

## Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust

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The Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust (BECT) was established following the successful 1st National Symposium on Elephant Management & Conservation held in May 1998. The Trust has been able to achieve a lot during the short period of its existence. Given below are some of the activities that the Trust has been engaged in.

### 1. Tour of Thailand

The Trust organised a two-week study tour in Thailand for two government officials working with elephants. They were Dr. Taraka Prasad, veterinary surgeon of the Department of Wildlife Conservation based in the Anuradhapura district, and Mr. S.S.M. Seelaratne, Curator of the Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawela. They spent two weeks on tour visiting the Elephant Training Camp and the Elephant Hospital in Lampang. They also observed the operation of the mobile elephant hospital run by the Friends of the Asian Elephant (FAE).

### 2. Schools Awareness Programme

The Trust, based on one of the recommendations made at the Elephant Symposium, embarked on the Schools Awareness Programme in the Anuradhapura district, where there are several incidents of human-elephant conflict. The purpose of this programme is to make the children living in these areas become aware of the value of the elephants and why they should be conserved for the future. It is with the knowledge that elephants cause much depredation and destruction in these areas that the material for the programme was selected. The programme is implemented through lectures, slide presentations, discussions and question and answer sessions. The villagers are also informed as to how they could benefit from the presence of elephants, e.g. eco-tourism.

BECT is grateful to the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society, Woodland Park Zoo and the Oregon Zoo, all of which are in the United States, for their support.

**Posters:** Lanka Bell sponsored a poster in Sinhala and English, designed to educate the school children about elephants. Another poster, designed to prevent the purchase of ivory products and thus save our tuskers from poachers, is sponsored by the Oregon University in the United States.

**Video on Elephants:** Young Asia TV made a video film on elephants in Sinhala for use in the Schools Awareness Programme. This is an educational film for children between the age 8-15 years and is shown with the school programme.

**Books:** BECT has also purchased some books, a set of which is presented to each school after the programme.

**Joint Schools Programme:** The Wildlife & Nature Protection Society has suggested that BECT ought to join them in their programme with the schools nature clubs. Such a move would be beneficial to both organisations in respect of the work that each is doing in the schools.

**3. Public Lecture**  
BECT organised a talk on the taming and training of African elephants by Mr. Uttum Corea, who is from Botswana and owns four African elephants. His talk, illustrated with coloured overhead transparencies, was based on his experience with these four elephants.

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### 4. BECT: an Associate of the AESG

The Chairman of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of IUCN, Dr. Raman Sukumar, has agreed to have the Biodiversity and Elephant Conservation Trust as its associate in Sri Lanka. The work that AESG carries out in Sri Lanka will be in association with and assistance of the BECT.

## 5. Development of the Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawela

The Trust decided that it should assist the authorities to develop the Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawela, along the lines suggested at the May Symposium. Jayantha Jayewardene met the Minister of Tourism & Aviation and the Secretary to the Ministry, under whom the orphanage is being managed and presented the proposals to them. The Minister mentioned that an overall plan for the development of the whole of the Pinnawela area as a tourist zone was being formulated. This includes the setting up of a zoo very close to the orphanage. He promised that a representative of the BECT will be included in the committee set up to plan the new development.

## 6. Photo - tracking of Wild Elephants

A basic requirement for the conservation and management of elephants is the long-term monitoring of elephant movements and habitat use. An effective, low-cost way of doing this is to maintain a photo-catalogue of elephants, which would allow anyone to identify individual animals on the basis of unique markings. By recording the location and date of sightings (of individual animals and herds) it may be possible to get a good idea of elephant movements, and thus develop management strategies.

BECT invited all enthusiasts who photograph elephants to assist in this programme by providing information and photographs, and monitoring movements of elephants. All they have to do is to photograph the elephants; identify individuals from unique markings; maintain a personal photo-catalogue; and contribute to a project catalogue and database. A short workshop will be held to initiate all those who are interested in photo-cataloguing elephants. Dr Prithiviraj Fernando and Ms Manori Gunawardene, who maintain the main photo-catalogues agreed to help in this venture.

## 7. Development of a National Policy for Elephant Conservation

The Department of Wildlife Conservation convened a Preparatory Meeting on 19th November 1998 to formulate a national policy for elephant conservation. Charles Santiapillai and Jayantha Jayewardene were requested by the Department of Wildlife Conservation to prepare a Working Paper for use at this meeting..

*Gajah 20 (2001)*

## 8. Meeting with HE the President

Jayantha Jayewardene was granted an interview with Her Excellency the President on 6 August 1999, during which he briefed her on the present situation with regard to wildlife conservation in general and elephant conservation in particular. She was also briefed on the 1998 Symposium and its outcome and the 11 proposals that were formulated, based on the symposium participants' suggestions, were also given to her. It was explained to Her Excellency what these proposals entailed and the benefits that would accrue to the conservation effort, if they were implemented. Her Excellency was very interested in the current situation vis a vis wildlife conservation and promised to look at the proposals and see how they could be implemented.

