

## News Briefs

*Compiled by Jayantha Jayewardene, Editor*

### **1. 3-meter-long ancient ivory fossil discovered in Anhui (China)**

*People's Daily  
September 10, 2010*

A 3.34-meter-long ancient ivory fossil were found at Zhang Changying Village, Mengcheng County of Anhui Province on the afternoon of Sept 8. After primary certification, researchers believe the ivory fossil belonged to an ancient elephant that lived about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. The fossil was buried 5 meters under the ground, and the thickest part of it reaches 22 centimeters. And judging from the ivory, it could be an adult elephant.

According to archaeologists, the discovery of the fossil provides important evidence to analyze the geological distribution of water and land, climate changes and the evolutionary history of animals in Anhui Province.

### **2. White elephant auspicious for elections (Myanmar)**

*Associated Press  
September 25, 2010*

YANGON - Myanmar's state-controlled media hailed Saturday the capture of a rare white elephant as a positive omen for upcoming elections, the first balloting in two decades in the military-ruled country. The 7-foot, 1-inch (216 cm) tall beast was captured Thursday in Rakhine state in the northwest, and is the fifth white elephant caught in a decade, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported on its front page. The pachyderm is estimated to be 18 years old.

White elephants, actually albinos, have for centuries been revered in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and other Asian nations. They were normally kept and pampered by monarchs and considered a symbol of royal power and prosperity. According

to ancient treatises, it is hard to find even a single white elephant among a thousand, but five of the rare beasts have emerged from 2001 to 2010, and the latest discovery is a matter of "national pride.

The country's fourth white elephant, a 38-year-old female captured in the jungles of Rakhine state in June, was given a lavish welcome ceremony when it was taken to the administrative capital of Naypyitaw. It was housed in an enclosure near the Upptasanti pagoda, a replica of the famed Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon, the former capital and biggest city in Myanmar. Three other white elephants caught earlier are kept in a special park in Yangon, where they live in an enclosure with spiraled pavilions, a manmade waterfall, ponds and trees.

### **3. Pesticide suspected in death of elephant (Thailand)**

*Bangkok Post  
September 27, 2010*

SURAT THANI: The consumption of pesticide is being looked at as a possible cause of death of a male elephant found dead in a vegetable garden, officials say. The 30-year-old wild elephant with two perfect tusks measuring about 60cm each was believed to have died at least 20 hours before it was found in a vegetable garden yesterday near Khlong Kratae in Kanchanadit district. The animal suffered from diarrhoea and internal bleeding before it died, said a veterinarian who was among a team from Tai Romyen national park that rushed to the scene.

Traces of pesticide were found about 30metres from the elephant, and officials said it was possible the animal had eaten some. Garden owner Tiang Srisuk, 45, said she went to pick vegetables and found her makeshift shelter had been damaged. Small bags of pesticide which were kept inside the shelter had fallen to the ground and some

vegetable plots were damaged. Ms Tiang said she followed footprints and found the dead elephant.

Sukrit Krataichan, head of the national park, said an autopsy would be held. Veerakiart Lakkhachai, chief of the Tai Romyen forestry development project, said elephants living around the national park foraged for food in nearby villages.

#### **4. Wildlife authorities grapple to contain jumbo-sized problem (Thailand)**

*Bangkok Post*  
*November 11, 2010*

Wildlife authorities are playing a “cat and mouse” game with criminals who kill elephants, wrench the tusks bloodily from their heads, then sell the ivory on the black market - usually in Thailand. They say they are trying better ways to deal with what they term “wildlife crimes” - which involve big cats, pangolins and ivory. Authorities said they are “playing a game with wildlife smugglers” which now is a transnational, well-planned, organised network. Criminals are changing tactics to avoid crackdowns.

One of the top concerns for Thailand is the illicit ivory trade. Thai craftsmanship is regarded as among the world’s finest. Thai authorities from police to customs agencies are in talks for the first time with officers from the Nairobi-based Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF) in Bangkok to map out better planning and closer cooperation to try to stop the flow of raw tusks from East African countries to the kingdom.

The illegal ivory trade is complicated. In many cases, elephants are killed in Africa and the raw ivory culled from the slaughter is sent to Thailand for carving. The finished products are exported to international customers, said Onkuri Majumdar, a senior programme officer with the Foundation for Human Rights and Wildlife (Freeland), which co-organised the workshop for Thai and African authorities with the Asean Wildlife Enforcement Network.

