

## News Briefs

*Compiled by Jayantha Jayewardene, Editor*

### **1. Kalimantan Palm Plantations Threaten Last Pygmy Elephants (Malaysia)**

*Jakarta Globe - 18.4.2012*

With no more than 80 Borneo pygmy elephants left in Indonesia, the massive clearing of forests to make way for palm oil plantations poses a major threat to the survival of the species, environmentalists warn. In a statement released on Wednesday, WWF Indonesia said a four-year-survey that concluded last year showed there were only 20 to 80 of the elephants left, all in northern East Kalimantan on the border with Malaysia's Sabah state.

The group warned that the expanding plantations were driving the elephants out of their natural habitat and forcing them into more frequent conflict with villagers in Nunukan district. Agus Suyitno, WWF's human-elephant conflict mitigation official in Nunukan, said the group was addressing the problem by setting up a task force involving local residents and wildlife officials. "WWF Indonesia calls on the government and the private sector to provide operational support for these task force members so that the conflicts won't escalate," he said.

Anwar Purwoto, WWF's forestry, species and freshwater program director, said forestry and conservation did not have to be mutually exclusive. He cited the case of logger Adimitra Lestari, whose concession covers the pygmy elephant's last major stronghold. He said WWF had worked with the company over the past two years to practice sound forestry management by only logging in areas the elephants did not visit and leaving the trees that they fed on untouched. "This," he said, "showcases the real implementation of the green economy, in which business operates without harming endangered species populations."

### **2. Tourism driving illegal elephant trade in Burma and Thailand**

*The Guardian - 24.7.2012*

Up to 100 wild elephants are being captured from the wild each year in Burma, to smuggle into Thailand for tourist destinations. An illegal cross-border trade in endangered wild Asian elephants to serve Thailand's tourist industry is threatening the future of the species, an undercover investigation by the Ecologist Film Unit (EFU) has revealed.

A new film produced by the EFU in association with Link TV and the NGO Elephant Family, has uncovered how at least 50-100 elephant calves and young female elephants are removed from their forest homes in Burma each year to be traded illegally to supply tourist camps situated in Thailand. Many of the animals end up being used for trekking, in festivals, as attractions in so-called 'wildlife parks' and for riding at other tourist destinations. Yet countless elephants die in the process, threatening the remaining populations of this endangered species.

Capturing elephants from the wild often involves the slaughter of mothers and other protective family members with automatic weapons. Captured calves are then often subjected to a brutal 'breaking-in' process where they are tied up, confined, starved, beaten and tortured in order to 'break their spirits'. It is estimated that only one in three survive this inhumane 'domestication' process.

As many as one million British tourists visit Thailand's tourist camps each year, it is estimated, leading to claims that they are unwittingly fuelling this devastating trade. Campaigners are now calling on the Thai authorities to launch a fresh crackdown on elephant smuggling ahead of the next Convention on International Trade in

Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Thailand in March 2013.

### **3. Malaysia identified as a major transit point for elephant tusk smugglers**

*The Star - 3.9.2011*

PETALING JAYA - More than 20 tonnes of illegal ivory have passed through at least two Malaysian ports since 2003, earning the country an unsavoury reputation as a trans shipment hub for the multi-million ringgit trade and the figure involves only those seized. This could have been caused by stricter enforcement measures in neighbouring countries, leading smugglers to venture through Malaysian ports.

It was reported that 794 African ivory tusks were confiscated by Hong Kong authorities on Monday after they arrived by sea from Malaysia. The tusks, weighing 1.9 tonnes and estimated to be worth around HK\$ 13 mil (RM 4.97 mil), was concealed in a consignment declared as non-ferrous products for factory use. The seizure came after last week's report that more than 1000 elephant tusks were seized by Tanzanian authorities. The tusks were hidden in a strong-smelling container of anchovies destined for Malaysia.

