

ORPHANED ELEPHANT CALF (*Elephas maximus*) ADOPTED BY CAMP ELEPHANTS AT JALDAPARA WILD LIFE SANCTUARY

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Introduction:

Floods are an annual feature during the monsoon in Assam. Many elephant calves get swept away by flood water. They often end up with the forest department for hand-rearing (Thakuria *et al.*, 1996). However, the survival of these abandoned calves have been low in the past. Absence of maternal care could be the major reason for this low survival percentage. Moreover, being a member of the Matriarchal Society, the elephant calves also get ample tending from the other female members of the herd which help in bringing up the baby.

The recent addition to the list of orphaned elephant calves is a 4 month old elephants that was rescued from the flood waters in September 1996 near Sahebpara Village of the Belakoba Range in Baikunthapur Forest Division of West Bengal. The calf was emaciated, restless and was unable to take food with its trunk. The calf also refused to take food administered orally.

Selection of Foster mother

Three of the Forest Department elephants, posted at Hollong, Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary, were in lactating condition. In order to supplement with a foster mother, an attempt was made to introduce the calf with one of these three lactating cow elephants. Only Champaky accepted the calf readily. She already had a 6 month old suckling calf.

Veterinary care:

All types of lacerations and sores on the calf were treated with local antiseptics (Betadine R: Wirmedicare) and antibiotics (Sofradex-F Oint: Ciba-Geigy). Supportive therapy to combat stress and debility included Multivitamins (Concitone R: Concept), Mifex (s/c-ly) and Tonophoron (East India). Intermittent diarrhoea and fever was treated with Floxin R Vet-5% (Hoechst India Ltd) 5 mg orally for 25 days.

Faecal sample examined initially were positive for ascarids and subsequently to Fasciola and Strongyle. These conditions were treated with Albendazole and Fenbendazole respectively.

Diet formula and feeding schedule

Previous experiences have shown that elephant calves, when raised with artificial diet, invariably get digestive disorders like constipation, diarrhoea and flatulence. To combat with this situation, strict hygiene was maintained besides regularly monitoring the ration and treatment schedule. Table 1 shows the daily ration schedule during the first 2 months arrival.

Boiled rice, dal, molasses and salt mixed were with Lactogen (in lukewarm water) properly and drenched in divided doses at two hours interval. For the entire 2 months period, the ingredients were mixed and drenched in the same schedule. Towards the end of this period, the calf was just beginning to use its trunk for feeding.

The calf has now become a member of the domestic elephant herd, accompanying them to the forest for grazing and bathing. The calf is being trained during day time and kept chained at night in pilkhana. It has since been named "TARJAN".

References:

Thakuria, D. B., T. Barthakur and P. K. Barborayh, Hand rearing with paternal care of orphaned Elephant Calves at Assam state zoo, Guwahati, ZOOS' PRINT, April 1996.

Table 1. Diet composition of the orphaned elephant calf

TIME PERIOD				
Ingredients	First 15 days	Next 15 days	Next 15 days	Next 15 days
Lactogen-1	500 gms	800 gms	-	-
Lactogen-2	-	-	1 kg	1.5 kg
Boiled rice	1 kg	11 kg	1 kg	1 kg
Daal (Masur/Lentil)	200 gms	250 gms	250 gms	300 gms
Boiled soyabean*	-	250 gms	300 gms	500 gms
Germinated gram**	-	100 gms	150 gms	250 gms
Molasses	25 gms	50 gms	75 gms	100 gms
Salt	20 gms	25 gms	25 gms	25 gms
Ripe banana	-	-	10 nos	12 nos

* Boiled given as a paste during the second 15 days