

News Briefs

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1. Farmers offer land for elephant corridor to avoid jumbo-size woes (India)

Deccan Herald - 6.8.2015

Agriculturists in eight villages coming under the Hongadahalla and Vanagur Gram Panchayats are so beset by problems that they are ready to give up their lands to be included in the elephant corridor. They constantly live under the fear of wild animals entering their villages any moment and feasting on or destroying crops, including commercial ones like coffee and cardamom.

On Wednesday, during a meeting chaired by Deputy Commissioner, Umesh Kusugal, they demanded that they should be rehabilitated with proper compensation, in return for the farmlands. Farmers who participated submitted consent letters that they were ready to part with their land. They have sought a minimum of Rs 30 lakh per acre and proper rehabilitation. The farmers want monetary aid for crop loss, till the elephant corridor is created. However, the meeting had its share of naysayers too, unwilling to give up land to be converted into forest, including Hongadahalla GP president Sunitha Prakash.

However, if people decide that life is completely untenable in the forest, he would take steps for acquiring their land. A total of 416 families in eight villages have given consent letters to part with 2261 acres of their land.

2. Wandering wild elephants to be herded home (Myanmar)

Myanmar Times - 27.8.2015

Six wild elephants that managed to wander from their native Bago Yoma habitat in Natmauk

township, Magwe Region, to Nyaung Oo township in Mandalay Region are to be herded back home with the help of tame elephants. The six wild elephants, including two calves, walk along a ridge on Tuyin Mountain near Bagan, Nyaung Oo township.

If all goes according to plan, the wild elephants will be herded back home by urging them to change their direction of travel. This effort will be carried out using six tame elephants, seven big trucks and a team of 55 people under the direction of officials from the Zoo Department and the Myanmar Timber Enterprise, accompanied by an elephant doctor. Their supplies will include four tranquiliser guns, which will only be deployed if absolutely necessary.

He said he assumed the elephants originally lost their way because of interference from humans. He added that further interference could complicate efforts to drive the elephants back to the Bago Yoma. There have already been some casualties: A police officer from Nga Tha York sub-township in Nyaung Oo district said the elephants injured one man from Thantel village and killed another from Sarkyat village on August 25, after they approached too close to the animals.

3. Largest ever elephant survey conducted in Mondolkiri (Cambodia)

Cambodia Daily - 5.9.2015

As part of the country's largest ever elephant survey, 1300 dung samples have been collected in Mondolkiri province in an effort to ascertain how many of the pachyderms remain in the province and where they live. Rachel Crouthers, biodiversity technical monitoring adviser for

WWF Cambodia, said researchers took samples from three areas in the province and will produce a unique analysis of Asian elephant populations in Mondolkiri.

“This landscape-wide survey spanning three protected areas (Phnom Prich Wildlife Sanctuary, Mondulkiri Protected Forest and Seima Protected Forest) will produce the first estimates for the entire Eastern Plains Landscape within Cambodia,” Ms. Crouthers said via email.

“Results will help us understand more about the elephant population’s characteristics such as population size, movement patterns, corridor use for the entire landscape, [and] will be crucial in protecting this regionally important population of this endangered and charismatic species,” she said.

4. Bengal denies jumbo sterilisation (India)

The Telegraph - 17.9.2015

The Supreme Court today directed the Bengal government to place before it a World Wildlife Federation research proposal for evolving an “immuno-contraception” drug to reduce the state’s elephant population. A bench headed by Justice Dipak Misra passed the directive after the state’s counsel told the court that Bengal had not taken any steps yet for sterilising elephants, whose numbers are said to have increased three-fold in north Bengal since 1989.

The court was dealing with a public interest petition filed by a journalist, Shakti Prasad Nayak, on deaths of elephants mowed down by speeding trains, a common occurrence in north Bengal where vast stretches of railway tracks run through forests.

At an earlier hearing, the petitioner’s counsel, had brought to the court’s notice alleged sterilisation of elephants by the Bengal government to reduce their population. In its affidavit today, the state said it was “incorrect” to say that the government had any plans for sterilising wild elephants but voiced the need for research on the subject.

