

The Conservation of the Asian elephant in India cannot be the concern of only the forest department and environmentalists. Conserving the elephant involves the conservation of prime wildlife habitats. This needs a multidisciplinary effort where the local people, the administrators and land use planners at all levels have to be

involved. Conserving the elephant therefore means conserving the human environment and it has to be a part of the development plans of the state and the country as a whole.

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## News from Sri Lanka

An update on the status of the wild elephants in Sri Lanka was long overdue. The last assessment of the status of the elephants in Sri Lanka was carried out more than 20 years ago jointly by the Department of Wildlife Conservation (Sri Lanka) and the Smithsonian Institution (USA). Dr. George McKay estimated the minimum size of the total population of wild elephants at that time to be between 1,600 and 2,200. A more recent estimate by Mr. A.B. Fernando, (a member of the AESG) puts the figure as anything between 2,800 and 3,250 in the late 80's. Some have even speculated that the number of elephants could be as high as 6,000. The problem in Sri Lanka is further compounded by the on going ethnic conflict in the north and east which has made many of the elephant areas in these regions inaccessible. Therefore an island wide census of elephants is impossible at present.

Given this situation, the Director of the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Mr. W.A. Jayasinghe initiated a survey of the elephants to monitor the changes in the structure of elephant populations across as large an area as is feasible. The main objective was to provide some training to the field staff so that they could standardize the methods and carry on monitoring the elephants on a yearly basis.

The survey was carried out in June 1993 in the Southern, Central, Eastern, Northwestern and Mahaweli regions and it involved about 800 people, including the field staff of the Department of Wildlife Conservation and NGOs. Estimation of elephant numbers was incidental to the main objective. Much emphasis was placed on the need to monitor the proportion of calves and tuskers - two of the most vulnerable categories - in the local populations.

The survey indicates that the population structure of the elephants is biased in favour of the adult animals. The proportions of the adults, subadults, juveniles and calves on an average were 51.9%, 21.8%, 15.7% and 10.6% respectively. The highest proportion (12.1%) of the calves was seen in the Southern population. The adult sex ratio varied from 1:1 to 1:2.9. The proportion of adult bulls with tusks varied from 2.8% to 15.3%. The national average for the percentage of tuskers among the adult bulls is 7.3. It is estimated that at least about 2,000 elephants (minimum estimate) are present in the five regions in Sri Lanka. A full report of the survey will be published at a later date. (Ch. S)