It has been suggested that customs officers improve their communication mechanisms by using the Ecomessage system set up by Interpol. (Ecomessage is a database to coordinate international efforts to combat environmental crime, including illegal trafficking of wildlife.) Local enforcement agencies should gather intelligence or information and bring it to the National Central Bureau (NCB) located at the federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman. <...>

### **4. Sri Lanka count finds more elephants than expected**

*Associated Press - 1.9.2011*

The first national survey of Sri Lanka's wild elephants found more than had been estimated - a sign the endangered species has a healthy,

growing population on the Indian Ocean island. The count conducted last month in forests and wildlife parks found 5879 wild elephants, of which 122 are tuskers and 1107 calves.

About 20 wildlife groups withdrew their support of the count, accusing the government of using it as a "smoke screen" for capturing the endangered animals and domesticating some of the young for use in Buddhist temples, tourism and labor.

Their accusation came after Wildlife Minister Chandrasena was quoted as saying 300 young elephants would be captured and handed over to Buddhist temples after the census. Elephants in elaborate costumes are often used in Buddhist ceremonies where they parade through the streets carrying the sacred relics of the Buddha. Chandrasena has said he was misquoted and no wild elephants would be captured.

The survey was conducted using the method known as "water hole count" and about 4000 wildlife workers, farmers and villagers were deployed for three days at more than 1500 locations across the country to survey the elephants as they come to water sources to drink.

### **5. Pygmy elephant relocated to forest reserve (Malaysia)**

*New Straits Times - 4.6.2012*

SANDAKAN - A Borneo pygmy elephant was relocated on May 28, from an oil palm plantation near Lahad Datu to the Ulu Kalumpang Forest Reserve, as part of a long-term programme to tackle human-elephant conflicts in plantations. To track its movements within the 510 km<sup>2</sup> reserve that has only 10 elephants, the bull was fitted with a satellite collar in the programme run by the Sabah Wildlife Department and the Danau Girang Field Centre (DGFC). <...>

DGFC director Dr Benoit Goossens said plantations such as oil palm, had considerably reduced the habitat of elephants and other wildlife in Sabah, increasing conflicts between the mammal and people. "We agree that oil palm is necessary for the development of the country.

However, there is a need to better manage the landscape within and around plantations by providing routes for wildlife to move from one forest to another. “Our programme includes fitting translocated elephants with a satellite collar, before we monitor their movements and migratory patterns to identify the best areas for conservation and the establishment of corridors for elephants,” he said.

Dr Goossens said, at the end of the programme, a guideline for conflict mitigation, especially adapted for plantations, would be established within the Central Sabah Managed Elephant Range.

## **6. A way out for trapped Borneo elephants (Malaysia)**

*Free Malaysia Today - 12.9.2011*

KINABATANGAN - Sabah’s many endangered species, including the Bornean elephant and the orangutan, are finally being helped to safe havens via “corridors” through vast oil palm plantations that have encroached into their home. With the habitats of these mammals becoming increasingly fragmented due to the rapid clearing of forests for oil palm and other industrial tree plantations, animal corridors linking them to untouched forests may be the only way to ensure their survival.

The State Wildlife Department announced the setting of an “elephant corridor” in the Melapi village in Sukau, Kinabatangan, which is home to an endangered population of the animals now trapped by the ever-expanding plantations. The newly created corridor stretches for 1km and measures about 50m in width and straddles the boundary of a wildlife viewing lodge and a plantation. It will allow around 200 trapped elephants in the lower Kinabatangan wildlife sanctuary to move to new foraging areas.

