

News Briefs

1. Mangrove elephants facing extinction

Independent Online
April 4, 2006

Yangon, Myanmar - Elephants that once roamed the mangrove swamps of Myanmar's vast Ayeyarwaddy Delta are headed for extinction, with only two of its kind still alive, a local newspaper said Monday.

The two survivors live in the delta's Meinmahla island wildlife sanctuary about 130 km south-west of Yangon, the Flower News weekly newspaper said. "These elephants are different from other wild elephants. Their toes are more delicate and they cannot survive in harsh terrain," the paper said, quoting a forest ranger from the island sanctuary.

A substantial number of wild elephants once roamed the mangrove swamps but the population fell to 27 by 1989, and to 14 by 1994. Ten of those 14 survivors were transferred to Ngaputaw, north of Meinmahla sanctuary in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta, but all perished due to their change in habitat and an overall degradation of the mangroves, the report said.

<http://www.int.iol.co.za/>

2. New study of the world's smallest elephant

Cardiff University press release
December 8, 2005

The world's smallest elephant species, the newly described Bornean elephant, will be the focus of a Cardiff University study in Sabah, Malaysia for the next three years.

The Bornean elephant has recently been confirmed as a separate sub-species, dramatically increasing its importance for bio-diversity. Bornean elephants are the world's most endangered member of the

elephant family with an estimated 1100-1500 surviving in the wild.

The Cardiff School of Biosciences study led by Prof. Michael Bruford and funded by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will provide the Sabah Wildlife Department with a range of essential conservation and management information concerning the ecology, genetics, social structure, dispersal and conflicts with agriculture.

Dr Benoît Goossens who will carry out the research, said the need for the project was identified by wildlife authorities in Sabah during a previous Darwin Initiative grant to study orangutans. He said: "There is clearly an urgent need to undertake sound conservation action. Our work will provide information that is currently lacking, including identification of priority areas for the species that should be kept under forest cover.

Project partners are the Sabah Wildlife Department, Kinabatangan Orang Utan Conservation Project and the Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation at University Malaysia Sabah.

http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2005-12/cu-ns120805.php

3. WWF flying to rescue of elephants (Indonesia)

Hyginus Hardoyo, The Jakarta Post
September 13, 2006

The Sumatran elephant, a subspecies of the endangered Asian elephant, is engaged in a battle for habitat — human development has cut down much of its natural jungle habitat. Instead of having the large space to roam around in that elephants need, Sumatran elephants are finding their freedom is rapidly being curtailed, something that often puts them in direct conflict with humans.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Indonesia says their numbers have dropped greatly over the last 10 years or so, from around 1000 to 1600 in 1995 to about 300 or 400 today. Unfortunately, protecting their habitat is proving to be a difficult task.

While initially poaching was a serious problem for the elephants, more recently deforestation has meant they now face poisoning and attacks. Habitat loss has forced the elephants into closer contact with humans, often resulting in violent attacks on and by both parties. Deforestation appears to be taking place at an uncontrollable pace in many areas.

Currently 38,576 hectares, the park is expected to be expanded to 100,000 hectares. The problem — besides parts of the proposed expansion areas being owned by three separate forest concession holders — is that an increasing number of people are living in the forest illegally. Forest fires to the escalation of human-elephant conflict are among concerns that have been raised.

Conflict between humans and elephants is an inevitable result of forest fires, logging and illegal forest activities, as they force the animals out of the forests to look for food.

WWF Indonesia believes that the flying squad system, coupled with the provision of adequate food supplies within the sanctuary, will go far towards solving the problem. Residents and businesses will be free from elephant attacks, and the Sumatran elephant will survive, instead of becoming another environmental casualty.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/detailnational.asp?fileid=20060913.G03&irec=2>

4. Study to tackle elephants' intrusion

*Navhind Times Staff Reporter, Panaji
Jan 24, 2006*

Senior officials of forest departments of Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka evolved a joint strategy to tackle the problem of intrusion of elephants into human habitat and decided to set up a study of reasons behind frequent

movements of pachyderms from one state to another.

The study would be conducted by Centre for Development of Asian Elephants Research and Conservation Centre of Indian Institute of Sciences and financial assistance and other support have been sought from the Union ministry of environment and forests, on how to keep the menacing elephants at bay.

He also said that conditions in Tillari catchment area were ideal for elephants to make it their temporary habitation, as they provided enough food and water for them. Besides, pachyderms being nomads they travel large distances in search of food and that it was difficult to predict their movement and behaviour.

