

News Briefs

Compiled by Jayantha Jayewardene

Biodiversity and Elephant Conservation Trust, Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka

E-mail: romalijj@eureka.lk

1. Indonesia probes death of 5 protected Sumatran elephants

China.org.cn - 16.1.2020

The Indonesian police have been investigating the death of five Sumatran elephants, in order to preserve the critically endangered animal in the vast-archipelagic country. Earlier this month, five skeletons of the Sumatran elephants were discovered in an oil palm plantation in Aceh province's district of Aceh Jaya on the northern tip of Sumatra Island. Local police investigators said on Wednesday that they had questioned several people and some of them were potentially declared suspects in the poaching of the giant animals.

The investigation focused on the existence of an electric fence on the scene, which is believed to be placed to ensnare elephants, not wild pigs. "Based on information from the electricity firm, the electric fence was made for elephants," said Putra. The Sumatran elephant is a sub-species of Asian elephant which is extremely rare at present with a population of just over 2,000 based on the estimation in 2000. The Sumatran elephants occur exclusively on Sumatra Island, but their number has plunged as they lost more than 80% of habitat due to deforestation.

2. Jumbo electrocution on rise in Dhenkanal (India)

The Orissa Post - 18.1.2020

Deaths of elephants due to electrocution are on the rise in Dhenkanal. While many cases are the fallout of accidental contacts with live electricity wires, poachers in some ranges killed the animals by laying electrically charged wires.

It was alleged that electrocution of elephants by poachers is increasing due to lack of patrolling by the forest officials. Over last five years, 21 elephants have died due to electrocution. Besides, CESU, the distribution company, was accused of adopting a casual attitude towards illegal hooking from its transmission wires. The animals suffered huge blow October 27, 2018 when seven elephants came in contact with live electric wires at Kamalang village and died.

Some experts pointed out that large-scale tree felling and unplanned industrial activities in the forest vicinities have also pushed the elephants to nearby villages in search of food and water causing serious problems for both humans and elephants. Human-animal conflict is another factor responsible for the alarming rise of elephant deaths. It has raised serious concern among environmentalists and wildlife enthusiasts. As for electrocution of elephants, DFO Bimal Prasanna Acharya said the forest department is to find out the wires laid by poachers for hunting animals while the energy department is supposed to detect illegal hooking meant to kill elephants.

3. New MoEF guidelines for elephant deaths from anthrax (India)

Down to Earth Magazine - 17.1.2020

An official team to oversee safe disposal of elephant carcasses infected with anthrax as well as a map of anthrax hotspots are some of the steps recommended in a new standard operating procedure (SOP) formulated by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The overall authority responsible at the state level under the SOP's provisions will be the chief wildlife warden, in accordance with the Wildlife (Protection) Act,

1972. The SOP also lays down rules for the constitution of a team to oversee assessment and disposal of elephant carcasses suspected to be infected with anthrax.

The procedure will also have steps to assess whether the elephant died due to anthrax and the collection of biological samples. A map of anthrax hotspots is to be created as well. "The deaths of elephants due to anthrax are not widespread. But they occur sporadically. That was the trigger to form this SOP. One can only know if an elephant has died from anthrax after proper post-mortem is done. This SOP has the provisions for that. Anthrax is an infectious zoonotic disease, which means it could be transferred from animals to humans. It is primarily a disease of herbivorous animals particularly cattle, sheep, goats, horses and mules. It occurs among omnivores and carnivores through contaminated meat, bone meals or other feeds; and among wild animals from feeding on anthrax-infected carcasses. Infected animals shed the bacilli in terminal haemorrhage or spilt blood at death. Anthrax spores can persist in soil for many years.

4. Yunnan looks to boost protection of Asian elephant (China)

Ecns.cn - 22.1.2020

Multiple efforts will be made in Yunnan province to strengthen the protection of wild Asian elephants. A total of 7500 ha of land will be transformed into a new habitat for the elephants, according to Yunnan Forestry and Grassland Administration. Based on current surveillance of the province's elephants, the newly added habitat will cover six areas in the province, including Pu'er city, Jinghong city and Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture.

