

News Briefs

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1. Wild elephants injure two in China

MSN News - 9.2.2014

A group of wild elephants trying to cross a river in China's far southwest has left two tourists injured. The incident occurred on Saturday afternoon in Yunnan province when the river-crossing pachyderms ran into a family of five people. A woman suffered a fractured right shoulder while a man suffered slight injury. Both were treated at a local hospital. The incident took place at the Wild Elephant Valley reserve in Xishuangbanna prefecture.

The police drove the elephants away but did not provide details on the nature of the encounter between the animals and the family. In July, state media reported that a group of 14 wild Asian elephants attacked and killed a woman in the Xishuangbanna area before chasing police and investigators from the scene. The rainforests of Xishuangbanna, which borders Myanmar and Laos, are home to 250-300 wild elephants, Xinhua reported. The animals are generally placid but can attack when they feel threatened.

2. Controversy over elephant 'census' (Sri Lanka)

Sunday Leader - 1.5.2014

Controversy surrounds the much publicised elephant census carried out in 2011, as the Wildlife Department is now claiming it was not a census and only a research. The research was conducted by the Wildlife Department and a copy of the report was given to the Ringling Brothers, a circus troupe, which had used it to source funds.

According to sources in the Wildlife Department the Ringling Brothers was given credit in the report although it never funded the research. The

deal was carried out when S.M. Chandrasena was the Minister in charge under a special agreement. Director General of Wildlife H.D. Ratnayake said that the Ringling Brothers took part in the survey based on a proposal put forward by the Rajarata University.

The first report had some shortcomings and a fresh report was compiled for Rs 500,000 but the analysis was incomplete in the second report. It was reported last year that the "census" had found that there are 5879 elephants in Sri Lanka. Rs 18 million was spent for the research but it does not identify the sex of the animals, age and number of baby elephants, sources said.

Minister of Wildlife Resources Conservation, Vijith Vijayamuni de Soyza said the first report on the elephant research was sent to President Mahinda Rajapaksa. He admitted that the data in the report may not be accurate. He also said there is corruption in the Wildlife Department.

3. Three elephants killed as train runs into herd in Assam (India)

Press Trust of India - 27.2.2014

Three elephants were killed when they were hit by a local passenger train in upper Assam's Jorhat district today. The elephants were returning to their nearby habitat Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary. The elephants were killed when the Guwahati-Tinsukia Intercity Express hit the herd crossing the railway track at Venuguri village near Moriani Railway Station, officials said.

The elephants were returning to their nearby habitat Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary. While an adult elephant was cut into pieces, a calf died after it was hurled about 500 meters away due to the mishap. Another adult elephant was found dead lying near the train track, they said, adding, forest personnel have rushed there.

4. Palm oil plantations allegedly poison seven critically endangered elephants in Sumatra

Mongabay.com - 28.2.2014

Wildlife officials suspect foul play in the deaths of seven Sumatran elephants on the outskirts of Tesso Nilo National Park. Officials stumbled on the corpses of one female elephant, five young males, and one male calf in mid-February. Although the males had their tusks hacked off, the officials suspect the elephants were poisoned in revenge for disturbing illegal palm oil plantations inside the park.

“There is an indication that they were poisoned,” Muhammad Zanir, head of the local wildlife agency, told the AFP. “Some people may consider the elephants a threat to their palm oil plantations and poison them.”

“Killing of elephants in and around Tesso Nilo National Park has dramatically increased. Since 2012: a total of 33 elephants have been found dead, many more may have remained undetected,” reads a statement from Eyes on the Forest, a local NGO. “If forest loss and elephant killings do not slow down, Tesso Nilo’s elephant population might go extinct in less than 10 years.”

Tesso Nilo was established as a national park in 2004, but was already heavily fragmented by thousands of migrants, many of whom have illegally stayed on inside the park. The park is located in Riau province, which has lost some of the most forest on the island. In 1985, Riau was believed to be home to over 1600 Sumatran elephants, by 2009 only 330 survived. Today, there are likely less.



