

Asian Elephant Conservation-Capacity building training for forest staff and sensitization programmes for journalists in Tamil Nadu

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The US Fish and Wildlife Service-Asian Elephant Conservation Fund has sponsored the project "Augmenting stakeholder awareness on Asian elephant conservation in Human Elephant Conflict areas of Tamil Nadu, India" to address human elephant conflict and fostering human elephant coexistence through strengthening forest staff skills and sensitizing journalists.

The goal is to ensure long-term survival of elephant populations by minimizing Human Elephant Conflict for the peaceful survival of both elephant and human being. The objective of the project is to conduct two capacity building training for forest frontline staff such as anti-poaching watchers, anti-depredation squad, watchers, guards and foresters. In addition, to conduct two sensitization programmes for journalists so as to reach out to the public through various media that will bring attitudinal change and positivity among the people. The attitudinal change, in the long run will help local community to harmoniously with elephants.



The Forest Department veterinarian Manoharan demonstrating methods of using tranquilizer gun

avoided if the people living near elephant areas followed certain do's and don'ts. Capacity building training is very much needed for the forest front line staff in order to develop and strengthen the management skills and ability of any organization to follow and fulfill the fast changing principles of governance and management. This implies and applies for skill development in the field of planning, leadership, program development, research and collaboration.

Sensitizing the media about Human-Elephant Conflict in general and elephant depredation in particular should be an essential part of the awareness strategy. Media should contribute to diffusing the tense situation surrounding conflict with objective reporting aimed at highlighting the measures to mitigate conflict.



Ashish Kumar Srivastava, Conservator of Forest, interacting with trainees

Modern practices in wildlife conservation, call for involvement of all stakeholders in the planning and implementation of conflict mitigation measures to muster greater support and cooperation from people. The overall aim should focus on a participatory approach, ensuring support of local communities and other stakeholders for conservation and management of wildlife. Awareness programmes should target the people sharing space with elephants, in human dominated landscapes like agriculture fields, and also the local communities living in forest dominated landscapes. So it is most important to teach and train stakeholders such as frontline forest staff, journalists and the public. Journalist requires attention since inaccurate reporting leads to complications and aggravate situation and also increase the intensity of the problem.

Most of the human deaths occurred were due to negligence and the human deaths could have been



Field demonstration on Elephant census techniques

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Training on field equipments usage

In line with above context, the first capacity building for forest staff was conducted at Hosur from 28-29 September 2016 at Forest Training Centre, Mathigiri. A total number of 40 staff including anti-poaching watchers, guards, foresters, forest range officers and persons from non-governmental organisations participated. The training was inaugurated by Ashish Kumar, Srivastava, IFS, Conservator of Forests, Dharmapuri Circle in the presence of E. Rajendran, District Forest Officer, Hosur.

The second capacity building training was held at Forest Training Centre, Attakatty, Anamalai Tiger Reserve from 20 & 21 October 2016, 35 forest staff in the capacity of anti-poaching watchers, guards, foresters and range officer attended the training. The training was inaugurated by V. Ganesan, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests & Field Director, Anamalai Tiger Reserve, Coimbatore in the presence of V. Subbiah, District Forest Officer & Deputy Director, ATR and A. Periasamy, IFS, District Forest Officer, Tirupur. Followed by the training, sensitization programme for 30 journalists was arranged on 22 October 2016 at the same venue that was inaugurated by both Chief Conservator of forests and District Forest Officer, ATR, Coimbatore.



Paulraj, IFS (Retd) delivering a talk on Human animal conflict to the journalists

In the frontline staff training, they were taught about why conserve elephants, ecological role of elephants, elephant facts, elephant ecology and behaviour, census techniques, wildlife law and crime, project elephant, elephant reserves, identifying and handling problematic elephants, elephant corridor management, background of human elephant conflict, elephant rescue, tranquilization, translocation of problem elephants, people participatory approach, human elephant conflict mitigation methods, a few tips on do's and don'ts in elephant areas etc. Other than the class room sessions field demonstration sessions were also conducted such as census techniques of elephants, tranquilization and how to use the field equipment's such as GPS, rangefinder, compass and densitometer etc.,

All the forest trainees were provided with a guidebook in local language which contain information taught in the training session. Other than this they were provided with multiple copies of big posters, do's and don'ts small posters, t-shirts, bag, stickers etc., to use them as publicity materials at their working areas.



Participants of the Hosur forest frontline staff training



Pollachi Forest Frontline staff training participants



Journalists field trip

The main agenda of the journalists sensitizing programme was to make them aware about elephants and its behaviours, do's and don'ts in HEC areas to avoid human death and motivate them factual reporting of human elephant conflict incidences to ease tension in the communities living in elephant areas. The resource persons answered various questions raised about elephants, human conflict issues and human elephant coexistence. Later the journalists were on a field trip to give exposure on few human elephant conflicts areas. The journalists were provided with elephant guidebook in local language, bag, t-shirt, big

elephant posters, do's and don'ts posters and stickers.

Resource persons of the trainings

- Dr. S. Paulraj, IFS (Rtd), Chennai
- Dr. N. S. Manoharan, Forest Veterinarian, Coimbatore
- Dr. B. Ramakrishnan, Asst. Professor, Govt. Arts, College, Udthagamandalam
- Dr. C. Arivazhagan, Indo-American Wildlife Society, Chennai
- Mr. R. Aumugam, Biologist, Anamalai Tiger Reserve, Pollachi
- Mr. Peter Prem Chakravarthi J., Wildlife Biologist, Pollachi

Zoo team

- Mr. R. Marimuthu
- Dr. B.A. Daniel
- Mr. K. Raveendran

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Pollachi Journalists staff training participants