The corridor is part of the elephants’ ancestral migration route, which has been disrupted in recent years due to deforestation. Working closely with Sabah Wildlife Department, BCT will initiate the Sabah Mega Ecological Corridor

Programme, by the end of this year. The idea is to identify and determine the strategies that could effectively contribute to improving and protecting the ecological corridors. <...>

## **7. Coordination key to bring down elephant deaths along Indo-Nepal border, say experts**

*Indian Express - 13.9.2011*

Last week, when a tusker died on Indian soil after receiving gunshot injuries in Nepal near the international border, it once again brought to fore a lack of coordination between the two countries on the issue of safety of elephants. Forest officials and wildlife experts say incidents of elephant deaths either by gunshots or by electrocution along the Indo-Nepal border has been steadily increasing.

What is required is a joint mechanism between the two countries so that the elephants can freely move across the international border. The area covering parts of Nepal, Bhutan, West Bengal and Assam in India forms a grand corridor for elephants that has been in existence for thousands of years.

The West Bengal Forest Department is already working in close co-ordination with Bhutan on the movement of the pachyderms. A border district co-ordination committee has been formed to closely monitor the movement of the elephants along the border with Bhutan. Forest officials say that every six months a meeting is held between the two sides.

The area has also witnessed an increase in the elephant population. The latest census carried out earlier this year found 560 odd elephants in north Bengal. According to forest department, about 1855 elephants crossed to Nepal in the last one decade.

## **8. Wild elephants get free meals (China)**

*China Daily - 10.3.2012*

Free “canteens” have been set up for wild elephants to reduce the friction with villagers

caused by their return to the improved environment of Pu'er in Southwest China's Yunnan province, said Shen Peiping, Party chief of Pu'er. A free canteen was set up last year on an abandoned 20 hectares in Pu'er's Mengkuang village, where elephants are seen. Farmers were hired to plant banana, plantain and corn.

"Elephants have been seen eating at the 'canteen' quite a few times. We hope that with this food source, elephants will pay fewer visits to farmland and the conflicts with farmers will ease," he said. More free canteens will be begun if needed.

In the past, wild elephants' natural habitat shrank to make way for rubber and other types of plantations, which were expected to bring farmers better earnings. With their habitat - and food sources - dwindling, the elephants migrated to neighboring countries. In 1995, they began to return to Pu'er, where wildlife reserves were established, hunting banned, and forest land expanded. "Some are newborn elephants, and others are from neighboring countries, including Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. <...>

### **9. Forest officials suspect anthrax scare at Periyar Tiger Reserve (India)**

*Rang7 - 26.9.2011*

The possibility of an anthrax epidemic outbreak has led to creating a fearful atmosphere at the Periyar Tiger Reserve. Last week the body of a female elephant was found at Vallakkadavu range in the Thekkady range of the reserve. Forest officials who carried out a detailed examination said that the death has occurred due to unnatural conditions and suspect mainly due to anthrax.

The forest veterinary officials suspected symptoms of anthrax in the animal and samples have been sent for detailed test. Following the suspicions the body was not cut open and burnt as soon as possible without carrying out a post mortem examination, though a final confirmation of the disease will only be made after the results are out.

According to forest officials, the Anthrax virus generally lives for over 30 years. "Even if it is Anthrax, the virus must have been alive in the soil for such a long time. We don't think there is the possibility of an epidemic outbreak in the wake of this incident," an official said.

Wildlife experts and officials often fear such epidemic outbreaks, which can wipe out an entire species. Fears of such instances occurring are often expressed in case of the Asiatic Lion, which is found only in Gir Forest National Park in Gujarat. Experts fear that in case of an epidemic the entire species can be wiped out in one instant and are therefore actively proposing for the lions to be transferred to other National Parks around the country as well. This will help to save the species in case of a problem in one area.

### **10. Nation's elephants under threat (Vietnam)**

*Viet Nam News - 4.10.2011*

HA NOI - With the death of a large number of tame elephants recently concerns have risen regarding the threat of extinction in the absence of measures to safeguard the animals. Dan Nang Long, an elephant keeper from Central Highland Dak Lak Province, had one of his elephants killed and three others injured in a poaching attack. Long said that while he had reported the incident to local police, very little existed in terms of concrete evidence in confirming the crime.