Elephants in Malaysia.
Photo by Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz

5. It will soon be ‘paradise regained’ for wild elephants (India)

The Hindu - 4.3.2014

Annual migration has begun; it’s expected to peak by March-end. It will be ‘paradise regained’ for hundreds of wild elephants as they reclaim the Kabini backwater. Their annual migration has just commenced and is expected to peak by March-end.

This year, there is sufficient water in the reservoir and the backwater. Last year, the prolonged drought and incessant release of water to save standing crops resulted in very low water level in the backwater. As a result, innumerable animals died of thirst and starvation. Consequently, wild animals deserted the Kabini in large numbers. Though elephants remained around the backwater, their number was less.

The Wildlife Conservation Foundation told *The Hindu* that as many as 54 elephants aged between nine and 14 had died in Bandipur last year because of this. “Post-mortem reports in almost all cases showed the presence of mud in elephants’ stomachs, as they had tried to dig out water-holes and eaten dollops of mud with little bit of moisture in them to survive,” he said.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, he said that on certain days during the peak of the migration season, one could find 800 to 1000 elephants on both the Bandipur and Nagarahole sides of the Kabini backwater. These numbers vary, depending on the availability of fodder in other parts of the forests, but one can easily spot over 200 elephants during this period.

6. Tourism seen as factor in illegal jumbo trafficking (Sri Lanka)

The Island - 7.3.2014

Tourism is being seen as a factor in the increasing illegal capture of wild elephants locally and in the trading of these animals. Wildlife conservationists warned that the Sri Lankan elephant population could very well be wiped out in the near future if

these deleterious trends continue.

Species Conservation Centre Chairman Pubudu Weeraratne said that the Sri Lankan elephants were in crisis due to the well organised, illegal trade conducted with the support of some politicians of this country. He claimed that there was a group of people who caught wild elephants and sold them at a huge price.

He also accused the Wildlife Conservation Department Director General H.D. Rathnayake of misleading the court by not divulging correct details.

Elephant activists suspect that this baby elephant had been captured in the Habarana forest. Habarana is believed to be the nerve centre of this alleged racket. The area has a high elephant density, being in the centre of three National Parks, namely, Minneriya, Kaudulla and Hurulu. Transporting elephants used for elephant safaris in and out of Habarana is also a common occurrence. So it is an ideal ground to execute abductions.

Meanwhile, Buddha Sasana Deputy Minister recently revealed that 63 elephant calves were stolen from the Habarana forest area, while the Wildlife Resources and Conservation Minister Vijith Wijayamuni Soysa said that they were finding it difficult to curb illegal elephant trafficking due to the absence of a proper legal system on the matter and proposed registering the elephants calves following a DNA test as a solution.

7. Six people and one elephant killed after cars pile into a herd running wild near Thai nature reserve

Mail Online - 12.3.2014

Six people have been killed and two others injured today after three wild elephants walked into a road in Thailand. The accident that involved a three-car pile-up happened in Rayong province, east of Bangkok. One of the elephants, who had ventured away from a nature reserve, later died. The area is near the Khao Anglunai

Wildlife Preserve, near Khao Chamao National Park and the heavily forested Cambodian border.

Reports said a sports utility vehicle carrying four people hurtled off the road after hitting an elephant. The male driver and a female passenger, died on the spot and the elephant had its leg broken. Another passenger later succumbed to injuries in Wang Chan Hospital. Shortly after, a six-wheel Isuzu truck crashed and then a bronze Toyota Vigo pickup rammed into the back of it. The male pickup driver died there. Three others, a man and two women, were injured. One died of her injuries, the Bangkok Post reported.

He saw two elephants looking agitated in the middle of the road. Another was lying on the ground almost 100 metres from the crash site. Pitak Yingyong, a forestry officer, said the three elephants left the Khao Anglunai Wildlife Preserve Area several days ago and rangers were searching for them.