The number of wild Asian elephants in China - all of which live in Yunnan - has doubled to about 300 thanks to protection efforts. Yunnan has established 11 nature reserves with a total area of about 510,000 ha. The area inhabited by wild Asian elephants in the province has expanded from seven counties in 2017 to eight last year. The habitat expansion is expected to

encourage the elephants to live within a certain area and avoid conflicts with residents. The administration started a pilot project in 2016 to use an elephant alert system using drones in Menghai County, successfully avoiding 46 cases of possible conflicts in the past three years. Moreover, artificial intelligence and broadcast systems have also been introduced to improve the efficiency of the alert system since 2017.

5. Plantation management probed for allegedly hiding death of pygmy elephant (Malaysia)

The Star - 26.1.2020

Wildlife rangers have located the site of a Bornean pygmy elephant that was buried at an oil palm plantation in Sabah's Kinabatangan area after the estate management allegedly hid its death. Sabah Wildlife Department director Augustine Tuuga, when contacted, confirmed that they were investigating the case and are awaiting the full report from their team on the ground. It was learned that wildlife officials had received a tip-off about a week ago claiming that an elephant was buried at a plantation in Kinabatangan. Sources claimed that the senior management decided not to report its death.

Some sources in Kinabatangan indicated that the estate involved had at least three to four previous elephant deaths that were reported to wildlife officials in 2019. A source, who provided a picture of an excavator allegedly used to bury the dead elephant, said that most of the elephants that died in the area were due to suspected poisoning. Under Sabah's wildlife conservation enactment, it is mandatory to report the death of a fully protected animal like elephants. Wildlife investigators suspect that the unrecorded elephant death was done with estate officials knowingly concealing its death.

6. Carcass of skinned elephant found in Ayeyarwady (Myanmar)

The Myanmar Times - 27.1.2020

Local authorities in Ngapudaw Township,

Ayeyarwady Region found a wild elephant poached and skinned with its trunk cut off in Sinma Forest Reserve on Friday. Officials with the forest department, police and administrative authorities were investigating a report by local residents that wild elephants were running in the forest reserve when they found the dead elephant near the Pathein-Mawtin road. The female pachyderm was around 2.5 m tall, over 2 m long and estimated to be 28 years old. According to the elephant veterinarian of the Forest Department, the elephant was killed by a poisoned arrow.

“Elephant poachers had skinned the elephant and were preparing to take it away,” said U Kyaw Myint Tun, administrator for Ngapudaw’s Tin Chaung Village-Tract. “When they saw us, they left their equipment and ran away. We feel sorry that elephants are being poached despite the fact that we are doing our best to prevent elephant poaching.” Friday’s poaching was the first case in 2020. A total of six wild elephants died last year, two of them from natural causes and four killed by poachers. In the past, elephants were mainly poached for their tusks but over the past few years they have increasingly been poached for their hides, which are believed to have medicinal properties. Demand for elephant hides has increased and, as with the tusks, the hides are mostly smuggled to China.

7. Telling Numbers: 2361 humans, 510 elephants killed in conflict in five years (India)

The New Indian Express - 13.2.2020

Between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, 2361 humans were killed as a result of conflict with elephants, while 510 elephants were killed in incidents of electrocution, train accidents, poaching and poisoning during the same period according to data tabled in Parliament by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Among elephant deaths caused in conflict with humans, electrocution is the primary cause, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the deaths (333 out of 510). The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 empowers the State Chief Wildlife Warden

for taking appropriate measures for management of human wildlife conflict situations. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has issued advisories dated 24th December 2014 and 1st June 2015, in context of human wildlife conflicts to all the States /UT’s, wherein they have been requested to take proactive steps including exercise of powers under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, for mitigation of human wildlife conflict.

8. Poison found in two dead pygmy elephants (Malaysia)

Free Malaysia Today - 15.2.2020

Two female pygmy elephants found dead had died of poison, Sabah’s environment minister, Christina Liew, said today. However, the authorities had yet to identify the type of the poison. “We will investigate further,” she told reporters here today. The two female Borneo pygmy elephants were found dead at a plantation in Sukau and in the Dermakot Sandakan Reserve Forest. The two deaths are the second and third cases this year following the first carcass found at Lower Kinabatangan last month. Liew said the state government had approved the Sabah State Elephant Action Plan (2020–2029) in an effort to resolve the conflict between humans and elephants in the state. Borneo pygmy elephants form a subspecies of the Asian elephant and are the smallest elephants in Asia. They are listed as an endangered species and are protected under the Wildlife Conservation Enactment.