Determined, Long has subsequently been successful in helping detect and bring to justice a ring of poachers specialising in elephant tails. According to historian Duong Trung Quoc, Viet Nam had over 500 wild elephants in 1985, but the numbers have since dropped to only 52.

Long expressed his concern regarding extinction due to the animals having little opportunity to reproduce while the taming of wild elephants has been prohibited. The breeder, alongside Quoc, recently attended a workshop held in Ha Noi where participants shared their views on preserving Viet Nam's remaining elephants. <...>

## **11. Watery grave for elephant in Palani (India)**

*The Times of India - 7.10.2011*

MADURAI - A female elephant looking for water in a dam near Palani in Dindigul district died as it got caught in the slush in the wee hours of Wednesday. Palani forest ranger K. Dharmaraj said that a herd of about 10 elephants was frequenting the Porunthalaru dam in Palani, for the past one week as water sources inside the forests were drying up. The water level in the Porunthalaru dam, which is 69 feet high now has just knee deep water near the banks and villagers said that even in the middle of the dam there was more slush of about four feet.

It is suspected that the female elephant aged about 6 years had got caught in the slush and was unable to come out due to its weight. The carcass of the dead elephant was found bloated and floating on Thursday morning and it was pulled out using a JCP machine and net and buried late on Thursday. A postmortem had revealed that the animal's lungs had decomposed due to filling up with slush and mud.

## **12. Electric fencing to be installed to ward off elephants (Vietnam)**

*Sai Gon Giai Phong - 25.2.2012*

A 30 km solar electric fencing system will be installed along the forest in the southern province of Dong Nai this year, to minimise conflict between elephants at the Natural and Cultural Reserve Park and villagers living in close proximity. The Reserve's director said that the fencing, the first of its kind in the country, is expected to protect the living habitat of both the people and the dwindling elephant numbers. The solar fence has been utilised in many countries, including India and Cambodia, with much success. Authorities have assured that the fencing system would be completely safe. It will control the animals via sharp, but safe shocks, sufficiently memorable to prevent repeat action. As many as 1,500 'danger' signs will be installed along the fence, which will include eight gates for forest rangers and people to pass through.

The province currently has more than ten elephants, including male, female and calves, living in an area of about 30,000 ha of forest protected by reserve staff. In recent years, farmers in some communes nearby said the elephants continually destroyed their sugarcane, mango and cashew fields, amounting to much financial loss. They now totally agree with the building of the fence as it will deter the elephants that trample cultivated crops in search of food. Farmers believe the solar fence will sufficiently hinder the entry of the wild herd.

During the last three years, the province has given nearly VND 4 billion in compensations to farmers. Since 2009, nine elephants have died in the reserve and the nearby protective forest area, eight without a clear reason while one was shot dead.

## **13. China, Laos will expand nature reserve to protect Asian elephant**

*Bernama - 31.10.2011*

China and Laos have signed an agreement to jointly build another cross-border nature reserve in order to better protect the endangered Asian elephant. The second reserve will cover 20,000 hectares of forest in China and stretch across 35,000 hectares in Laos, according to the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve Administration. It will expand the cross-border reserve area to over 100,000 hectares after connecting it with the first nature reserve that was founded in 2009, which covers area of 54,000 hectares.

It will connect the separated tropical rain forest along the border into a bigger, better habitat and provide passages for the migration of large animals and other wildlife. The reserve is a part of the efforts to set up a safer corridor for the migration of the Asian elephant.

About 250 Asian elephants, the largest land animal in Asia, live in the wilderness of southwestern China's Yunnan Province. The elephants frequently cross the bordering forest. In 2009, the two countries signed an agreement

to establish the first cross-border nature reserve to protect rare animals like the Asian elephant and Indo-Chinese tiger. Cross-border cooperation with Myanmar will be carried out in the near future.