8. Elephant bites on pumpkin filled with explosives, dies (Sri Lanka)

Emirates 24/7 - 13.3.2014

In a horrific incident in Sri Lanka, some villagers had hidden explosives inside a pumpkin and left it for a wild elephant to consume it. Wildlife officials in Madhu area found a malnourished baby elephant besides the carcass of its dead mother, which was lying by the side of the road in the village of KK Kulam in Murungan.

The female elephant had died on Sunday night. The post mortem conducted on the elephant revealed that she had swallowed a pumpkin, which was stuffed with the explosive 'hakka patas', which is used by villagers to chase away wild animals. The unfortunate elephant had tried to eat the pumpkin, which then exploded in her mouth injuring her severely. The official said her jaw had been blown up.

The mother and her calf were loitering unable to find food and the mother was unable to eat due to her injuries. The calf had been walking behind her without food when it was spotted. The female

had eventually succumbed to her injuries and the calf had remained by her side, unable to forage for food on its own.

9. Killer elephant halts West Bengal rampage to unearth baby girl

Animals World - 14.3.2014

It appears the cries of a baby are too much to bear, even for a rampaging elephant. A killer tusker elephant was on a fresh rampage through a West Bengal village on Monday when it stopped to carefully unearth a crying baby girl beneath the rubble of the house it had begun to demolish.

The 10-month-old's father, Dipak Mahato, told the Times of India that he and his wife were having dinner at about 8pm when they heard a "cracking sound" and then a huge crash from the bedroom. "We ran over and were shocked to see the wall in pieces and a tusker standing over our baby," Mr Mahato said. "She was crying and there were huge chunks of the wall lying all around and on the cot. The tusker started moving away but when our child started crying again, it returned and used its trunk to remove the debris." The baby was taken to hospital with external injuries from the falling debris but was "in no danger".

Conflict between humans and elephants in West Bengal's Purulia district has risen over the past few years. Land-use patterns have blocked elephants' traditional migration routes. Herds routinely raid farms and villages and smash houses, according to the Times of India. Local forest ranger Samir Bose said the same elephant had killed three people in the last year and damaged 17 homes in three village areas.

10. Human encroachment shoos elephants from forests in central Vietnam

Thanh Nien Daily - 31.3.2014

A shrinking habitat has forced herds of wild elephant away from natural forests and into residential areas to scrounge for food in the buffer zone of a national park in the north-central

province of Nghe An. The daily lives of many residents in the buffer zone of Pu Mat National Park in Anh Son District have been disturbed for several months now with the presence of wild elephants in their areas.

At around 2 a.m. every day, Luong Van Tinh and Ha Thi Hien of Veu 3 Village, Phuc Son Commune, are woken from sleep by the sounds of broken trees and fallen leaves. Tinh rushes to his neighbors' houses to give them the alert. Soon the village is alight with torches and flashlights. The sounds of striking pans and people screaming are disturbing.

A herd of elephants is seen calmly gnawing into sugarcane in the fields, as if they do not hear the sounds. It is not until 4 a.m. that the elephants made their exit, leaving the exhausted villagers behind.

The Nghe An provincial government has just approved an emergency plan for elephant conservation until 2020. The cost to implement the project in 2014-2015 is VND30 billion (\$1.42 million). However, the provincial government has allocated only VND300 million for the project so far.

Vietnam is home to some 100 wild elephants but conservationists have blamed habitat loss, human-animal conflict and poaching for a sharp decline in the population in recent decades. Conservationists warn the species will become extinct in Vietnam over the next decade if drastic measures are not taken to protect it.

