

## Joint Elephant Health Camp in Sauraha, Nepal

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### Elephant health camp

The National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), Nepal in conjunction with pachyderm researcher, Dr. Michelle Szydlowski, and the Katie Adamson Conservation Fund, completed an elephant health camp in the area surrounding Chitwan National Park in November of 2022. The NTNC is the primary manager of ~33% of the protected areas within Nepal, and is tasked with research, anti-poaching support and building capacity within local communities (NTNC 2019). This collaboration is part of an ongoing partnership between the NTNC and funding bodies. The organisations previously teamed up with the World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Veterinarians International and other entities to build the first wildlife hospital within Nepal. The hospital opened in 2020.

This elephant health camp, initially planned for 2020 but delayed due to COVID lockdowns, began through the collaborative efforts of Szydlowski and the NTNC's head veterinarian, Dr. Amir Sadaula. Through joint efforts with the NTNC in Sauraha (Dr. Babu Ram Lamichhane, project manager in charge, Biodiversity Conservation Center), and other NTNC leadership (Dr. Naresh Subedi, department head), the KACF was able to fund the camp and sent a team of seven veterinary professionals and foot care specialists to assist Dr. Sadaula and his team with the health camp.

The camp's goals included obtaining baseline measurements on elephant health (such as body condition scoring, weights, girths, wound and foot assessments, Figs. 1 & 2), performing basic examinations (faecal and blood chemistry panels), performing foot care, checking that microchips are still readable using current equipment, and providing training for local veterinary stu-

dents. The camp also offered veterinary staff from the US and Nepal the opportunity to exchange information on elephant husbandry methods, nutrition, and stabling from both countries. Farriers and specialists from the US, including foot specialist Mike McClure of McClure International Consulting, shared their professional experience and learned about the unique foot issues facing captive elephants in Nepal. They further assisted the NTNC in offering care to working elephants in the area.

### Private elephants

Maintaining up to date records on captive elephants in Nepal is now easier, thanks to the supreme court, which last year rededicated efforts toward ending illegal transboundary trade in elephants. Privately owned elephants currently residing within the Sauraha area will no longer face sale to India, ensuring that their health and



**Figure 1.** Showing how to measure the girth at the workshop. Photo by Lori Teirney.

welfare can now be monitored over the long term by the NTNC as well as elephant health organisations and researchers. Keeping these individuals in the area is key to supporting ongoing research, ensuring that records can be updated regularly, and that improvements can be undertaken which increase their health and welfare (Szydlowski 2021, 2022). The health of these elephants is key to maintaining healthy wild populations, as disease transmission at the captive-wild interface is of growing concern (Thapa 2017).

### Government elephants

Government elephant teams serve vital conservation purposes. These elephants, and their mahouts, serve in anti-poaching efforts, wildlife census, provide transport for researchers, and rescue wildlife and humans during the annual monsoons. These elephants and mahouts are housed throughout the national park areas of Nepal. The joint health camp will offer addi-



**Figure 2.** Demonstration of a foot assessment at the workshop. Photo by Lori Teirney.

tional support for ongoing health care programs which regularly occur through the NTNC and Government of Nepal Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation veterinary staff.

The camp served over 40 elephants in 2022, and, has the potential to become an annual event serving both privately-owned tourism elephants and government and NTNC owned individuals.

Dr. Lamichhane said, ‘The owners appreciated the effort of NTNC and KACF for the health camp. It is important to continue such health camp at least once a year for all captive elephants in Nepal to ensure their better health and welfare.’ Information garnered from the camp will become part of each elephant’s medical record files and will be written up as part of Szydlowski’s ongoing health and welfare study in Nepal. This camp and the associated research projects were approved by the University of Exeter College of Social Sciences and International Studies Ethics Committee.

### References

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