The smugglers’ routes change frequently to avoid detection. The best-known route now is to

Suvarnabhumi via the Middle East or Singapore. Many shipments of ivory are kept at a Middle East transit point for some time before being sent to Thailand and other countries. Mr Karugaba, who is considered an expert in the fight against illegal trade in wild fauna and flora, and Thai authorities admitted there was a lack of good coordination. He said there was a need for better data sharing so they could be more effective in their pursuit of criminals.

Thailand is not alone in facing the illegal ivory trade. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and Vietnam are also favourite places for smugglers to have their raw products polished, LATF records show. Most raw tusks are sent to those countries from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Raw tusks are also smuggled out of India for carving and the problem is widespread in its southern and northeastern states, according to the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau of India.

That led to a reduction in the number of wild elephants in the country from 10,841 in 1999 to only about 8,000 in 2007, it said. One of the tactics smugglers use to take ivory and other wild animals or their bodies out of India is to use two different containers with the same serial number, Indian wildlife inspector Aarti Singh said in another workshop last week.

#### **5. Elephant declared national heritage animal (India)**

*Press Trust Of India*  
*October 22, 2010*

NEW DELHI - Elephants have been declared as national heritage animal by the government with an aim to step up measures for their protection. A notification in this regard was issued by the Environment Ministry today as recommended by the task force on elephant project and approved by the standing committee of National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) in its meeting on October 13. The long-awaited move has cheered the conservationists who feel that jumbos, being closely associated with religion and culture in the country since ages, need to be given the same degree of importance as enjoyed by the tiger.

The government also plans to amend Wildlife (Protection) Act to pave way for setting up of National Elephants Conservation Authority (NECA) on the lines of the NTCA that has been constituted for the tiger conservation. Declaring elephants as national heritage animal and setting up NECA for their protection are part of recommendations of the Elephant Task Force, set up by the government, in its report “securing the Future for Elephants in India.

The report has called for protection of jumbos by creating new reserves, curbing poaching and restricting development in the corridors they use to travel between forested areas. According to the task force, there are over 25,000 elephants in the country, including 3,500 in captivity in zoos and temples-- particularly in southern and north-eastern parts of the country.

#### **6. Central highlands to have \$3 million elephant sanctuary (Vietnam)**

*VietnamNet*  
*November 9, 2010*

A veterinary center to treat both wild and tame elephants and a breeding-research center will be set up under a VND 61 billion (US \$3.1 million) conservation project approved by the Central

Highlands province of Dak Lak. Y Rit Bya, chief of the province’s Forest Protection Department, said the 200 –hectare complex will be situated in the Yok Don National Park and that officials running it will be given professional training.

A 2009 study by the Central Highlands University says that Dak Lak has 80-110 wild elephants and 61 tames ones. Unfortunately, the number of tame elephants is falling due to deaths, and no tame elephants will be left unless measures to breed new ones are taken immediately, the study warns. The animals are found mostly in the districts of Buon Don, Ea Sup, and Ea H’Leo. Of the 310,000 ha of forests where wild elephants live, only 160,000 ha of mostly special-use and protected forests provide them safe habitats. But as these forests shrink, there is increasing conflict between humans and wild elephants.

#### **7. Mitigating The ‘Humans Against Jumbos’ Conflict (Malaysia)**

*Bernama*  
*November 10, 2010*

KINABATANGAN - Six years ago, the Sabah wildlife authorities set up the Elephant Conservation Unit (ECU), in collaboration with HUTAN which is a non-governmental organisation. ECU’s primary task being the



An impressive young tusker - Galkiriyagama, Sri Lanka (see book review on page 84)  
Photo by Vajira Wijegunawardane

prevention of extinction of these pygmy elephants. ECU is based at Kampung Sukau. ECU also provides the gear and training for farmers on how to protect their crops from the foraging elephants apart from teaching them to understand these mammals and their ecology.

Sulaiman said the routine work of ECU members is to patrol the routes identified as elephant trails around the village including the areas bordering the jungle fringes and oil palm estates. He said the patrols are being carried out either on 4-WD vehicles or boats, alternately in the morning and evening. They would have to be on the alert round-the-clock in monitoring the jumbos' movements to prevent the mammals from foraging into the plantations, destroying the crops.