5. Tusker kills Chinese engineer in Raigarh

Daily Pioneer - 8.9.2015

A Chinese national was trampled to death by a tusker in Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh on Monday. The incident took place forest close to village Katengapali in the Gharghoda police area. The victim identified, as Jong Kitau, along with his colleague was walk in the forest. The victim was an Engineer and part of team here from China to setup a power plant in the region.

Like on other days, they were taking walk in the forest patch when an elephant suddenly appeared before them. Somehow, Kitau colleague managed to escape. the spot and he was targetted by the tusker. In the encounter Kitau suffered severe injuries on internal body parts. Notably, in part few months some parts of the State has witnessed killing, damage to human settlement and standing crops by herd of tuskers.

It is to be mentioned here that as many as 63 people were killed by tuskers and other wild-animals across the state between 2014 and 15.9 lakh as compensation whereas Rs 10,000 was provided to each affected family as an instant relief.

6. Nine human-elephant conflict zones mapped (India)

The New Indian Express - 3.10.2015

Studying the reasons and possible mitigation options for human-elephant conflicts in Sathyamangalam forest in West Tamil Nadu, wildlife experts here have identified nine conflict hotspots where over 72% of crops had been damaged by elephants the last year. Experts from the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) began their survey a few months ago and studied 26 villages around Velamandi reserve forest area near Sathyamangalam. Of these, frequent conflicts were reported from nine villages along the fringes of the forest area. Out of the 124 damages reported in the region, 89 incidents of elephants raiding farmlands were reported from these nine hotspots. Among the nine villages, Kallipatti,

Nalroad and Solabanur villages were the worst hit. The damages were often substantial, leaving the farmers with no money to feed their families.

Experts added that the elephants went on a rampage mostly from February to June. However, to get a better picture, the wildlife scientists will spend another year at the forest studying the spatial landscapes, animal movements and recording any repetition in their patterns.

Velamandi reserve forest is spread across 130 km² that has about 30,000 villagers living around it. Most of these villagers are subsistence farmers who grow banana, jasmine, tobacco and other crops that are sold during festivals that fall later in the year. However, the constant raids by elephants have left farmers with very little.

7. Asian jumbos play key role in spreading green cover (India)

Press Trust of India - 4.10.2015

Asian elephants play a vital role in the ecology of the forest and help spread green cover because of their eating and movement pattern, says a study by the researchers of the Indian Institute of Science and Princeton University. The researchers studied the eating and movement patterns of domestic cattle, buffaloes and pachyderms as they are the ones who often venture inside the core of the forest and also travel a significant distance daily. More importantly, these species are herbivores.

They also chose the Buxa Tiger Reserve for their research. The core area of the reserve consists of native vegetation, surrounded by areas consisting of plantations and degraded forest tracts. According to a 2003 estimate, there are 217 elephants in Buxa. In the study over three fruiting seasons (2010-2012), the researchers chose three species of plants for their study: *Dillenia indica* (the elephant apple), *Artocarpus chaplasha* (the chaplash) and *Careya arborea* (wild guava). These are mostly eaten by cattle, buffaloes and elephants.

In the fruit trees chosen by the researchers, they found that the elephant apple produces relatively

hard fruit that are about 430 g in weight. Because the hardness of the elephant-apple fruit, it makes pachyderms its predominant consumer. Chaplasha and wild guava trees produce softer fruits, which are easy for smaller fruit-eating species to handle.

8. Diseases kill more elephants than poaching (India)

Post News Network - 5.10.2015

Diseases such as anthrax have claimed more elephants in the state than poaching since 2000. While the number of elephant deaths due to poaching reported from 13 districts in Orissa has declined since 2000, deaths caused by unknown reasons have risen. Wild life expert Binoy Kumar Behera, said that the state's elephants, are now increasingly falling prey to unknown diseases.

Studies by wildlife experts have documented that since 2000, 23% of the state's elephants died due to diseases, mainly anthrax, while poaching and unknown reasons claimed 18% and 15% deaths respectively. "The existing practice of burying the dead elephant's bodies instead of burning could be one of the reasons behind the spread of anthrax. Scientific studies have revealed that anthrax germs were found to be active even after 50 years and the disease could contract other animals that eat grass grown near the carcass," said Behera.