#### **14. Wild elephant kills villager in SW China**

*China Daily - 6.11.2011*

KUNMING - A villager was killed by a wild Asian elephant in Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Southwest Yunnan province. Local police confirmed the death of Cao Xiaoler, a resident of Xinshan village in the prefecture, was caused by a wild elephant. According to Cao's family, Cao went to gather herbs on Friday afternoon and did not return. His body was found on Saturday afternoon. Cao's back had bloodstains and wounds to his head, chest and legs indicated he had been trampled. On the ground, fresh footprints and dung of wild elephants were scattered.

Under the protection of the local government, the number of wild Asian elephants in the rainforests of Xishuangbanna has increased to more than 250, about 90% of China's wild elephant population. Since 1991, wild elephants in Xishuangbanna have attacked more than 140 people and destroyed 50,000 tonnes of grain, local forestry authorities said one year ago.

The local government used to pay the compensation for the elephant attacks, which amounted to 3 million to 10 million yuan per year. In November 2009, the provincial government signed a contract with China Pacific Insurance Co., allowing the private insurer to cover some of the villagers' losses.

#### **15. Jumbo killings: Kingpin nabbed (India)**

*IBN Live - 8.11.2011*

BHUBANESWAR - In a significant breakthrough in elephant poaching case, the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) joint team on Monday arrested four persons, including the kingpin, for their

involvement in the jumbo killings. The team arrested the kingpin, Mohan Majhi, his two associates and Sarfaraz, who acted as middleman. They were rounded up from Bakula, a peripheral village of STR.

During interrogation, the wildlife officials found out an inter-state smuggling racket with networks ranging from Orissa and West Bengal to Gujarat. "Sources said Mohan was responsible for removal of the tusks and handing it over to Sarfaraz, who belonged to the same village.

The three elephants were poisoned around October 27, a day after Diwali. Since access to the remote pockets of STR is difficult, Mohan and his accomplices managed to remove the tusks and dispose them of. The arrests have come as a boost to the enforcement measures of Wildlife Wing against elephant killings in Similipal since no such success could be achieved last year when close to two dozen elephants had allegedly been killed in the park. <...>

#### **16. Tracking the world's smallest elephant (Malaysia)**

*Mongabay - 15.11.2011*

Researchers have fitted three Bornean elephants with satellite collars to track them across the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, in the Malaysian state of Sabah, Borneo. The effort means currently five elephants are being tracked. The tracking is a part of a collaborative effort by the Sabah Wildlife Dept., the NGO HUTAN, and the Danau Girang Field Centre (DGFC).

"Extensive agriculture through palm oil plantations has considerably reduced the habitat of the elephant in the Kinabatangan, therefore increasing human-elephant conflicts. The herd there, estimated at about 200 to 250 individuals, finds it difficult to move between flooded lands, swamps, fenced plantations, villages, and nature lodges. Moreover, uncontrolled tourism with sometimes up to 20 boats aligned along river banks, less than 5 meters from where the elephants graze, increases the pressure on the herd," said Benoit Goossens, Director of the DGFC.

The Bornean elephant (*Elephas maximus borneensis*) is generally considered a prospective subspecies of the Asian elephant. It is thought to be the smallest elephant in the world. Asian elephants are classified as Endangered by the IUCN Red List. They are imperiled by habitat loss, deforestation, poaching, and increasingly human-wildlife conflict.

### **17. Elephant population up (India)**

*Hindustan India - 21.11.2011*

Elephant population has increased by 2,000 in the past 15 years in the country taking their number to 28,000, as per the latest data provided by environment ministry. The ministry, however, said it does not maintain statistics on the death of elephants and their disappearance. According to the 2007 census, there are 27,669 to 27,715 elephants in its various reserves and habitats as against 25,604 in 1993.

A maximum of 14,005 tuskers are in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra followed by 9305-9355 in northeastern regions with Assam having the highest number of 5281 pachyderms. The census of elephants is undertaken at an interval of five years and the last was done in 2007.