11. Slightly over 2000 Bornean pygmy elephants left in the wild in Sabah (Malaysia)

New Straits Times - 15.4.2014

Slightly over 2000 Bornean pygmy elephants are left in the wild across Sabah based on a survey conducted in 2010. Assistant Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Pang Yuk Ming said this had put the endangered species in the Red List of the United Nation International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

“Since the survey was completed by the State Wildlife Department and World Wildlife Fund Malaysia in 2010, a series of action plans have been launched to preserve the species,” he said. “The Borneo Elephant Sanctuary have also been formed as a rehabilitation centre to place sickly or problematic species,” Pang said.

12. Yunnan insures farmers against wild elephant attacks (China)

China Times - 18.4.2014

A villager from Jiangcheng in the city of Pu'er was killed by an Asian elephant at his rubber plantation on Saturday. It was the second human death caused by a wild elephant in the past few weeks. In March, another farmer named Zhang Defen from the same village was trampled to death by an elephant while farming.

China's ecological improvement has led to better conditions for wild animals. Eighteen Asian elephants were found in Pu'er for the first time in 2011. The number increased to 43 in March this year. However, these wild elephants take farmers' crops as food, damage trees, houses and pose a risk to local people's lives.

According to Chinese law, the local government should compensate victims for relevant losses caused by wild animals. However, as most local governments have no compensation standards or specific budget allocation for the damage, enforcement has been poor.

Since 2010, Yunnan began to purchase commercial insurance for people in pilot regions. The government pays insurance and companies investigate and compensate people when wild animals cause trouble.

13. Solar-powered fence to keep elephants in Chitwan (Nepal)

eKantipur - 28.4.2014

Starting from March 30, the elephants at Chitwan National Park (CNP) have been allowed to move freely with the construction of an electric fence

to mark their territory. Thirty-one elephants out of the 63 chained in 15 different places will be released in first phase, with four of the elephants already off the chains, he said.

The construction of a solar-powered fence has already been completed in four places. The construction will be completed by June 29. The relation between mahouts and elephants will improve once the animals are off the chains. The elephants tied up reportedly suffered wounds on its feet. Around Rs 800,000 will be spent in the construction of a fence in each location and a total of around Rs 10.7 million is allocated for the construction of electric fences in all places. The government and Elephant and International Project, an INGO, have funded the project.

14. Beehive fence to ward off jumbos (India)

ZNews - 1.5.2014

After solar fences and trenches, Kerala Forest Department is experimenting with beehives to deter wild elephants from straying into farms in human settlements close to forests. The Kerala Forest Research Institute has erected a beehive fence on an experimental basis in a selected location in the wake of increasing man-animal conflicts and wide crop damage caused by straying jumbos in many parts of the state.

According to KFRI sources, the eco-friendly technique has been successfully implemented in many places, especially in Kenya, to keep



Elephants in Corbett National Park (India)
Photo by A. Christy Williams

elephants away. A KFRI scientist said many studies have proved that the hissing sound of bees would frighten jumbos. “First of all, it is a completely eco-friendly technique and so cause no harm to elephants. It is widely in practice in many foreign countries especially in Kenya,” Dr. E.A. Jayson, Wildlife Biology scientist of KFRI, told PTI.

As part of the experiment, KFRI personnel recently set up a beehive fence at Mailampara in Nilambur forest region, one of the many places where straying jumbos cause havoc. A total of 18 beehives had been installed in a forest-fringe path there, he said.

“We first fixed a number of wooden sticks along the path. Then connected them together using metal wires on which the beehives are installed. The bees were procured from local apiculturists,” he said. Raid by animals, especially jumbos, to ravish on the crops of small-holders is a serious problem in forest-fringe hamlets in the state.

15. Tusker havoc at Satasidham (Nepal)

Republica - 5.5.2014

A herd of elephants has vandalized three houses at Satasidham in the district on Monday. The houses of Bir Bahadur Neupane, Sita Ram Budhathoki and Bal Kumari Rai of Satsidham were vandalized by the tuskers.

Property worth around Rs 170,000 in the houses was also destroyed, said the Area Police Office, Jhilmile. The herd of tuskers came from the Chure region near to the village and created havoc, said locals.