9. Malaysia develops world’s first human-elephant conflict resolution mechanism

Malaysiakini - 18.2.2020

The world’s first publicly available human-elephant conflict (HEC) resolution mechanism is being developed with the partnership of the academia with the public and private sectors in the country. The science-backed mechanism in the form of standard operating procedures is made possible by a collaboration between the Management and Ecology of Malaysian Elephants (MEME) and Sime Darby Plantation

Bhd (SDP) through Yayasan Sime Darby to champion the co-existence between humans and the endangered animals. In the next three years under phase three, MEME will be working with various communities on the ground through capacity building to find effective ways to help them manage HEC and test if the intervention is effective as it is aimed at not just reducing HEC, but also to increase the tolerance of the various communities towards elephants.

While noting that Malaysian palm oil is continuously being targeted by international NGOs as well as foreign countries, in particular, the European Union for being unsustainable, Kok said Malaysia is committed to ensure sustainable practices in all the value chain of palm oil production.

10. Odisha finds ‘fodder plantation’ solution for man-elephant conflict (India)

The New Indian Express - 26.2.2020

With man-elephant conflict in Odisha continuing unabated, the State Government has decided to take up fodder plantation in 1250 acre of land in 2020-2021 to prevent the gentle giants from straying into human habitations in search of food. The situation was at its worst towards the end of the 2019-2020 fiscal as more than 10 human lives were lost in elephant attack in the last one and a half months. Death due to elephant attack has already crossed 75.

Lack of fodder and water, and increase in cropping areas surrounding forests are considered to be the key reasons behind the elephants frequently approaching human habitations. Forest and Environment department officials said the fruitbearing trees will be planted in more than 500 hectare (ha) of land under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) scheme and Rs 803.65 crore has been approved for 2020-2021.

The fund will be spent for block plantation, assisted natural regeneration, bald hill and fruit-bearing plantation, maintenance and plantation for wildlife management. A senior officer of

the department said apart from carrying out the plantation drive, a project will be taken up for revival of 200 water bodies in forest areas and elephant corridors to ensure adequate water for the wild animals under the scheme.

11. Asian elephant gives birth to third calf in SW China

CGTN - 24.2.2020

A 32-year-old Asian elephant gave birth to a calf last Saturday in southwest China's Yunnan Province. This is the third offspring of the elephant called Ping Zai. The baby elephant Jiu Mei, which literally means “the ninth sister,” is in good health, according to the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center where Ping Zai lives. She is 94 cm tall and weighs 85 kg. The calf stood to her feet just 40 min after being born, and was nursed for the first time two hours and 15 min later. The center is closely monitoring the newborn's health. Ping Zai got pregnant in April 2018. She was carefully looked after by the keepers of the center during the 693-day gestation. Located in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, a popular tourist destination in China, the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center was established in November 2008 to carry out artificial breeding research and rescue injured and sick wild elephants. A total of nine elephants were bred at the center since its establishment, and another 11 rescued are now receiving rehabilitation training here.

12. Tamil Nadu farmer electrocutes crop-raiding elephant to death, carcass exhumed (India)

The New Indian Express - 2.3.2020

The Forest Department has arrested one person in connection with killing and secretly burying a tusker who had been on a crop-raiding spree in a far-off village of Vellore. The carcass was exhumed for an autopsy.

A manhunt has been launched to nab two more persons, including the key accused. The incident came to light when the forest personnel on

patrolling duty in Gudiyatham Range found that one of the two straying elephants was missing. Enquiries revealed that the elephant was electrocuted to death as it had touched the electrified fence erected on the paddy field owned by S Pichandi of Kudimipatti village.