## 9. Awards Ceremony

The valuable services rendered by a number of people in Sri Lanka for wildlife conservation have mainly gone unnoticed and unrecognised. The Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust thought it fit that some of these persons should be recognised and rewarded. A panel of judges met to choose two recipients for the Conservation Award for the years 1998 and 1999. They chose Mr. Ainsley B. Fernando for the Conservation Award for 1998 and Mr. Christy Wickremasinghe for 1999. Both these gentlemen have worked for a long time with the Department of Wildlife Conservation and are now in retirement. At the Awards Ceremony held on 20 May 1999, The Director General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) sent a citation to Mr. A. B. Fernando, while the Director General of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) sent one to Mr. Christy Wickremasinghe. These citations were read out and presented to the recipients of the awards. Both were then presented with a Gold Medal.

## 10. Walk for Elephant Conservation

The Rotary Club of Mount Lavinia organised a Sponsored Walk for Elephant Conservation the proceeds of which were to be given to the Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust for its projects and programmes. Despite a heavy downpour on that day, many turned up and joined in the walk. An elephant, kindly lent by the Rev Galaboda Gnanissara of the Gangaramaya temple, also took part. The Rotary Club has completed its accounts and sent us Rs 100,000/- being the collection.

### 11. Documentation.

As there are many records and publications regarding wild elephants, their capture, taming, export etc, the BECT hopes to document these as a publication on how elephants were managed in the past. Back numbers of the journal *Loris*, Administration Reports of the Directors of the Wildlife Department and other documents contain much useful information, and volunteers are needed to extract it.

Ms Manel Tampoe, who has agreed to collect material from past issues of *Loris*, needs assistance. If anyone who would like to assist her, please contact her. Since this is a big undertaking she will appreciate all the assistance that she can get. If anyone has access to old records, publications, books etc. please get in touch with BECT.

### 12. Training of Veterinarians

Instances of human-elephant conflict are on the increase in various parts of the country. The conflict has brought injury and death to both humans and elephants. There are constant reports of dead elephants lying in various parts of the country and also of elephants that have been injured.

The requests for veterinary services to treat such injured elephants may come from different parts of the island at the same time. This puts a lot of pressure on the inadequate veterinary staff of the Department of Wildlife Conservation. As a result it may not be possible to enlist the services of the veterinary section of the department to treat injured elephants in time. This may lead not only to the death of the elephant, but may also increase the criticism that is directed at the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC).

The Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust organised a training programme for veterinary staff of the Department of Animal Production and Health in the treatment of elephants. The trainers were from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Peradeniya and included an expert from India and two from Thailand along with another veterinarian from Denmark. The programme was conducted at the Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage from 27 to 31 October 1999. This training will now enable them, if there were a delay on the part of the DWLC veterinary surgeon getting to any injured animal on time, to treat elephants immediately.

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### 13. Electric Fence

The President of the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society, based in New York, Mr. Ravi Corea has obtained funds to erect an electric fence around an area that is subject to elephant depredation. After looking at many locations and having many discussions with Charles Santiapillai and Jayantha Jayewardene, it was decided to erect this fence around the village of Pusselyaya very close to the southern boundary of the Wasgomuwa National Park. Elephants from the Wasgomuwa NP come regularly to this village and cause damage to crops, houses and the people. They also cause a lot of trouble in the adjacent villages but Pusselyaya was the worst affected. The work on the fence has now been completed and the fence appears to be effective in keeping elephants out.

### 14. Policy for Elephant Conservation in Sri Lanka

The Secretary to the Ministry of Plantation Industries and Public Administration formed a committee to evolve a policy for elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. This committee met a number of times, often under the chairmanship of the Secretary. Later the committee was reduced to Dr Devaka Weerakoon, Mr. Sunil Liyanage and Jayantha Jayewardene. The report of the committee has been given to the Secretary to be given to the Minister who will place it before the Cabinet of Ministers.

### 15. Motorola contributes to BECT

In an effort to find a pragmatic solution to the ongoing and escalating human-elephant conflict, two employees of Motorola, Lalith Seneviratne, (based in Colombo) and Greg Roseel (USA based but currently in Singapore), teamed up and are developing and testing a non-intrusive warning and deterrent system to keep the elephants off cultivated areas. In recognition of their ongoing work, Lalith and Greg have been selected as the team winners of the 1999 Motorola CEO Award for Volunteerism, the highest recognition an individual or a team of Motorola employees can receive for community involvement.

As part of the award, the team gets to nominate a non-profit organisation of its choice to receive a contribution from the Motorola Foundation, and the Biodiversity & Elephant Conservation Trust has been nominated by the team. Mr Jayantha Jayewardene received the contribution on behalf of BECT, at the Motorola office in Colombo on 26 June 2000.

## **16. Policy for Protected Area Management and Wildlife Conservation**

The Minister of Public Administration and Plantation Industries set up a Task Force to go into the present National Policy on Wildlife Conservation, which was approved in 1990 and make suggestions for any changes that are needed. Changes seemed necessary especially in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which Sri Lanka ratified in 1994. CBD emphasises the three themes conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing.

Dr Sarath Kotagama, Messrs Rohan Pethiyagoda and Jayantha Jayewardene, amongst others, were appointed to

this Task Force, which has met over 12 times and formulated new policies for protected area management and wildlife conservation. The Cabinet of Ministers has approved the final document.

## **17. Presidential Task Force.**

Her Excellency has appointed a Presidential Task Force for Wildlife Development. Rohan Pethiyagoda, Sarath Kotagama and Jayantha Jayewardene are members of this Task Force, whose first duty is to formulate an action plan based on the policies for protected area management and wildlife conservation that the government has adopted recently.