### **18. HC halts relocation of 25-30 elephants (India)**

*Deccan Chronicle - 17.11.2011*

In a major relief to elephant conservationists and the forest department, the Green Bench of Karnataka High Court on Wednesday halted the capture and relocation of 25-30 elephants from Alur Taluk of Hassan District. The Bench has also ordered the Central Government to seek advice from the African experts who could visit the village and give a fresh perspective on the entire human-elephant conflict in Hassan District. The decision also came as a big relief to the forest department as insiders revealed that they were under tremendous pressure from the Forest Minister C.P. Yogeshwar and local farmers. Mr Yogeshwar on Tuesday had declared

that the forest department will capture all the 25-30 elephants from Hassan district and send them to training camps to tame the wild elephants.

Incidentally the acting Chief Justice indicated that so-called 'elephant experts' are not helping the court dispose of the matter. "They are not here for conservation. They are here for something else," he said. The elephants in Alur at the backwaters of Hemavathi are restricted to 500 acres of forest. Majority of areas around this small patch have been encroached upon and there have been no efforts in the past to retrieve them. The forest department can now think about consolidating the forest land by expanding or adding the revenue land to the existing forest patch. <...>

### **19. UK green group shows how to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks (India)**

*Times of India - 2.12.2011*

PUNE - Radar sensors installed on trains can detect elephants crossing or standing on railways tracks while an auto-brake function can avoid hitting them. Both steps would bring down the mortality rate of the elephants, Animal Equity, a UK-based animal rights' organization, have said. On an average, trains hit five elephants every year and injure scores of other animals.

Last September, seven elephants were mowed down in a single incident at Banerhat on the New Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar junction stretch. This year, so far, four elephants have been run over by trains. Scintillating light headlamps with halogen or light-emitting diode bulbs, water cannons to drive away animals blocking tracks and high-powered binoculars for train drivers were other suggestions made to the environment minister and railways minister for implementation.

Amruta Ubale, representative of Animal Equality said "Radar sensors installed on trains can detect animals both moving and immobile in front of the train and on the tracks. They will also determine the distance from the animal and an auto-brake function can avoid hits," she said. <...>

## **20. Australian killed by elephant in Malaysia**

*The Sydney Morning Herald - 7.12.2011*

A pygmy elephant has gored an Australian woman to death Wednesday in a remote wildlife park on Borneo island in Malaysia. The woman in her 20s was trekking with a friend and a Malaysian guide in the Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Sabah state on Wednesday when they were attacked by the rare pygmy elephant, said state wildlife department director Laurentius Ambu.

Ambu told AFP that the bull may have been startled when the two tourists tried to take its photo and charged at them. While the guide and one woman managed to get away, the elephant's tusk pierced the other woman's body and she died instantly, he said. Ambu said the women had trekked to a mud volcano but were disappointed that they didn't see much wildlife so the guide took them back another way and not on the main path. Police are questioning the guide. Ambu said fatal attacks were rare though single elephant bulls are known to be aggressive.

Pygmy elephants, which are about 2.5 m tall compared to around 3 m for mainland Asian elephants, are unique to Borneo. Authorities say the elephant, a sub-species of the Asian elephant, is considered endangered with around 1500-2000 left on Borneo island.

## **21. Sri Lanka to spend 100 million rupees to minimize human-elephant conflict**

*ColomboPage - 6.12.2011*

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka has allocated 100 million rupees in its 2012 budget to implement programs to minimize human-elephant conflict and the crop damage by the elephants. The government will set up four centers for wild elephant conservation with the aim of minimizing the human-elephant conflict. The centers will be started in a land extent of three thousand acres in Veheragala, Maduru Oya, Horowpathana and Galgamuwa areas in the north central region. The human-elephant conflict is escalating in Sri Lanka as elephant habitat is encroached by development

and elephants are rampaging villages in search of food.

