

# Changing Local Attitudes and Behaviour Towards Elephants in Kerala, India

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The International Elephant Foundation **IEF** sponsored an educator skills training workshop titled "Changing local attitudes and behavior towards elephants in Kerala, India to mitigate conflict between man and elephant" and two awareness programmes. The training workshop was hosted by the Centre for Wildlife Studies, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Pookode, Wayanad, Kerala from 12-14 October 2012. Dr. Leo Joseph, Dean, College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Pookode and Mr. S. Sreekumar, Wildlife Warden, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary inaugurated the workshop in the presence of Dr. George Chandy and Dr. A. K. Lala of the Centre for Wildlife Studies. Dr. Gigi K. Joseph, Nirmala College, Muvattupuzha, Ernakulam and the authors were the resource and trainers for this programme. 38 educators from HECx areas of Palakkad, Wayanad and Chalakkudi districts in Kerala attended this three-day programme.

Kerala, which has the second highest number of elephants in south India is reporting HEC and it is in increasing trend. The mitigation measures presently in use are failing and the people who live in the fringe areas of the Western Ghats are losing tolerance leading to the death of animals and in certain cases people as well. The human population explosion and the other factors have led to large amounts of land, which was once the range of elephants being taken over by people. When there was more land and less people, humans and elephants perhaps met less frequently. When elephants felt secure in their habitat without having to struggle for food and space, or to avoid human predators, the behaviour of the elephants were likely to have been less confrontational and more evasive also. It is the nature of wild animals to avoid conflict more than to engage in the same, unless there is a problem. HEC is not going away and the only present option left is Co-existence. Bringing in some attitudinal change in the minds of the people of HEC areas will help to understand the animal and thereby avoid conflicts.



Dr. Leo Joseph, Dean, College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, addressing the audience at the Inaugural session of the HECx workshop



Learning activity: Illustrated history of Elephants in our society



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Group activity: Mini drama: enacted by the participants

The objective of the workshops was to educate all the people living in or near elephant habitats of Palakkad, Wayanad and Chalakkudi districts in Kerala, South India to improve their attitudes towards wild elephants so as to avoid confrontation and conflict whenever possible.

With this objective, the project provided teaching tools, education materials and dynamic training for the teachers, village heads, ngos, forest department staff and volunteers who live in the HEC areas so that they can spread the message and educate others. Zoo Outreach Organization Trust has developed a teaching guide on Human-Elephant CoExistence (HECx) entitled 'Getting along with elephants' and educational packets for use during the programmes. The

active learning tools employed in the teaching materials help them to find a partial solution on learning to coexist peaceably as proven in other HEC areas in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand and Indonesia.

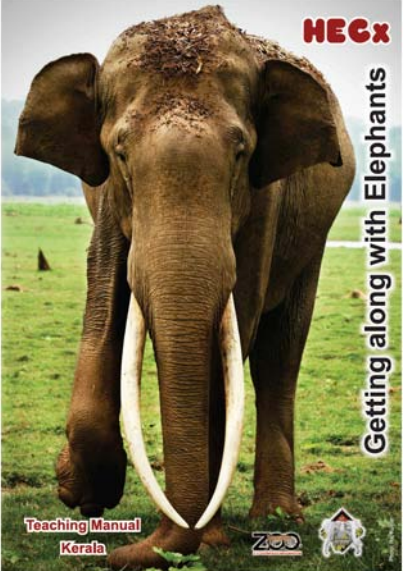
As per the objectives of the project the trainees were taught with a variety of attractive, effective and meaningful learning techniques that would help to change the attitude of the people towards problem elephants and try to coexist with them instead of fighting. The feedback from the participants gives strong indications that the

project has been successful, due to involvement and active participation from different human conflict areas of Kerala thereby changing their attitude. At the end of the workshop each participant received about 100 'ele-kit' packets to use with their audience.

The participants were evaluated by using a form to know about their views on workshop content, design, facilitation, delivery and application of design and also their attitude towards elephants before and after the workshop. Their answers were summarized. They were also asked about their open comments about the workshop. From the evaluation results and their comments we understand that the workshop was great success in achieving its goal. Mrs. C. V. Shanthy, Principal, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya distributed the certificates to the participants.

**Two HECx Awareness Programmes at local schools**

After the training workshop, two HECx awareness programmes were conducted involving the participants who attended the workshop. The first programme was organized at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Lakkidi on 15 October 2012 and another one was held at Silent Valley Model Residential School, Mukkali, Attappady on 31 October 2012. Six trainees coordinated the entire programme at different times. At Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya 120 students of age 14 - 16 attended



Students learning about elephants from the booklet which is a part of teaching/ learning materials on HECx



Students taking pledge on HECx



Mini drama enacted by students as part of the awareness programme conducted by the Trainees of the Educators Training programme

and at Silent Valley Model Residential School 100 girl students participated and another 120 students remained as observers.

All these students hail from high human elephant conflict areas with rich experience related to HEC problems. The students were briefed about the reasons for human-elephant conflict and told of ways to coexist with them. Elephant characteristics activity from the HECx teaching guide was done in order to understand elephant's body weight, running and walking speed, sense organs and communication skills, etc. Do's and don'ts in elephant habitat was also explained to them in detail using the booklet so as to save their life whenever they had to confront elephants. Then ele-kit packet items were demonstrated. Few students were asked to read aloud the elephant etiquette booklet to other students to hear, then they tied the elephant *rakhi* (wrist-band) to each other, wore the head band and elephant masks and took an oath to coexist with elephants.