The forest officials of three states also agreed to give priority to control the damage to villages and to focus on strategy to limit the strayed and straying elephants to Karnataka, besides studying their migration, the herd size, patterns of migration and recurrence.

Other strategies agreed to by the officials include study of land use pattern in the states, habitat continuity, fragmentation, degradation and the threats to animals and strengthening of communication network and inter-state co-ordination.

With regards to recent intrusion of elephants in Goa, the forest officials said that since the herd was very small comprising two females and one calf, it had in all probability broken away from main herd and would reunite with it sooner or later.

Since the calf was small it would not travel great distances and restrict its movements to smaller areas, they added.

The principal chief conservator of forest (Maharashtra), Mr B Majumdar, said that intrusion of elephants was a new phenomenon to the state, like Goa.

In all over 40 officials from three states participated in the day long programme.

http://www.navhindtimes.com/stories.php?part=news&Story_ID=012539

5. Government plan aims to save Vietnam's declining elephants

VietNamNet Bridge
September 13, 2006

The number of elephants in Vietnam has plummeted from 2,000 to 130 over the past 30 years. To counteract this alarming trend, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development launched a national action plan for elephant conservation last week in Hanoi.

The Vietnam National Elephant Action plan, developed by the Ministry's Forest Protection Department (FPD), aims to conserve and develop wild and domestic elephant populations in the country in a sustainable way. The plan, which will extend through 2010, also includes provisions for the conservation of elephant habitats.

According to Tran The Lien, a representative from the FPD, a statistically documented drastic drop in the number of elephants in Vietnam prompts action. Areas that once were home to large herds currently have few if any elephants.

The new plan will include methods to minimise human-elephant contact using electric fences and trenches to prevent elephants from raiding agricultural areas, in addition to the use of noise and smells that elephants dislike to drive them away from roads and people's property.

In locations inhabited by both people and elephant, farmers will be encouraged to reconsider their crop choices so as not to attract elephants. To handle situations where human-elephant contact does occur, detailed plans will be drawn and implemented.

In addition, the new plan will entail the protection of elephant habitats and efforts to ensure adequate production of food for elephants. Elephant sanctuaries will be built in Dac Lac, Dong Nai and Nghe An provinces, regions that contain large elephant habitat areas

and well-populated herds. In areas with smaller elephant populations, habitats will be examined to create optimal conditions for the elephants' long-term survival.

When all other options have been exhausted without success, the possibility of relocating elephants will be considered.

Provisions for the domesticated elephant population will also be put into motion, with a new control and management system that includes placing tracking devices on domesticated elephants.

With this system, domestic elephant populations will be able to be more easily monitored for their protection and for research their reproduction, facilitating the conservation and development of domestic elephant populations.

To prevent illegal poaching and the international trade of elephant products, the plan will fine-tune the current law enforcement system to ensure its effectiveness.

6. China offers hungry elephants "dinner halls"

Reuters
July 1, 2006

Chinese officials hope to lure hungry wild elephants away from farmland by offering "dinner halls" with banana and sugar on the menu, state media reported.

Last year three villagers were killed by elephants around nature reserves in Xishuang-banna in the southwest province of Yunnan, Xinhua news agency reported. Crops belonging to 12,000 families were also destroyed.

Wildlife officials are planning "dinner halls" of banana plantations and sugarcane planted several kilometres from villages to entice the animals away, Xinhua said. So far, 70 ha (170 acres) have been set aside.

Twenty years ago, Xishuangbanna had only 80 wild elephants compared to some 300 today.

In April, the Yunnan province government set aside 4 million yuan (270,460 pounds) to compensate farmers for crops lost to hungry elephants, Xinhua said. "So far the experiment has had mixed results," it said of the new dining initiative, but did not elaborate.

http://today.reuters.co.uk/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=oddlyEnoughNews&storyID=2006-07-01T051425Z_01_PEK155986_RTRIDST_0_OUKOE-UK-CHINA-ELEPHANTS.XML

7. Elephants may get IDs, more protection (Thailand)

*Janjira Pongrai, The Nation
September 10, 2006*

Public opinion will be sought on a proposed new law relating to elephants before a final revision of the draft bill is submitted for parliamentary consideration, the vice minister of the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry said yesterday

Noppadol Pattama said the bill, which the ministry has recently drafted, complies with and consolidates about 10 existing elephant-related acts and contains 17 key provisions to protect both wild and domestic elephants. These include controversial new regulations regarding the issue of elephant identification documents and the establishment of a DNA database of the animals.

