

There have been suggestions earlier with regard to the setting up of Captive Breeding stations. The forest in the catchment of the Kalawewa/Balaluwewa reservoir is a suitable location for such a station. This area consists of over 500 acres of forests which are linked to the newly declared Kahalla-Pallakelle Sanctuary. There is also an abundance of water throughout the year. These are some suggestions that should be taken into account when plans are drawn up to solve the many problems the Department of Wildlife

Conservation is faced with. It is imperative that the problem of elephants in Mahaweli be looked at in its totality and initially an overall plan for future conservation and management formulated. Then a prioritised implementation plan based on the available resources (finance, manpower, vehicles, equipment etc.) should be drawn up. Plans to conserve the Mahaweli elephant, which constitutes a large percentage of the island's elephant population, will no doubt be an important segment of this plan.

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A new technique to transport elephant herds

Throughout Asia, as a result of high human population growth and high rates of deforestation, elephant habitats are shrinking year by year thereby leading to the fragmentation of hitherto continuous populations of elephants. An extreme result of such fragmentation is the development of so called "pocketed" herds of elephants. Such animals have no long-term future and are responsible for much of the crop depredation. At times, these "pocketed" elephants attack people. The people then become very hostile and often take the law into their own hands. A number of elephants have been killed by farmers in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia as a result of the escalation in the human-elephant conflicts.

Now a new technique pioneered by Clem Coetsee of Zimbabwe's National Parks and Wildlife Management Department, to immobilize and transport entire families of elephants from one area to another hundreds of miles away, could be applied in Asian countries too. Coetsee has proven that even middle-aged elephants could be safely sedated up to 48 hrs. using haloperidol and trilafoxon, two relatively new tranquillizers. More than 600 elephants have been relocated from Zimbabwe to Bophuthatswana in South Africa, across a distance of 1,050 km overland, with a loss of only 15 animals. As long as there is sufficient water and food available en route to the elephants, there is no limit to the distances sedated elephants could be transported across. This new technique could become useful in relocating chronic crop raiding elephants from an area to more secure reserves (Ch. S).