**Participant's HECx Programme report**

As they committed in the workshop the participants conducted their own HECx awareness programmes. Two participants (Suresh & Askar Ali) who are teachers at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Lakkidi conducted an awareness programme. Here is their report:- One-day workshop on Human Elephant Conflict HEC organised by Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Lakkidi, Wayanad for the students of WMO English Academy, Sulthan Batheri, Wayanad. Sri Joshi teacher of the school brought forty-eight students and 4 teachers. Students were divided into various groups and acted a role-play to save and protect the elephants. All the students actively participated in the role-play and they also asked many questions about Asian elephants and the future of elephant's life in the world. Sri Aneesh a journalist of Mathrubhumi also witnessed the programme. We also took the students to the forest to study and understand the natural ecosystem of the animals. Sri. Miniil Kumar G, PGT Bio and Sri Suresh T C M, TGT Social Science took class on various subjects like human elephant conflict, coexistence and sustainable development.

## Feedback from the workshop participants:

**K.S. Jitha, Teacher**

I am very happy to have participated in this 3-day workshop. This is the first time I attended such a kind of workshop. Learned much information about elephants, which I didn't know earlier. Most important being how to save my life when I am confronted with elephants. Very interesting workshop. I thank all the trainers.

**Santha. V, Teacher, Attappady**

This workshop was totally a different experience for me. I assure that whatever I learned out of this workshop, I should follow in my life to coexist with elephants.

**O. Jacob, Beat Forest Officer**

The programme was excellent than I my expectation.

**Nitha Valson, Student**

I have learned much new information about our fellow elephant, which never I understood.

**N.S. Farsana, Teacher**

This workshop gave me a different experience. Each and every session was good and I liked all of them. Group exercise should be organized well.

**Mini K, Teacher**

This workshop taught me how to coexist with elephants. I was very fortunate to participate in this. If I hadn't participated, it would have been a great personal loss for me.

**Leena Janardhanan, Teacher**

The training programme was a new experience in my life. It gave me lots of exercises and made me active all through the workshop time. Although lots of information was given orally, I didn't get any visual images of elephant behavior through overhead projector. However it was nice experience over all.

**Vinodkumar, Attappady**

Way of conducting the workshop was very nice. I congratulate Dr. Gigi Joseph, Dr. B. A. Daniel and Mr. R. Marimuthu for their sincerity.

**Jibith Chandran, Beat Forest Officer**

It is a very different experience for me and it is first time I am attending such a class. Very good, friendly and interesting three days they were...

**K.K. Shaji, Teacher**

The workshop helped me to know more

details about elephant, HEC and HECx.

**Dilip Falgunan, MVSc. Scholar**

The workshop was nicely conducted.

**K.M. Askar Ali, Teacher**

This type of training programme is very good and this training is an eye opener to those who attended. Definitely worth reproducing to the public.

**Vivek Philip, Student**

The workshop was a great success as a lot of information on HEC & educational tools were passed on. But you could have elaborated a little more on human elephant coexistence.

**Tijo K. Joy, Student**

The programme was very useful to me and a very good experience.

**T.C.M. Suresh, Teacher**

The programme was conducted in a proper way and my suggestion is conduct such a programmes for the school students and the farmers as they are having direct experience with human elephant conflict.

**K. Baiju, Forest Department**

Workshop experiences should be given to the public also especially the people who stay very close to forests. I will try to do this.

**K.A. Prasad**

It was more attractive if there is a video clippings of elephants in their natural habitat.

**R. Rajesh, Teacher**

It was nice. But there should be a field level training programmes with elephants like trekking, visiting few places should be added to the programme. At least there should be a video presentation about elephant habitat, behaviour, man-elephant co-existence and conflict etc., and then the effect of the programme will improve.

**Manikandhan, Teacher**

Please include some outdoor (field trips) activities such as visiting a place to study HECx.

**K.F. Prince, Beat Forest Officer**

If you change this workshop for one hour

into any field like any forest beat, it will be more better than this closed hall in the case of classes like elephants.

**K.K. Shaly, Teacher**

It should be better to conduct a field trip to see elephants and all other animals. The teaching should be more powerful if we use any kind of documentaries about wildlife. Anyway, this programme was a new experience to me and liked it very much.

**S. Saritha Gopal, Teacher**

Very useful, informative, interesting 3 days. Thanks a lot.

**K. Rathnakaran, Beat Forest Officer**

The class delivery is very good. Food and accommodation is fairly good and hospitality also.

**Shakir, Student**

Super and informative; easy to learn; enjoyable.

**K.C. Suresh, Teacher**

Conduct a field trip to wildlife sanctuary especially to elephant reserves like Muthanga and interview with mahouts.

**P.R. Premalatha, Teacher**

Very interesting class and useful class to give information to others.

**Anon...**

This is my first experience in such training and I really want to appreciate it. Try to conduct this type of programmes to the villages of HEC areas. Include participants of different sections of the society.