16. Police say Kui Buri jumbo killed by poison powder (Thailand)

Bangkok Post - 9.5.2014

Prachuap Khiri Khan: Police believe a dead elephant discovered in the Kui Buri National Park last week was deliberately poisoned. A bag of white powder was found next to the jumbo. Prachuap Khiri Khan police chief Thanet

Sunthonsuk said police gave weight to poisoning as the probable cause.

Blood found on the trunk and mouth of the jumbo during an initial examination corroborated this theory. Police believe there is a chance that whoever poisoned the elephant wanted to show off their work by leaving the bag of powder in full view. Fingerprints found on the bag will lead to the identification and arrest of the suspect, said Pol Maj Gen Thanet yesterday.

The six-year-old wild male elephant was found dead last Tuesday near Kunchon creek in the park, part of a forest restoration area under a royally initiated project. Experts are certain it died of unnatural causes and are determining what kind of substance the white powder is. Police said the bag looked to have contained a toxic substance and are tracing where the powder could have been bought.

The wild elephant’s death came as some farmers in Kui Buri district filed complaints about wild elephants invading their farms, according to police. In the past, wild elephants from protected forests have been found foraging for food in pineapple farms, causing extensive damage to crops.

17. Bee sting to scare away straying elephants (India)

The Hindu - 20.5.2014

A study report prepared by experts from Oxford University, UK, and findings from field experiments in the forest-fringe villages in



Elephants in Kuiburi National Park (Thailand)
Photo by Wayuphong Jitvijak

Kenya and Western Uganda has inspired farmers of Kalladikode-Karimba region in Mannarkad taluk to try out a unique way of scaring away wild elephants that frequently raid their crops.

On hearing about the success of African farmers in deterring wild elephants from entering agricultural fields, a large number of farmers living close to the Siruvani and Silent Valley forests here have started placing beehives on strategic places inside their farms after realising that bees can significantly reduce human-wildlife conflicts involving elephants.

According to him, an elephant, which suffers bee attack once will not visit that particular region again. The African experiment replicated in the countryside of Siruvani has farmers placing beehives in the normal routes of elephants inside the farmlands.

The hives will be inter-linked using tight ropes and the bees will be disturbed once the elephants touch the ropes while they attempt to raid crops. Then the bees in unison will attack the elephants and the pachyderms will retreat back home to the forests.

“It is true that bees cannot sting through thick adult elephant skin. But these insects can create uneasiness in few vulnerable spots of an elephant’s body like its eyes and the trunk. We have adapted the African model after sourcing their details from the Internet and accessing a study report of experts from Oxford University,” says T. Sabu of Kalladikkode.

18. Hungry jumbos raid cupboards (Thailand)

Bangkok Post - 19.5.2014

About 30 elephants raided a village in Khao Chamao district on Saturday and searched for food in the cupboards of villagers’ homes. The villagers of Ban Khao Ngor said the elephants intruded into their village around 1 am while most of them were out tapping rubber in local plantations. The elephants opened cupboards at the back of some houses and ate ripening mangoes. They did not attack the villagers.

The villagers had seen the herd around the village for three days. They believed the elephants were from the same herd that had come down from the forest in search of food and damaged crops at Ban Moo 4 in neighbouring Wang Chan district and Ban Moo 2 in Khao Chamao earlier. The elephants picked different villages as their targets before returning deep into the forest in the sanctuary.

19. At least 34 wild elephants poached in Myanmar last year

The Nation - 27.5.2014

Myanmar lost at least 34 wild elephants last year to poachers supplying the illicit ivory trade, a government official said on Tuesday. “We arrested poachers in 34 cases of elephant slayings last year but we believe there were a lot more deaths,” said Aye Myint Maung, deputy minister of environmental conservation and forestry.