Realising the uniqueness and importance of these Borneo Pygmy elephants, the government took the initiative on the mammals' conservation by creating this sanctuary. The pygmy elephants of Borneo are baby-faced little pachyderms, with oversized ears, plump bellies and tails so long they sometimes drag on the ground as they walk. Satellite collars on the jumbos in 2008 to track and know the wildlife's whereabouts. The effort was also to map out the area where the elephants moved along the Kinabatangan Corridor and this helped to identify the jumbos' annual migration pattern.

It is estimated that there are some 200 Borneo pygmy elephants in Kinabatangan out of the more than 1000 of such elephants in Sabah. These elephants are the subspecies of the Asian elephants.

## **8. Family of man killed by wild elephants expect compensation in SW China**

*Xinhua News Agency  
November 11, 2010*

KUNMING - Family members of a farmer who was believed to have been killed by wild elephants in mountains of southwest China's Yunnan Province are expecting compensation from a local insurance company. Ma Jinyou, 67, died on Nov. 3 while harvesting chillies in

mountains of Mengla County in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, a spokesman with the local government said Thursday.

The Mengla Branch of China Pacific (OOTC: CHNAQ) Insurance Co. was working on the case and compensation would be paid out in about a month, the spokesman said. Ma was not the first to be trampled to death by wild elephants in Xishuangbanna, but his case was the first to be covered by commercial insurance, under a new compensation scheme introduced by the local government exactly a year ago.

Though the exact amount of compensation was not immediately known, Ma's family could expect a larger amount than victims of the past. Victims in similar tragedies used to be compensated solely by local forestry department, which paid out 3 million to 10 million yuan (452,100 to 1.5 million U.S. dollars) annually for deaths, injuries and economic losses incurred by wild elephants.

Under a pilot agreement between China Pacific Insurance Co. and the local government, valid from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2010, the insurer would pay up to 30 million yuan in compensation for wild elephants' attacks on humans.

The virgin rainforests of Xishuangbanna is home to more than 250 wild elephants, about 90 percent of China's total, thanks to its ideal ecology and effective protection. Wild elephants have attacked more than 140 people and damaged 50,000 tonnes of grain in the past 20 years, according to the local forestry department.

## **9. Vietnam villagers seek eviction of marauding elephants**

*Monsters and Critics  
November 18, 2010*

HANOI - An aggressive herd of elephants is frightening villagers in Vietnam's Central Highlands, but a local official said Thursday that requests to remove the elephants were 'not feasible.'

About 20 elephants have appeared in a commune



in Ea Sup District of Dak Lak province, destroying nearly 40 hectares of crops and causing an estimated 50,000 dollars in damage, the Lao Dong newspaper reported. But evicting the elephants would be 'very expensive and takes time,' Y Rit Buon Ya, deputy director of Dak Lak Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, told the German Press Agency dpa. The process, he said, would also require support from the central government and help from the international community. It was the fifth time the elephants have damaged crops since the beginning of 2010.

'We have to light fires every night to scare off the elephants but they seem not to be afraid anymore,' Ngo Van Luon, a villager, told local press. The elephants even seemed attracted to fire, he said. 'They show signs of coming to our place, making us too frightened, so we have to run away.' 'This elephant group is really causing danger for local people because they are very aggressive,' Ya said. 'Local people will be starving if they continue to destroy their farms. 'The only way to help local people to avoid starvation is to grow paddy in other places.'

#### **10. Three endangered elephants found dead in Indonesia**

*Agence France Presse*  
*December 8, 2010*

BANDA ACEH - Three endangered Sumatran elephants have been found dead after their herd rampaged through a village in western Indonesia. The cause of the animals' deaths is being investigated but a local conservationist said they might have died after eating poison intended for wild boars as they scavenged for food at village stores.

"Three elephants have been killed. We don't know the cause but we have sent a team to the location to find out," Aceh province conservation agency chief Abubakar Chek Mat said. "Conflict between elephants and residents happens often in this location and we're trying to find a solution to drive the elephants back to their habitat."

"For the past week, dozens of Sumatran elephants have gone to the village in east Aceh district and destroyed houses and crops, forcing 50 villagers to seek refuge elsewhere," he said. "When the people returned home yesterday, they found three elephants dead. They said the elephants might have consumed poison meant for wild boars."

Human-animal conflicts are a rising problem as people encroach on wildlife habitats in Indonesia, an archipelago with some of the world's largest remaining tropical forests. Bakhtiar said his group and the local authorities are planning to bring tame elephants to the area to help chase any straying herd back into the forest. There are up to 3350 Sumatran elephants remaining in the wild, according to the environmental group WWF.