Increasing man-elephant conflicts have resulted in the death of about 700 people and elephants each in the state since 2000, said Behera. Elephants have been increasingly attacking villagers and destroying their crops due to the non-availability of food in forests, he said. Connecting the state's 14 elephant corridors with forests of neighboring West Bengal and Jharkhand could help in easy movement of the pachyderms, said Behera.

9. The last refuge for China's elephants

Fox News - 7.10.2015

In China, the country with the highest demand for elephant tusks and where lust for ivory threatens

the species' survival, pachyderms have found a refuge in a nature reserve established with the goal of raising awareness about wildlife. The 10,000-km² Mengyang wildlife refuge is located in the southern district of Xishuangbanna, a region known as "Chinese Thailand" on the border with Laos and Myanmar (Burma).

Strolling on a walkway made of wooden planks a few meters above the ground, visitors hope that some of the 150 wild elephants living in the reserve will make an appearance. "We estimate they come through here every 1.3 days," Zhang Zhongqin, a member of the management staff at the sanctuary, told EFE. "The main reason is the surroundings, with a large forested area without humans, many small rivers and a large supply of the foods they eat," Bao said.

In southern China, the government protects elephants and defends their rights, even putting them above those of local residents.

"The main problem we currently have is that of confrontations with peasants," researcher Yang Zhengbin said. "Wild elephants cannot be controlled and sometimes they eat the crops," Yang said, adding that bad encounters between humans and pachyderms result in an average of two peasants killed each year. The government pays compensation, but residents consider the money inadequate.

Since the reserve opened in 2008, about a dozen people have worked to check the pachyderms' health and sometimes stage rescues, as in the case of Yang Niu, a 2-month-old female elephant found abandoned recently and who suffers from a heart condition. The reserve's hospital is currently caring for 10 elephants.

10. Scientists discover why elephants rarely get cancer

USA Today - 8.10.2015

According to everything we know about cancer, elephants should be hit hard by the disease. Cancer is a disease of aging, and elephants can live up to 70 years. Over the course of a life that

long, elephants grow a lot – burgeoning from 200-pound babies to 12,000-pound giants. All that growth involves cell division, a process that provides opportunities for potentially lethal genetic mistakes. Yet cancer is relatively rare in elephants. Fewer than 5% of elephant deaths in captivity are related to cancer.

A new study suggests a possible reason why: Elephants have 20 times as many copies of a key cancer-fighting gene as humans. Humans typically have just two copies of a tumor-blocking gene called TP53, inheriting one from their mother and one from their father, said Joshua Schiffman, co-author of a study published Thursday in JAMA. In contrast, elephants have 40 copies.

TP53 plays a vital role in preventing cancer, said Schiffman, who describes it as the "guardian of the genome," scanning cells for genetic mistakes and destroying ones that can't be fixed. "Every time a cell divides is a potential disaster," said Weinberg, Professor of Biology at the MIT in Cambridge, Mass. "As we evolved from small, short-lived animals into larger, long-lived animals, there has been the co-evolution of anti-cancer mechanisms in our tissue, so we don't have an ever-increasing risk of cancer as we get older."

Cancer death rates vary widely by species, the new study says, ranging from 1% in the rock hyrax, a small African mammal related to elephants, to 8% of deaths in African wild dogs and more than 20% of deaths in cheetahs. Cancer causes 11% to 25% of deaths in humans; many of those deaths due to lifestyle issues such as smoking, the study said.

11. Wildlife ranger trampled to death by elephants in China

New Straits Times Online - 24.10.2015

A wildlife ranger was trampled to death while observing wild elephants in southwest China, authorities said Saturday. Yao Zhengyang went missing Thursday afternoon in Mengwang township and his body was found early the

next morning, the Xishuangbanna prefectural government said on its microblog. "According to an initial investigation, death was caused by wild elephants," said the brief posting. Xishuangbanna is in southern Yunnan province, bordering Laos. Despite China's reputation as a major market for poached African ivory, Xishuangbanna's approximately 300 wild elephants enjoy state-level protection on a level with China's unofficial mascot, the giant panda. Killing an elephant in China can result in a death sentence. Despite the setting aside of land for elephant habitat, the animals are blamed for damage to crops, and occasional attacks on humans are reported.