A large number of wild elephants have been killed by villagers in the recent past mounting pressure on the government to act before the situation worsens to the level of near extinct of the massive mammal. Sri Lanka's wild elephant population has dwindled in the recent years and an elephant census conducted by the Wildlife Department in August this year found that 5879 elephants are currently roaming Sri Lanka's jungles.

## **22. Rampaging wild elephant tramples farmer to death on Indonesia's Sumatra island**

*Associated Press - 25.12.2011*

BANDA ACEH - A rampaging wild elephant has trampled a farmer to death on Indonesia's Sumatra island. Nyak Cut, a paramedic, says three farmers in Geumpang village in Aceh province were trying to drive away a herd of wild elephants from their fields Saturday when one of the animals charged, sending the men fleeing. Cut says one of the farmers, 60-year-old Muhammad Amin, was trampled to death after he stumbled and fell. He says villagers have threatened to kill the elephants if authorities fail to protect their farms.

Only 3000 Sumatran elephants are believed to remain in the wild. They're threatened by their shrinking habitat, with jungles being cleared for commercial farming or felled for lumber. The elephants sometimes venture into inhabited areas in search of food.

## **23 Efforts to help save elephants end in failure (Vietnam)**

*Viet Nam News - 29.12.2011*

DONG NAI - Half of the wild elephants in Dong Nai Province have been wiped out in recent years, despite steps taken by the Prime Minister to save them. A project that he initiated five years ago to provide them with sanctuary in three "elephant" provinces by the year 2010 failed to get underway in the province. Under the plan,



Dong Nai in the south, Nghe An in the centre and Dak Lak in the Central Highlands were to cooperate with relevant bodies to protect the rare beasts. The decision was made after the number of wild elephants fell from as many as 2,000 in 1975-80 to only 100 in 2006.

Recently, farmers took over forest land for cultivation, restricting their living and feeding areas. Nguyen Huu Ly, chairman of the Vinh Cuu District People's Committee said this apparently outraged the hungry elephants, who started feeding on farmers' crops, particularly at night, destroying the crops in the process. Since 2007, the province has spent more than VND3 billion (\$185,705) compensating local residents whose farms have been damaged.

In the last two years, nine wild elephants in the province have been found dead and now only nine survive. The project to save them was not implemented because authorities at different levels could not decide if funds to run it should be from the State or provincial budget, said Dao. Meanwhile, Ha Cong Tuan, director of the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry under MARD, said the project was being implemented by Dong Nai authorities so the work of allocating funds should be borne by the provincial People's Committee. <...>

#### **24. Smuggling ring threatens wild elephants (Thailand)**

*MCOT - 10.1.2012*

Thailand's wild elephants are at an increasingly higher risk of extinction than ever before despite being officially protected. On average three of the giant animals have been hunted down and killed in each of the past two years, according to statistics from the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation. The carcasses of four male pachyderms were found after the New Year in Phetchaburi's Kaeng Krachan district. Hunters shot the animals with a powerful gun in their foreheads, while destroying evidence by cutting out the front of the skulls, burning bullet holes, and the elephant corpses themselves. Ivory tusks, tails, and sexual organs were taken.

National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department experienced this type of elephant hunting for the first time in the country. Earlier foreign hunters were suspected, as the scene was similar to a Bengal tiger hunt where two Vietnamese men were arrested. However, latest reports clues indicate that a smuggling ring is involved. The elephants' organs were sent to restaurants in Phuket for foreign customers. Elephant flesh is not usually consumed by Thais.