#### **11. Locals happy at new way to ward off elephants (Nepal)**

*Republica*  
*December 15, 2010*

BARDIYA - A novel method of repelling wild elephants has provided relief to the locals of Bhimapur Village Development Committee (VDC), who had been suffering tuskers coming from the Murtiha Katarniya National Park in India. Police used to fire their guns and locals would keep vigil throughout the night to chase away the elephants. Patrolling with domesticated elephants also did not work and the wild elephants destroyed crops worth millions in the past five months.

But the use of a rope painted with paste made from a mixture of 10 liters of used engine oil and 1 kg of tobacco and chilli powder has done the trick since Friday. The method, used successfully in India recently, was tried out after repeated efforts by locals and by Bardiya National Park, which deployed six elephants and 23 staffers for the purpose, failed to bear fruit. Chief Conservation Officer at Bardiya National Park, Tika Ram Adhikari, said the elephants were repelled by the strong smell of the paste and claimed that 1 km of rope can be painted with paste at a cost of Rs. 1000. It was more effective than an electric fence.

Locals of Bhimapur and Khairi Chandanpur are still not sure if the elephants have been repelled by the odor of the paste or it is just a coincidence, but they are delighted. "We are delighted that expenditure of just Rs. 1000 has stopped the elephants," Bishnu Rizal, a local, said.

## **12. Bhutanese elephants develop 'new fondness' for oranges**

*BBC News*  
*December 26, 2010*

It is estimated that there are about 500 wild elephants in Bhutan. Elephants in Bhutan have begun eating oranges for what is believed to be the first time, officials have told the country's main English newspaper.

A report in the Kuensel newspaper says that elephants have developed a taste for mandarins in orchards in the south-east of the country. Villagers told the newspaper that they were shocked to see the animals tucking into the fruit. Experts say that Bhutanese elephants eat between 149 and 169 kg of vegetation daily. While it is not unknown for them to eat some forms of fruit along with grass, small plants, bushes, twigs and tree bark, in Bhutan it seems that they have only recently developed a fondness for oranges.

"This has never happened before," orange exporter Pushpa Adhikari told Kuensel. Villagers believe that the lack of fodder in the jungles has forced the giants into the orchards in search of food and that it is only a matter of time before the animals start moving into other orchards in the south-east. In 2007, wild elephants destroyed an estimated 132 acres (53 hectares) of land.

The WWF says that the animals' traditional migratory routes have "been blocked by human intervention through rapid industrialization and infrastructure development". Villagers say that they not only have to contend with the loss of their crops, but also the destruction of trees. At least two orchards have so far been destroyed. They say that branches have been ripped off and fruit scattered all around, while elephant dung coated with orange seed litters the ground.

## **13. Hakka patas inserted in vegetables brings**

## **slow, painful death to elephants (Sri Lanka)**

*Sunday Times*  
*December 26, 2010*

The continuing human-elephant conflict in several areas of the country has led to deadly consequences for both people and animal. Much to the dismay of Wildlife authorities, villagers living in threatened areas have invented a deadly weapon called hakka patas to kill elephants. This weapon is specially popular in the Wayamba region. At least three adult elephants and seven baby elephants have been killed recently in Anuradhapura, Mannar, Vavuniya and Puttalam districts, according to Zonal Officer- Wildlife Department, C. Jayasinghe.

The hakka patas is a mixture of explosive matter, lead and iron made into a ball, which is inserted into a cucumber or a pumpkin. These are mainly used to hunt wild boar. Sometimes, dry fish, which is a 'delicacy' for the wild boar, is added to the explosive mixture. And now, the elephants have fallen easy prey to this 'temptation'. Animals that come for water too, easily fall prey to this spiked food.

Mr. Jayasinghe explained how the animal dies a painful death after the deadly fruit bursts inside its mouth on being consumed. However, the adult elephant is intelligent enough to identify the masked fruit as a deadly meal, not so the calves. He said it is pathetic and heartrending to see elephants, who consume this deadly fruit, suffer in pain and go without food for days. These animals must be saved from extinction he said, adding that, recently, he had witnessed an elephant and its baby suffer a painful death from this deadly fruit.

## **14. Epidemic kills six K'taka, TN elephants in 20 days (India)**

*The Pioneer*  
*January 3, 2011*

BANGALORE - A new epidemic, Haemorrhagic Septicaemia (HS), has killed six wild elephants in just 20 days in Karnataka and Tamil

Nadu. The Forest Department fears this deadly outbreak may spread to ungulates such as wild bison, deer and other animals too.

