago Mountain Range, the area was converted into an elephant camp to take care of injured and ageing elephants from state-owned enterprises. Soon it has become a haven for orphaned elephants and now has nine. The latest addition is named Moe Moe Lwin, which arrived on Tuesday.

Moe Moe Lwin’s mother died when she was 10 months old and she was sent to be cared for by the Myanmar Timber Enterprise in Bago Region. Moe Moe Lwin and four other orphaned elephants in the sanctuary are the offspring of

domesticated elephants owned by the Myanmar Timber Enterprise while the remaining four others were wild elephants that were orphaned after poachers killed their mothers. The orphaned elephants are being trained for their eventual release into the jungle when they become adult. The orphans are housed in a two hectare area within the Winkabaw Elephant Camp. It is the only camp for orphan elephants in the country.

13. There’s been a series of elephant deaths in Sabah. And palm oil may be a cause (Malaysia)

Cilsos - 25.11.2019

Sometime at the end of September, anglers fishing at a river in Tawau spotted an elephant carcass floating in the river. Pictures of the carcass made went viral on social media, prompting the authorities to locate the carcass. Upon investigation of the body, the cause of death was determined to be due to some 70 shotgun wounds over the animal’s face, back and legs, believed to be shot at close range. Since then, another four elephant carcasses showed up in Beluran, Kinabatangan and Lahad Datu. Except for one, all the elephants died of unnatural causes, either from being shot at, poisoned, or being trapped in a mud-filled ditch.

Oil palm plantations might be a big factor behind these elephant deaths. Including the five cases we mentioned earlier, this year alone there have been 23 elephant deaths in Sabah. This is actually a big problem, as the elephants in Sabah are from an endangered subspecies of Asian elephants called Borneo pygmy elephants. Besides being distinguishable by their gentle natures, cute baby faces, plump bellies, oversized ears and tails so long that sometimes they drag on the ground as they walk, they are only found in Borneo (mostly Sabah) with an estimated 1,500 of their kind remaining in the wild.

With the Recent Deaths, Sabah is Starting to Look Seriously into a Plan to Save their Elephants. Sabah was said to have already completed the paper work for a 10-year action plan to increase conservation efforts for their elephants, and it is planned to be presented to the Cabinet by year’s

end for approval. But the government isn't the only one concerned. To minimize instances of HEC, some oil palm plantations in Kinabatangan are working together with a French environmental NGO known as HUTAN to establish an elephant corridor. The corridor, planned to link a plantation regularly visited by elephants to the Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, will involve a 100 m wide and 3 km long corridor.

14. Taming of wild elephants at Dubare camp (India)

The Deccan Herald - 25.11.2019

An elephant, captured in Chettalli, has now been released from the kraal. One of the three rogue elephants, which was confined to kraals, has now been released as it has been tamed. However, the elephant will be part of Dubare camp. The elephant was captured in Bettalli region in June this year and was being tamed by mahouts, confining it in an enclosure. The released elephant was captured during an operation carried out by the Forest Department near Coffee Board in Chettalli. The elephant was confined into the kraal for six months for training. The elephant has now turned calm and has been moving in Dubare camp and for grazing. It will be taken for a bath within a day or two, mahout Arune said.

Two other wild elephants, captured in Bandipur and Hassan, are still being confined to the kraals and are undergoing training, from the last four months. Initially, both the elephants were ferocious in nature and were making futile attempts to break the kraals. Day by day, they started responding to the mahout and are now receiving food from the hands of the mahout.

One of these elephants is a lone tusker and has been attracting the onlookers. Another wild elephant captured from Bandipur is an 18-year-old pachyderm and is now eating paddy, grass, leaves, jowar and jaggery. Veterinary officer Dr. Mujib said that the male elephants wander in search of female elephants. Among the tamed male elephants in the Dubare, one elephant has left the camp and has entered into the forest area and the officials have been making attempts to

bring it back to the camp. Tamed elephants from the camp have been to the forest during earlier occasions and have returned as well, he added.

15. GPS radio collars for elephants to stop them from entering Kumbh (India)

The New Indian Express - 12.11.2019

Uttarakhand state forest department has identified 10 'rogue elephants' which will be fitted with radio collars and will be monitored 24 x 7 to prevent them from entering human populace, especially Kumbh 2021. Parag Nigam, a scientist from Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun who attended a meeting on the issue said, "We have presentation to state government officials about possible solution. There were few points agreed upon to tackle the problem. These radio collars will be GPS fitted to get the real-time location of the pachyderms on mobile applications of forest officials from anywhere in the world.

The work is proposed to start on December 1, 2019, and to be completed in the same month. The report prepared by the state forest department indicated that the situation of elephants treading into human settlements have become a problem, especially in Haridwar district. Over 100 drones are said to be monitoring the congregation round the clock along with 1500 CCTVs. Along with the drones, the police have also planned to make use of LCD screens and face recognition cameras to monitor crowds and traffic. Routes for paddle rickshaw and auto-rickshaw will be separate to avoid traffic congestion at the site which is chosen to be at Shyampur bank of river Ganga in Haridwar.