The suspected ring of smugglers have been hunting in the western forests along the Myanmar border. Ethnic minorities living near the border, usually do the job. Also baby elephants are captured to be trained and reared for elephant shows at home and overseas. There are now only some 1,750 elephants left in Thailand's forests countrywide. <...>

#### **25. Sumatran elephant upgraded to critically endangered status (Indonesia)**

*The Guardian - 24.1.2012*

The Sumatran elephant has been placed on the list of critically endangered species after losing half of its population in a single generation, prompting calls from conservation groups for emergency measures to halt the destruction of its habitat. Deforestation is seen as the primary reason for the collapse in numbers in Indonesia. The animal is now at risk of becoming extinct within decades.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) upgraded the risk assessment after tracking the loss of 69% of the animal's habitat over the past 25 years. With their home forests burned, felled or converted to plantations, the wild population has fallen to no more than 2800.

In its latest "red list" of threatened species, the IUCN noted that many of the remaining elephant communities were likely to disappear because they do not live in protected areas and there is a high risk of conflicts with humans. It cited studies showing that at least six herds disappeared between 2007 and 2009 in Riau province - a

centre for the paper, pulp and palm oil industries. "That this pattern will continue seems certain," it warned. <...>

However, without more public pressure or more funds, the Indonesia authorities are likely to continue to support or turn a blind eye to the loggers and plantation owners. The threat upgrade follows a flood of grim conservation news due to poaching, habitat loss and a lack of awareness among consumers.

The Javan rhino was declared extinct in Vietnam in October after the last one was found dead with a bullet in its leg and its horn sawn off. A month later, it was followed by Africa's western black rhinoceros and warnings that the Sumatran rhino is on the brink of extinction in Indonesia.

## **26. Elephants fighting back in southern Vietnam**

*Thanh Nien News - 24.2.2012*

A herd of wild elephants have been ravaging farmers' fields in the southern province of Dong Nai for a week-and-a-half, according to local forest management authorities. The elephants have eaten up fields of corn, sweet potatoes, cassava and sugarcane in Hamlet 2 near the Vinh Cuu Nature Reserve in Phu Ly Commune, Vinh Cuu District. The elephants usually show up at midnight and stay until the following morning, the residents said, adding they may have been unable to find food in the forests during the dry season. The elephants are living in a protected forest of around 30,000 hectares in Dong Nai, stretching from Cat Tien National Park to the Vinh Cuu Nature Reserve.

Dang Van Nhon, chief of Hamlet 2, said he had sought permission from district government to establish a quick-reaction team to instruct residents on how to avoid the elephants and to protect the animals from being killed by terrified residents. At least nine elephants have died in Dong Nai forests since 2009. Local authorities, however, have not made any official

announcements about the exact reasons for the deaths.

According to conservation experts, a shrinking habitat and scarce food resources for elephants have led to conflicts between humans and elephants. The Dong Nai Forest Management Department said there are only around 15 wild elephants left in the province. Experts have warned that the wild elephant herd in Dong Nai may become extinct in the near future.

## **27. The elephant on rampage was blind: Vet (Sri Lanka)**

*Times Online - 29.10.2011*

The elephant that went on the rampage damaging as many as 50 vehicles on Saturday close to Kekirawa has been found to be blind, according to a Veterinary surgeon. In addition to loss of sight in both eyes it also has suffered gunshot injuries earlier. The Surgeon Chandana Jayasinha said that since the elephant is without its sight in both eyes it was difficult to treat the animal, which has now traveled about 35 km away from the original area where it caused damages. It is currently in the reserves of the Kalawewa tank.

Villagers blame the Wild Life officials for mishandling the situation and allowing the elephant to go on the rampage damaging vehicles. They claimed that when the elephant, a tusker was cornered in a garden the officials had fired warning shots prompting the animal to get to the road and start attacking the vehicles. However, Wildlife officials said that most of the vehicles had parked in the area and come to look at the elephant instead of passing by and helping the officials to clear the location to ensure safety of the people. "Some people were even running behind the animal who was already in a state of panic and at one point the elephant threateningly turned back at the crowds', he said. The elephant went on the rampage at Thibbatuweva in Kekirawa for several hours Saturday morning, forcing people to flee in all directions for safety while it also created a traffic chaos.