Under the new law, the birth of a domestic elephant must be reported to the ministry within seven days for an elephant ID card to be issued. If an elephant dies, the owner must report the death to officials within 24 hours. The draft bill also states that a DNA database will be set up when such technology is available in the country.

It has been more than a decade since the government and conservationists first tried to

revise all elephant-related laws. The bill also covers the process of importing and exporting elephants, as well as measures to provide welfare for the animals.

http://nationmultimedia.com/2006/09/10/national/national_30013230.php

8. Elephants as Partners in Conservation (Sri Lanka)

*F. Samath, Inter Press Service News Agency
March 5, 2007*

Decades after unsuccessful attempts to minimise the elephant-human conflict in Sri Lanka, authorities are trying out a bold experiment — allowing both mammals to live together in harmony with the environment.

Some 50 to 60 people — mostly chena (slash and burn) cultivators — are killed annually by marauding elephants in search of food. Drives to shift herds to nature parks, away from human settlements, have not been very successful.

New research by Sri Lankan scientists have found that, rather than clashing with the large animals, humans can recruit them as partners in the protection and conservation of these animals generally considered their number one enemy.

Thousands of poor Sri Lankans venture into the jungle and grow cash crops on government land without permits. In the experiment based on scientific data, the Department of Wildlife Conservation and scientists are embarking on a model project to ensure that elephants and cultivators live alongside each other, with the cultivators being the protectors of elephants.

Prithiviraj Fernando, senior researcher at the Centre for Conservation and Research, told IPS that the most crucial factor in the recently introduced National Policy for the Conservation of Wild Elephants is finding a viable solution to the human-jumbo conflict.

Elephants and chena cultivation are inextricably linked, says this research scientist - who

studied the animals for his thesis and is studying their ecology. He believes the human-elephant friction and elephant management and conservation are complex issues.

Farmers also get a pittance for their produce. Fernando says as soon as the yield is collected they can get about 35 rupees (35 US cents) for a kg of string beans, for example, but gradually the price drops to about two rupees (0.02 cents) a kg, often leaving them with huge losses.

The scheme will link cultivators to elephant conservation and make them feel that they are beneficiaries while protecting and conserving elephants and not handouts.

The model project follows the new elephant conservation policy launched last year in which representations were invited from the public. There are no exact figures of Sri Lanka's elephant population but the number being spoken of by conservationists is around 4000.

9. International Congress and Symposium

Elephant census in South India

Elephant census in South India from May 7 to 9 An extensive census of elephants roaming the forests of South India will be carried out from May 7 to 9. According to Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Bangalore, Anur Reddy, forest officials of Karnataka along with their counterparts in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh will carry out a census of elephants for three days to estimate their numbers. Officials were carrying out a synchronised head-count of the pachyderms in view of their tendency to migrate across state borders. The census will be carried out by direct counting on sighting elephants or, indirect method like dung-counting. The census assumes importance in Karnataka as the state probably has 4,500 elephants which is the highest for any

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/subcontinent/2007/April/subcontinent_April566.xml§ion=subcontinent&col=

Wild elephant census in North Bengal this month (India)

The Hindu
April 8, 2007

Cooch Behar (WB), April 8. (PTI): Census of wild elephants in North Bengal will begin on April 23, a senior forest department official said here on Saturday.

To be conducted in two methods - 'dung density' and 'direct sighting' - the census was expected to be completed by April 26, he said. While in 'dung density', the census workers have to measure the density of fresh dung of elephants to find out their numbers in a select zone, in 'direct sighting' the employees count elephants by seeing. In the 2005 census, the number of wild elephants was 350, against the number of 292 in 2000, he said.

Elephant population has been steadily on the rise in the forests of North Bengal in the past few years.

Article at the following link:

<http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/002200704080311.htm>

10. International Elephant Research Symposium

The International Elephant Foundation and Feld Entertainment, Inc./the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation, are pleased to announce that the International Elephant Research Symposium will be November 2-4, 2007, in Orlando, Florida. Additional support for the Symposium will be provided by Disney's Animal Kingdom and Busch Gardens Tampa Bay.

This important symposium, on the research and conservation needs of captive and wild populations of elephants, invites researchers from around the world to present conservation projects and research results on human-elephant conflict, population management, health, nutrition, reproduction and behavior.

Abstract deadline: July 1, 2007
www.elephantconservation.org