16. Global experts meet to discuss conservation of Asian elephants (Malaysia)

New Straits Times - 4.12.2019

A group of elephant specialists from around the world will gather in the state capital for three days starting today to discuss the priorities and strategies for the conservation of Asian elephants. Dubbed as the 10th meeting of the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG), the

event is jointly hosted by AsESG and the Sabah Wildlife Department.

The meeting is being organised at a resort here in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. AsESG members, government officials from all 13 Asian elephant range countries, special invitees from across the globe and funding agencies will attend the meeting. AsESG is a global network of specialists concerned with the study, monitoring, management, and conservation of Asian elephants in its 13 range states across Asia. They are aiming to promote the long-term conservation of Asia's elephants and the recovery of the species populations. Tomorrow, Sabah Chief Minister Mohd Shafie Apdal and his deputy Datuk Christina Liew are also expected to launch the meeting.

Following the dwindling population of elephants in Sabah, with more than 20 of them being poached or them killing each other this year, the state government is hoping to collaborate with all stakeholders in saving the species. In 2002, the elephant population in Sabah was estimated to be between 1,100 and 1,600. Sabah Wildlife Department will be doing a survey worth RM 1.5 million on pygmy elephants and orangutans for 24 months ending 2022.

17. IOCL donates ₹50 lakh for GPS collars to Koundinya elephants (India)

The Hindu - 27.12.2019

The Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) has donated ₹50 lakh to the A.P. Forest Department for tagging wild elephants in the Koundinya wildlife sanctuary with GPS collars. The sanctuary is spread over Bangarupalem, Palamaner and Kuppam mandals of Chittoor district, and is flanked by Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Senior forest officials of Chittoor West Division said that on Thursday, a team of IOCL personnel from Chennai visited Chittoor and made a donation as part of the oil major's corporate social responsibility (CSR) outreach. Officials said that there are about 35 wild elephants in Koundinya wildlife sanctuary, split into various herds. The main objective of tagging the wild elephants

with GPS collars is to track their movements and prevent them from raiding crops.

The collars, which are expensive, would be fitted to leaders of each herd. A herd is led by its oldest female elephant called a matriarch. The movement of the herds would be monitored through a separate app. Whenever a herd comes close to fields or if they cross the forest fringe areas and come close to human habitations, the GPS collars would send alerts to elephant trackers, who will rush to the spot in no time to divert the elephants towards the forest.

18. Musth does not necessarily give younger, male Asian elephants an edge (India)

The Hindu - 28.12.2019

A seven-year study of Asian elephants from Nagarahole-Bandipur, a population centred around the Kabini region, yields interesting patterns of male elephant behaviour when in musth. Hormonal levels give musth males high energy and aggression levels and this state is often correlated with a propensity to mate. In two papers published in *Journal of Mammology* and *Gajah*, the team from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, probes how this works in the Kabini population.

When an elephant is in a musth state, its urine shows increased testosterone levels. Also, temporin, a thick secretion, flows from the temporal ducts situated midway between their eyes and ears. Sometimes, the elephant dribbles urine as well. They hardly feed during musth and are more focussed on finding fertile females. They move from female to female, checking if she is fertile or not. Males enter into musth (show signs of musth) when there are in good body condition, and lost body condition over the time they are in musth because they are hardly feeding.

Moreover, males can also mate when they are not in musth (they do not have to enter musth in order to mate). Therefore, people have been interested in finding out how exactly musth helps as a reproductive strategy since it is a very

expensive strategy. One way in which musth might give an advantage is that it might help to break a “queue” so to say of which male elephant is allowed to mate. It is also possible that musth allows for males to have greater energy and to rove (roam) over larger areas, which then gives males the opportunity to sample more females than non-musth males.

Young (15-30 years old) males in musth did not have an advantage over older (over 30 years) non-musth males in terms of access to females. Old musth males had an advantage over old non-musth males, and also showed a roving strategy, which allows for searching for multiple females. Therefore, musth seems to be a roving strategy that is primarily advantageous to old males and not to young males. If the female should get pregnant, she is out of circulation for about five years, because the pregnancy lasts two years and then she is lactating for over two-and-half years.

19. Tea gardens along Bhutan border install non-lethal electric fences to keep elephant herds away (India)

News Live TV - 8.12.2019

Several tea gardens in Udalguri and Baksa districts situated near the Assam-Bhutan border have installed electric fences to keep wild elephant herds at bay as pachyderms continue to enter human settlements in search of food and water. Tea estates are adopting desperate measures to deter wild elephant herds from entering garden areas and paddy fields by installing these electric fences. These fences use non-lethal direct current through a solar-powered battery to keep elephant herds away.

Authorities of several tea gardens have covered their gardens with electric fences. Meanwhile, several villages along the Indo-Bhutan border continue to suffer from regular elephant depredation with a herd of around 70 to 80 wild elephants coming out of the Tamulpur forest range in search of food and water almost regularly and enter nearby villages. Villagers say they have been passing sleepless nights as elephant herds continue to unleash terror; destroying crops,

banana plantations and razing down houses. More than 100 people have been killed in violent conflicts between men and elephants in Baksa and Udalguri districts in the past couple of years.