“After our personnel noticed one of the elephants was missing, an investigation was held secretly. On receiving a tip-off, we traced the perpetrators and nabbed one of them,” Sewa Singh told Express. Subsequently, on Monday, the carcass was exhumed in the presence of DFO Bhargava Teja by a team of veterinarians. The arrested person was identified as Selvaraj who had operated an earthmover to dig up a pit to bury the elephant after it was electrocuted. The farmer, S Pitchandi, who had electrified the fence around his paddy field, and the owner of the earthmover Ashok are still at large, sources said, adding a hunt is on to nab them.

13. After tusker, electric fence snaps life of youngster in Vellore (India)

The New Indian Express - 2.3.2020

Close on the heels of a tusker killed in electrocution, a young man died after coming into contact with an electrified fence erected illegally in a farmland at Pallikuppam village near Gudiyattam in Vellore district. 20-year-old S Santhosh Kumar of Poomalai village at Pillayarkuppam was found dead at the land owned by D Mahadevan early on Tuesday. Police sources said Mahadevan went to his land in the early hours and found Santhosh Kumar lying dead. Following information, police reached the spot and retrieved the body.

Mahadevan had cultivated sugarcane and groundnut crops in his two-acre land, and erected an electric fence around the land illegally to prevent wild animals from damaging the crops, the sources said. Santhosh Kumar, unaware of the electric fences, presumably walked in the land at night, before being electrocuted. Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), N Balakrishnan told Express, “We have begun the investigation to ascertain how the deceased came into contact

with the fence and what for he had gone there.” The police had secured the landowner, and a case was registered following a complaint lodged by the victim’s father.

14. Myanmar closes elephant camps

The Myanmar Times - 27.3.2020

All elephant camps operated under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation nationwide have been closed to visitors as a precaution against COVID-19, the Myanmar Timber Enterprise said. U Saw John Shwe Ba, managing director of the MTE, said the ministry ordered elephants camps to stop accepting visitors on Tuesday, and they will re-open only after the pandemic is contained. “Our elephant camps are not as crowded as shopping centres and city buses, but we will close them as a precaution,” he said, adding that while the camps will be closed until at least April 30, their staffs will stay on to maintain them. Among the more popular camps in the country is the Palin River View elephant camp in Nyaung-U township in Mandalay Region, which suspended operations on Wednesday. The MTE operates 22 elephant camps nationwide, U Saw John Shwe Ba said.

15. Study suggests elephants may get drunk naturally after all

Phys.org - 29.4.2020

A team of researchers at the University of Calgary has found that variations in ethanol metabolism abilities in different species may account for the “myth” of natural animal intoxication. The group describes comparing mutations in the ADH7 gene in multiple species and what they found by doing so. For many years, there has been anecdotal evidence of wild animals getting drunk and behaving badly after consuming fermented fruits and berries. One notorious example was of elephants consuming fruit from the malura tree after it fell and fermented.

But back in 2005, a team of researchers from the University of Bristol appeared to discredit such stories with a study in which they claimed

to have found evidence that elephants were so large that it would take more fruit than they could consume to make them drunk. In this new effort, the researchers suggest that the team at Bristol forgot to account for a major contributing factor to drunkenness. The work involved looking at the gene ADH7—it is present in a wide variety of animals. Its purpose is to instigate the production of enzymes that metabolize ethanol.

Prior research has shown that most primates have an ADH7 mutation that allows them to metabolize ethanol more efficiently than those without it. It is believed the mutation persisted because it allowed primates to consume large amounts of fermented fruits and berries without getting too drunk to function. The researchers looked at ADH7 in 85 mammals and found that many of them, such as horses, cows and elephants, do not have the mutation, and are thus not nearly as good at metabolizing ethanol. This suggests that if such animals were to consume fermented fruits, they would become intoxicated much more easily. Thus, they suggest it is possible that elephants at times become inebriated, and because of that, may behave out of character.

16. Villagers in Assam get respite as hanging fence deters jumbos (India)

The Hindu - 4.5.2020

Elephants in Assam may have finally run into a barrier beyond their ability to bulldoze — a solar-powered hanging electric fence. Camera trap records show the elephants attempting unsuccessfully to enter areas near eight villages, which lie at the edge of a 350 km² reserve forest that was added to the Manas National Park in 2016, on at least 59 of the 65 occasions that the pachyderms had been sighted since October 14, 2019. The elephants, however, did manage to cross the fence without damaging it on eight occasions, due to a sudden discharge of the batteries powering it around midnight. But the villagers, who have borne the brunt of the elephant-man conflict, aren't ready as yet to call the latest barrier a success. For that, they would rather wait to see how the fence performs during the monsoon months ahead.

