

1. Indian elephants prefer crops to forest fodder

Reuters
April 26, 2007

A government study in India has shown elephants prefer food crops to forest fodder and often travel hundreds of miles to the same farmland every year, even remembering specific months of harvesting.

Elephants in India are having problems with shrinking habitats, usually travel long distances and mostly do it as a routine. With constant encroachment from growing cities and villages, their habitat range has shrunk and they end up searching for food at various places. Instead of searching for food in the forests, the elephants go to nearby farms and start eating the crops planted in the fields. According to Ujjal Bhattacharjee, chief conservator of forests in West Bengal, India, the elephants like the farm crops better, they make it a point to visit again just in time when the foods are ready to be harvested.

This federal government study was done over four years on Asian elephants in West Bengal state. The researchers and wild life experts trapped dozens of elephants and installed radio and satellite collars to monitor this behavior.

Elephants are migratory animals and move from one forest to another through corridors which are now fragmented due to villages and farmlands, conservationists say, making the animals change their habits.

The villagers because of limited land are beginning to encroach the forests and start planting farm crops, which makes it easier for these animals to eat the crops. Shakti Ranjan Banerjee of the Wildlife Protection Society of India said the elephants eating habits changed because of the encroaching by farmers.

The Elephant population is dwindling in India, from 50,000 a century ago to 21,300 currently.

The loss is also due to illegal hunting of elephants for their ivory tusks. Elephants are also shot by hunters for precious ivory and sometimes killed by villagers to protect their fields.

After this study, the researchers and wild life experts want to help preserve and strengthen the foraging paths of the elephants, so want to relocate the villagers to a safer place.

It is a good step, now the villagers and elephants can live side by side without harming each other.

2. Rampaging elephants force Indonesians to relocate

Antara News
April 26, 2007

Jakarta - Thousands of Indonesians will be relocated on Sumatra island after wild elephants repeatedly attacked their villages killing six people, officials said Wednesday.

The local government will move about 10,000 people living in Bukit Barisan National Park, a protected habitat for the animals whose numbers on the island are fast diminishing.

Villagers in the past have co-existed with the elephants in the 363,000 hectare (896,000 acre) park which has been declared a World Heritage Site.

But new communities were springing up in the park, encroaching on the animals' habitat and causing a series of violent clashes, an official at the Lampung provincial forestry office said. "We need to relocate thousands of people living in the national park zones to prevent the clashes from recurring," official Arinal Junaidi said.

Conservation group WWF said the elephants had trampled six people to death in the park in the past 12 months and destroyed villages and crops. Nurchalis Fadli of WWF added that it appeared the same six female elephants were involved in the clashes, although it was unclear why. "It was not their fault. The incidents have occurred in the elephants' natural habitat," Fadli told AFP.

He added the relocation of the villagers was a huge task, as they had built communities and were farming crops.

WWF is also attempting to track the movement of the animals, by tagging their necks with a device containing a global satellite positioning system, Fadli said. Six elephants had been tagged since November, he added.

The WWF has said that elephants in Sumatra, one of two Indonesian islands where they are found, were dying at an alarming pace with numbers dropping by 75 percent in just 18 years. As of 2003, only about 350 to 430 wild elephants remained on the island in seven provinces, it said. Their natural habitat is being increasingly taken over by resettlement, plantations and industrial estates. (*)

3. Elephant census in State from May 7 (India)

*S Prashantha, Deccan Herald
April 28, 2007*

The Forest Department is all geared up to conduct the three-day-long elephant census in the State, scheduled to begin from May 7.

Experts from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, held a session to train department officials in the methods and procedures for the census, at Bandipur, on Thursday. It was attended by officials of various cadres, including the CCFs, Conservators, ACFs and DFOs from across the State. In turn, they will train the other department personnel and volunteers, who will actually conduct the census. Meanwhile, the department is looking for volunteers physically fit enough to handle the job. It is also planned to rope in research students for the purpose. The elephant census is being held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu on the same days. This will, it is hoped, help in correctly estimating the number of elephants since the three States share the same forest border. This way, there are hardly any chances of “duplication” in enumeration.