There are 2500 to 3000 wild elephants left in Myanmar’s jungles, down from 6000 in 1960-1970, and 4639 recorded in a 1991 census, the deputy minister said, citing government estimates. The decline is due to poaching for their ivory, and also to trafficking in live pachyderms to supply the tourism industry in neighbouring countries, according to Myanmar conservationists.

The government needs to combat both the export and domestic markets for illegal ivory, as the population of wild elephants has declined by more than 2000 in two decades. The government has designated several protected national parks as well as reserves specifically to provide sanctuary for wild elephants.

20. Alarming rise in elephant deaths in the state (India)

The New Indian Express - 30.5.2014

Kerala, the Gods own country, is fast becoming a burial ground for domestic elephants, with as many as 453 pachyderms dying in the state in the past seven years. Though old age is the primary cause of elephant deaths in the state many of

them have died of torture-related illness much before their average life expectancy. According to statistics available with the Heritage Animal Task Force, as many as 12 elephants died so far this year. In 2013, a total of 36 elephants died of various causes, which vary from torture to diseases and age-related illnesses.

In 2012 and 2011, the number of elephants died in the state was 96 and 94, respectively. In 2010, 79 elephants died. The numbers for 2009 and 2008 are 72 and 64, respectively. "In short, a total of 453 elephants died in the state since 2007," said Heritage Animal Task Force secretary V.K. Venkitachalam. Additional Principal Conservator of Forests (Bio-diversity Cell) O.P. Kaler said that only 80 elephants died during that period.

21. Operation jumbo capture nearing end (India)

The New Indian Express - 14.6.2014

One of the biggest operations to capture wild elephants in recent times is almost complete with the state Forest Department successfully catching 22 of them in the affected taluks of Alur and parts of Sakelespur taluks in Hassan district. The operations, that began in November last year, was taken up on the directions of the High Court to capture 25 pachyderms to address the increasing human-elephant conflict in the region. This is a massive exercise the state is seeing after the Khedda operations in 1971. The present modern effort involved lot of meticulous planning, modern equipment, and guidance from pachyderm experts from other states.

Speaking to Express, Karnataka PCCF (Wildlife) Vinay Luthra said, "The operations are almost complete and unlike the 10 per cent mortality that we usually see, this has been done without any casualties. This exercise was done using tranquilising methods needing coordination from various people and departments." Deputy Conservator of Forests, Hassan, Ganesh Bhat said, "Out of the 22 captured elephants, 12 are tuskless, five adult females, one juvenile and four calves". All the 22 captured animals have been transported to elephant training camps at

Sakarebailu, Dubare, Doddarve, and Mathigodu where they will be looked after and trained.

One of the positive spin offs from this exercise was that the state Forest Department got an opportunity to study the social dynamics of elephants at very close quarters. Also some interesting behavioural patterns like the aunt taking care of the calves, roaming of calves with other young ones, among others was observed and recorded. All observations have been documented and a paper will be presented soon.

22. Dept denies Myanmar jumbo trade (Thailand)

Bangkok Post - 9.7.2014

Thai authorities insisted there is no evidence that illegally traded elephants in Thailand come from Myanmar. Nipon Chotiban, acting director-general of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, said Thai authorities have made efforts to tackle illegal elephant trading in the country but there are no cases showing that those elephants came across the border from Myanmar.

He was responding to Myanmar's deputy environment minister Aye Myint Maung who claimed that elephants sold illegally in Thailand for the tourist trade were captured from Myanmar "but no arrests have been made". The comment followed warnings in a recent report issued by the wildlife NGO Traffic that the trade in Thailand could resurface unless there are changes to various laws.

About 80 elephants were illegally captured for sale in Thailand between April 2011 and March 2013, where they were put to work at tourist camps and hotels, the Traffic report said. At least 60% of the animals trafficked originated from Myanmar, the report said. The capture of wild elephants is considered a serious threat to Myanmar's wild population of around 5000. In Thailand there are about 2500 to 3200 wild elephants. The captive population is far greater, numbering 4169 animals in 2012, according to government data.