The earlier project entailed stringing a solar-powered fence between two ordinary 7 feet tall poles, set 10 m apart. Elephants, however, would frequently uproot them for gorging on the granaries in the villages. The hanging fence involves sturdier metallic poles with a strong cable strung from the top. Wires arranged 3 feet apart dangle from this cable without touching the ground for letting smaller animals pass.

17. Plan adopted to prevent Kingdom's Asian elephants from extinction (Cambodia)

Phnom Penh Post - 12.5.2020

The Ministry of Environment, in collaboration with Fauna & Flora International (FFI), has adopted an action plan to save Asian elephants in Cambodia from extinction. The conservation plan was compiled by the ministry's General Directorate of Administration for Nature Conservation and Protection (GDANCP) and all stakeholders with technical support from the FFI's Cambodian Elephant Conservation Group (CECG). Established in 2015 by the FFI in cooperation with the ministry and the Forestry Administration, the CECG aims to conserve the endangered species by stabilising and increasing its populations throughout Cambodia.

GDANCP director-general Meas Sophal said the action plan is a significant milestone. "We developed this action plan, the first for Asian elephants in Cambodia, that will guide effective protection of the country's most iconic species," he said. Classified as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, Asian elephants face a "very high risk" of extinction. Between 400 and 600 of them are believed to remain in Cambodia and are concentrated mainly in the Cardamom Mountains in the southwest of the country and the eastern plains of Mondulkiri province.

Habitat degradation due to deforestation has taken a toll on elephant populations and their long-term survival. Elephant calves have also fallen victim to snares, which hinder population recovery. The action plan aims to strengthen the management of Asian elephants with involvement

from all stakeholders so that their populations are protected and able to recover.

18. The carefree life of wild Asian elephants in SW China

CGTN - 12.5.2020

For wild Asian elephants roaming between rainforests and croplands, life is simple. They eat, play and sleep every day. In scorching summer, they love to drink and bath openly in the nitrate-rich pond. This is the natural playground for them to escape the heat and dryness. Just like humans, wild Asian elephants also need to drink salty water to supplement their salt intake. Sometimes, they would even break into villagers' homes to find salt. Although Asian elephants are the largest living land animal in Asia, these giants are plant-lovers. Considering their huge size, they spend 16-18 h eating roots, trees and bark every day. Whenever you see them, they are probably eating or on the way to finding food.

Having lived side by side with farmers in Yunnan for many years, smart wild Asian elephants know the right time to find tasty food like sugarcane in croplands near the rainforest. After the harvest, they would visit the croplands less and return to the rainforest for nourishment. In China, wild Asian elephants only live in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Pu'er and Lincang cities in southern Yunnan. There are about 250 of them left due to habitat loss. In Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, people are replanting native plants that elephants favour on degraded land far away from villages in the hope that these giants can stay carefree in their homeland many years to come.

19. Sabah Wildlife rescues elephant with oral abscess caused by brooch

New Straits Times - 22.5.2020

An elephant wandering alone in a forest corridor in Tingkayu was in fact suffering with an abscess in its oral cavity caused by a brooch, which was stuck. Sabah Wildlife department assistant director Dr Sen Nathan, in his Facebook posting,

said they were alerted about the presence of the elephant on Tuesday. "A team headed by our Wildlife Rescue Unit veterinarian Dr Navaneetha Roopan arrived in the area they immediately found the poor elephant," he said, adding the 1.5 m tall sub-adult bull elephant was darted, removed and treated around 11 am.

Upon examination, the team found a large abscess had caused swelling to the elephant's left cheek. A brooch that had been stuck in the teeth had caused severe ulceration of its tongue, and the brooch was removed. The abscess was lanced and topical antibiotics were applied and the pus in the oral cavity was rinsed out.