20. Of 41 jumbos at Koundinya, six died this year (India)

The Hindu - 30.12.2019

The Koundinya wildlife sanctuary in Chittoor district has lost six of its 41 elephants due to causes ranging from electrocution to old age in this year alone. The sanctuary, located at the tri-State junction of A.P., Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, is spread over 500 sq km and has been a safe haven for elephants for decades ever since elephants first appeared here in the 1980s. Apart from being a home to the existing 35 elephants, the sanctuary is also part of the Hosur-Krishnagiri-Koundinya elephant corridor.

Breakaway herds from the Kuppam region formed another safe haven in Seshachalam biosphere spread over the Chamala valley, Talakona reserve forest and Rajampeta division of Kadapa where they are protected from the risk of electrocution, unlike Koundinya. Apart from the risk of getting electrocuted, there are other threats faced by Koundinya elephants, such as communicable diseases, scarcity of fodder and water, and shrinking habitat due to encroachments on forest fringes and denudation.

21. Exploitation in Central Highlands robs elephant calves of first breath (Vietnam)

VN Express - 26.12.2019

No calves have survived birth since 1989 in a Central Highlands district where elephants are considered kin and buried among family members. Y Yo Ni, of the M'ngong ethnic minority, wades through the mud to reach a cemetery near his home in Bhok Village of Yang Tao Commune, Lak District, Dak Lak Province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The 21-year-old is visiting Thong Nang, a baby elephant that died earlier this year.

The mahout is unclear why Thong Nang succumbed at birth, though he ascribes the incident to the mother being too old, heavily exploited by tourism, and confined to a small space. Five years ago, Yo Ni married and moved to Yang Tao Commune. Here, his father-in-law had made a living by providing tourist rides on a 40-year-old elephant named Bak Kham. When Bak Kham grew pregnant, she was transferred deeper into the mountain. Protected by nature, Yo Ni cared for her during the next two years.

On the morning of December 1, Bak Kham gave birth to a stillborn infant the family was unable to resuscitate, having blown air into its trunk for nearly 30 minutes. “My father-in-law couldn’t let go of the corpse. He just held it and wailed. Thong Nang weighed 100 kg,” Yo Ni explains. As the M’ning consider elephants kin, often cohabiting beneath the same roof, Thong Nang was interred next to Yo Ni’s family ancestors.

22. Armed unit to tackle poaching (Malaysia)

The Daily Express - 27.12.2019

It was a sad year for Sabah’s wildlife, which saw the death of its last known male and female Sumatran rhinos as well as continued killings of pygmy elephants. Malaysian police paramilitary unit, Tiger Platoon, has also been called in to assist the Wildlife Department to stop the senseless killing of the elephants. In November, the Tiger Platoon from the General Operations Force was assigned to assist relevant authorities in protecting the wildlife in the State. The special platoon is to be mobilised to conduct patrols, track down suspects and carry out joint raids with enforcement officials, including from the Wildlife and the Sabah Forestry Departments.

It also came as a shock that a syndicate had been active in Sabah smuggling pangolins worth RM 8 million in February and that the State Wildlife Department or authorities knew nothing about its operations for seven years. The 30-tonne pangolin haul was also picked up by the world’s press, calling it a record. The seizure from one single raid that went unnoticed by the authorities confirmed there was massive poaching going on

in Sabah. Seven pygmy elephant deaths were reported since September, in which elephant tusks were also reported missing, with some smuggled into Indonesian Kalimantan.

Two tusks involving the case in Dumpas Kalabakan were recovered. The elephant that owned the tusks was found dead with 70 shots. Its two tusks were found buried at the Kebun Koperasi Felda Umas area. A plantation manager has since been charged in court for refusing to hand over the tusks. Three others accused were also brought to court. Just a week after Sabah hosted the 10th Asian Elephant Specialist Group meeting in December, another elephant was found dead in Kinabatangan. The human-elephant conflict in Sabah attracted the attention of non-governmental organisations and its population was estimated to be down to 2,000 in the State. The pygmy elephants in Sabah are a different species compared to their Asian and African cousins.

23. Elephant terror in Kampur (India)

News Live – 27.12.2019

Man-elephant conflicts continue to be on the rise in different parts of Assam with frequent incidents of wild tuskers straying into human settlements. Residents of Kampur under Nagaon district are spending sleepless nights as a herd of wild elephant destroyed crops and houses in the area. The pachyderms entered the area on Thursday night and brought down Naren Bordoloi’s house in Tetelisara, Kampur. Local people have alleged that the forest department pays no attention to their concerns despite repeated complaints to drive out the herd of wild elephants from residential areas.

Meanwhile, several people have been injured in the wake of increasing human-elephant conflicts in different parts of Assam. “We are facing a lot of problems. We cannot stay outside at night because of wild elephants’ terror. They often stray into our houses and paddy fields destroying everything in their way. I request the concerned authority to take necessary steps and help us out with the ongoing elephant issue,” said a local.