Three female elephants died at Bailur Forest Range in Biligiri Ranga Temple Wildlife Sanctuary of Karnataka, while three others were killed in the bordering Sathyamangala forest of Tamil Nadu. This range falls in the Nilgiri biosphere, which is home to 6000 Asiatic elephants. It is a major migratory route linking three States.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and chief wildlife warden BK Singh spoke to The Pioneer about the grim situation. “The reason for the spread of this virus is grazing of domestic animals inside the park. We have instructed grazers not to let the domestic herd into the forest. It is quite serious,” Singh said. “This disease spreads fast in the winter. We have also made sure that village cattle have been vaccinated. We have been keeping a strict vigil on cattle movement. Now, we have to wait and watch,” he added.

Institute of Animal Health & Veterinary Biologicals director Renuka Prasad said the disease, which spreads through saliva discharge, can take two forms — pneumonia and intestinal. Unvaccinated animals can die within a week. The initial signs of the disease are general dullness, a reluctance to move and high temperature. Then salivation and nasal discharge appear and edematous swellings are seen in the throat, which spread to the rest of the body. Visible mucous membranes are congested and respiratory distress is soon followed by collapse. Recovery is rare. The animal dies within 3 to 36 hours.

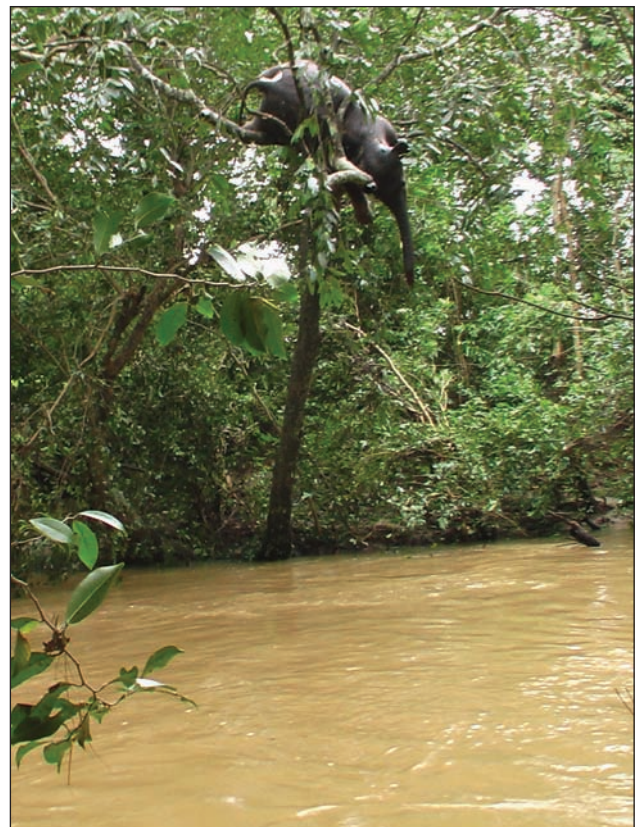
### **15. Flood-hit Sri Lankan elephant calf found dead in tree**

*BBC News*  
*January 13, 2011*

An image has emerged from Sri Lanka of a dead elephant calf stuck high in a tree after getting caught up in the country’s fast-flowing floods. The animal was found near the Kaloya river in northern Sri Lanka, which rose 18 ft (5.5 m) above its normal height.

Local villagers alerted photographer Kanchana Kumara Ariyadasa, who took the picture on Thursday. He believes the photo will be a defining image of the country’s recent heavy flooding. “I have been working as a journalist for the last 10 years but this is likely to be one of the strangest photos I will ever take in my career,” Mr Ariyadasa told the BBC. “The animal is still stuck in the tree as we speak while wildlife officials work out the best way to get it down to conduct a post-mortem examination.”

Thousands of animals - including elephants, snakes, water buffaloes and livestock - are thought to have perished in the floods. More than 30,000 army, navy, police and air force personnel are currently battling to provide urgent aid to people hit by the disaster. At least 23 people have died and more than a million have been affected by the flooding, which the government says has displaced more than 325,000 people.



Dead elephant calf in the tree  
Photo by Kanchana Kumara Ariyadasa  
Courtesy The Sunday Times, Sri Lanka