20. Officials discover 5 million-year-old elephant fossils in forests near Dehradun (India)

The Weather Channel - 19.6.2020

A camera-trap study in the reserve forests near Dehradun, which was conducted to develop a new tiger reserve, led to the discovery of one of the world's oldest fossil remains of elephants, dating back to 5 million years. "We are taking the help of 'van gujjars' (a forest tribe), to discover even more," says Sanjay Kumar, the Commissioner of Saharanpur Division of Uttar Pradesh bordering Dehradun, capital of Uttarakhand. The rare fossils of elephants suggest that the foothills of the Himalayas, the beautiful lush green Terai region in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, were once inhabited by giant elephants, giraffes, horses and hippopotamus.

Commissioner Sanjay Kumar initiated a camera trap study to develop a new tiger reserve in this forest range. "The growing tiger population in Jim Corbett and Eastern Rajaji Park has been migrating gradually towards the west, including Siwalik forests. Therefore we thought to conduct the wildlife study here," Sanjay Kumar, a wildlife enthusiast, told IANS.

The camera trap study, a powerful tool to investigate the presence of animals in a given area, was conducted with help of forest officials and experts of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

in Siwalik range.” In May, last month, the forest officials stumbled upon a rare fossil elephant near a river bed. Chief Conservator V.K. Jain and his team later sent this fossil sample for testing to the Wadia Institute, located in Dehradun. “The scientists at the Wadia Institute have now opined the age of this elephant fossil, ranging from 5-8 million years.

21. Farmer offers jackfruit to jumbos to keep estate safe (India)

The Hindu - 17.6.2020

Distraught over repeated instances of elephants damaging coffee plants in his estate, a planter at Kirehalli in Sakleshpur taluk has been voluntarily offering jackfruit grown in his land to the elephants. Krishne Gowda dumped two tractor loads of fruits along the path usually taken by elephants roaming around the village in the hope that it would satiate them and they would not enter his farm. The farmer owns a 30-acre coffee estate in the village. A herd consisting of more than 20 elephants has been moving around the place for the past few days. Neither planters nor workers can freely walk into their estates, as they could encounter elephants any time. “If they enter our estate, they will eat the jackfruits, besides damaging the coffee plants. He dumped around 1000 kg of jackfruit.

More than 60 elephants have been roaming in Sakleshpur, Yeslur, and Alur forest ranges. The Forest Department gets reports of crop damage caused by the herds every day. The department sends rapid response teams, formed by involving the local youth, to avoid human-elephant encounters. “We park our vehicles facing towards the road. As elephants can show up any time, we flee in the vehicles,” said Mr. Gowda. The department sends alerts on the movement of herds through mobile phones. They have radio-collared a few elephants to track the herds. The rapid response teams also alert local people. Many planters have not been able to take up any work in their estates due to the presence of elephants. The planters have demanded that the state government capture all of them.

22. SW China village finds way to ease elephant-human conflict

CGTN - 22.6.2020

Jiangcheng County, located in Puer City in the province, often receive “unpleasant visits” from the wild elephants. Since January, there have been about 96 cases of elephants breaking into the village and causing damage of over two million yuan. Besides, many villagers are fearful of encountering wild elephants as they can harm people. In recent years, the local government has come up with ways to ease these conflicts. A monitoring system that can track the elephants has been set up. Staff of the system will keep eyes on the route the animals take and send evacuation alerts to villagers via radio, text and phone calls if necessary. The government has also purchased insurance plans to compensate villagers for the damage to houses, livestock and crops caused by the incursions. Because of these efforts, the conflicts have eased, without harming the elephants.

23. Elephant population crosses 2000-mark in Uttarakhand, around 30% rise since 2015 (India)

The Hindustan Times - 29.6.2020

With a 29.9% increase since 2015, Uttarakhand government said that the state now has 2026 elephants. Chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat released the fresh elephant census on Monday during the 15th State Wildlife Advisory Board meeting. Rawat said elephants were counted in Uttarakhand for three days. “It was found that there are a total of 2026 elephants in the state. In 2012, there were 1559 elephants while in 2017 there were 1839 elephants,” Rawat said.

For the first time drones were used for counting the jumbos in the hill state. Parag Madhukar Dhakate, who is the coordinator of the forest department’s drone force, said the drones flew over forest blocks in a zigzag manner and captured images of elephants that helped in verifying the ground reports.