Chief Conservator of Forests (Project Tiger) S Rajanna told Deccan Herald that three methods would be adopted: ‘Direct counting’ on sighting

the animal, and the “indirect method of counting their droppings”. Counting male, female and baby elephants from herds sighted in a water body would be the third.

The census will be done with the direct method on May 7, with the water-hole method on May 8 and the indirect method on May 9. About 30 to 50 per cent of the forest area will be covered during the counting and the figure thus arrived at would be extrapolated to include the total forest area.

According to the statistics available with the department, Bandipur topped the list in the State with 1217 elephants as per the last census conducted in 2005, while Nagarahole came second with 804.

4. First elephant released into wild under foundation plan (Thailand)

*Pasara Puthamat, The Nation
May 20, 2007*

After two years of careful training to prepare Pang Kham Mool Yai for life in the wild, the 35-year-old elephant was yesterday released into the Sublangka Wildlife Sanctuary. Kham Mool Yai is the first domesticated elephant to be introduced to the wild under a programme that will see a further 80 released over time by the Elephant Reintroduction Foundation. However, many fear the animals may not be able to adjust.

Kasetsart University’s Narit Bhumiphakphan said domestic elephants born and raised in captivity depended on humans for survival. “It will be very hard for them to change their habits and survive,” he said. But foundation chairman Sumet Tantivejkul argued Kham Mool Yai had two years to learn to survive. The elephant has been living in Sublangka with her mahout during that time. “She is now ready to live in the forest as a wild animal,” he added.

Sumet explained foundation staff would observe Kham Mool Yai for the next five years. The foundation was established several years ago in response to concerns of Her Majesty the Queen. When indigenous logging

was ended in Thailand in the 1980s, thousands of domesticated elephants were out of work. Handlers were forced to roam them in cities, begging for money or food to care for the animals.

5. Elephants could join dodos in Vietnam central highlands

Thanh Nien Daily
May 22, 2007

Deforestation and owners' callousness have taken a toll on elephant populations both in the wild and in captivity in Vietnam's central highlands, sending the giant animals to the brink of extinction. There are only a few hundred elephants left in the area compared with thousands a century ago, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources reports. Dak Lak province, once a pachyderm haven, now has just 50 elephants, mostly in captivity. Residents point out that the relentless illegal logging has robbed the elephants of their habitat and left them in a permanent state of agitation. Besides, the animals are chained, preventing them from mating, spelling further doom for their numbers. They are not in great health to start with since their owners work them into the ground.

Residents in Gia Lai province's Nhon Hoa village are nostalgic about the elephants' heyday around 40 years ago when people were proud about the number of elephants. The disappearance of the elephants has badly affected elephant-related cultural festivals in the region, they grumble.

The Gia Lai and Dak Lak provincial administrations have begun to act to save the elephants from extinction. They have called for using In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and

offering elephants private spaces to mate. A Gia Lai-based tourism company has bought three elephants for VND50 million (US\$ 3100) and uses them to entertain tourists as a last-ditch effort to conserve the pachyderm. But a long-term plan to protect and preserve elephants is yet to be chalked out.

6. Rare Nepal elephants have tuberculosis

Reuters
June 12, 2007

Ten of Nepal's 250 endangered elephants are suffering from tuberculosis in a national park and the disease is threatening to spread to humans and other wildlife, authorities said on Monday.

Chitwan National Park in southern Nepal attracts thousands of tourists every year and has numerous rare wildlife, such as rhinoceroses and tigers. Park authorities said tests had confirmed at least 10 of 100 domesticated Asian elephants in Chitwan had contracted the disease in the past two years. "Tests have confirmed that the elephants have tested positive for TB and we are trying to provide treatment," Kamal Gaire, a senior veterinary official, said by phone from Chitwan, 50 miles south of Kathmandu. "This is serious because it may spread to human beings." Park officials said this is the first time that tuberculosis in elephants had been reported in the Himalayan nation.

Nepal has about 150 elephants in the wild and about 100 domesticated pachyderms, some of which are used in safaris by private hotels and state-run national parks. Elephants are a protected species in Nepal and killing them carries a jail term of up to 15 years.

www.elephantconservation.org