

## Book Review

“Sri Lankan Elephant - A Celebration of Majesty” by Vajira Wijegunawardane

*Reviewed by Jayantha Jayewardene*

The study and observation of wild elephants requires a lot of time and patience. The photography of wild elephants also requires a lot of time and patience. Both use the latest technology and equipment. However the photography of wild elephants needs another element – a vision. Whereas the study of elephants requires a keen eye to record what is seen in terms of elephant behavior etc. a photographer has to have an acute idea or sense of what he wants recorded in his photograph for the benefit of the viewer. Vajira has shown us, through the photographs in this book of beautiful elephant photographs, that he has this vision in ample measure.

Vajira was educated at St. Thomas’ College in Colombo, Sri Lanka and excelled in many school activities, especially cricket. Vajira was initially a Fund Manager. However, since 2007 he has been in the Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka (SEC) as the Director - Capital Market Development. His passion for elephants has, I believe, come from his father who had many tame elephants on his estate. Vajira says that as a wildlife photographer he likes to frame action. His focus is, specifically, rare tuskers that roam the spectacular wild locations that are to be found in this country.

Photographing wild elephants needs long and most times difficult and arduous treks into deep jungles. These forays are always fraught with danger as any jungle with wild elephants would be. These efforts under difficult circumstances have been well worth it when one sees the resulting photographs in the book. The photographs are sharp and well in focus and bring out very clearly the natural colours of the elephant and its wild habitat. Looking at this array of elephant photographs (for examples see pages 4, 6, 7 and 87 in this *Gajah*), one is transported into the

wild habitats of the elephant and you seem very close to the wild elephant without actually going there.

There are over 200 photographs, which are supplemented with notes by many knowledgeable individuals who have subscribed relevant texts to further educate the reader on elephants their biology, physiology, human-elephant conflicts etc. Though the photographs tell you the story these notes help you to understand the photographs better.

Ian Redmond says that ‘elephants are beings and not beasts like cattle’. Indeed the pictures in this book justify that distinction. Eric Wikramanayake mentions that there is a close bond between people and elephants. He says that both are highly social, highly intelligent animals that nurture family ties. This too is true if you observe elephants in the wild for some time.

The photographs in the book and the accompanying text will create, in many an awareness strong enough to become concerned about the plight of our elephants and also for some to get actively involved in elephant conservation.

Vajira’s 14 years vigil in Sri Lanka’s jungles to take the many photographs, some of which are published in this book, make the long and difficult effort eminently worthwhile. We are the beneficiaries of this successful project and should be thankful to Vajira for this.

Sri Lankan Elephant - A Celebration of Majesty  
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