12. Wild tuskers unleash terror in Madi; destroy houses, crops (Nepal)

Himalyan News Service - 26.10.2015

Prastav Subedi of Madi municipality-10, Diwanagar, was busy chasing wild tuskers during Dashain festival in Chitwan. Subedi is not the only person who spent most of his time chasing away tuskers instead of enjoying the festival with family. The locals remained under constant fear of tusker attack as elephants from the Chitwan National Park entered human settlements and damaged houses and crops ready for harvest. The locals had no option but to keep vigil throughout the night.

According to Narayan Datta Sapkota, chairman of Chitwan National Park Buffer-zone Consumers' Committee at Gardi, at least two houses at Bhairabpur were damaged. Locals have started patrolling the locality after elephants started wreaking havoc on human settlements. Besides, the locals move around carrying torches and hitting plates during the night. He said elephants run away at the sound of siren installed on the tractor.

13. EU adopts baby elephant (Indonesia)

Jakarta Post - 29.10.2015

The Delegation of the European Union (EU) in Jakarta has adopted Eropa (Europe), a newborn elephant from the Tangkahan Conservation

Response Unit in the Leuser Ecosystem, as part of its effort to strengthen conservation and encourage community-based ecotourism.

"The naming and adoption of baby elephant Eropa, born on Sept. 1, 2015, highlights the EU's long-term commitment to the unique Leuser Ecosystem, to which it has contributed over US\$ 55 million to protect and sustainably manage Aceh's and North Sumatra's forests," the head of cooperation of the EU Delegation to Indonesia, Franck Viault, said.

Earlier this year, the EU Delegation adopted young elephant Aras, which monitors and protects the eastern part of the Leuser Ecosystem as part of the Aras Nepal Elephant Patrol Unit (EPU). The aim of Aras' adoption was to bring public attention to the importance of conservation and the fight against climate change.

It is estimated that 80% of Sumatran elephants' lowland natural forest habitat has disappeared in the past 25 years and the number of Sumatran wild elephants has diminished to only 2500 with increased conflict between them and farming communities. As a result, the Sumatra elephant, a subspecies of the Asian elephant, is now on the international list of critically endangered species.

14. Elephant caravan treks across Laos on mission to stave off extinction in species' former stronghold

ABC Online - 29.10.2015

A "caravan" of elephants is travelling 500 km through northern Laos over the next two months as part of a campaign to save the Asian elephant from extinction in the small landlocked country. Twelve elephants and their mahouts (keepers) will travel through the provinces of Xayaboury and Luang Prabang, raising awareness of the elephant's plight.

There are now fewer than 900 Asian elephants left in Laos. There are about 350 in the wild and about 400 domesticated animals. The species' survival is threatened by habitat loss, poaching and abuse. Conservationists say without urgent measures,

within half-a-century the Asian elephant will disappear from a country traditionally dubbed the “Land of a Million Elephants”. From the mid-14th century, for 353 years, Lan Xang was a large kingdom in Southeast Asia. It eventually became part of modern-day Laos.

The Elephant Caravans arrival in Luang Prabang on December 17 will coincide with the 20th anniversary celebrations of the city being granted World Heritage status. The next day 20 elephants will join the traditional elephant procession through the ancient city.

15. Now, elephants get ambulance service in Kerala (India, Kerala)

The Indian Express - 5.11.2015

Elephants in Kerala will soon have the luxury of ‘ambulance’ service to transport sick and injured jumbos. The state Forest Department has launched an animal ambulance, a specially designed vehicle for elephants at the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS), a paradise of wild jumbos in north Kerala. A modified lorry, the ‘ambulance’ vehicle will be used mainly for the transportation of injured and tranquilised elephants for their translocation during the time of emergencies and to ferry ‘kumkis’ (domesticated elephants) from other places, department officials said.

There is a special system in the vehicle to restrict mobility of jumbos. The vehicle has also facilities to store food and medicines for the animal. Official say the vehicle could play a significant role in bringing down man-elephant conflicts region of high range Wayanad. Domesticated elephants can be brought in this vehicle to drive away wild elephants which stray into human settlements..

16. India, Bangladesh join hands for safe cross-border elephant migration

The Economic Times - 4.11.2015

Human migration may remain a contentious issue between India and Bangladesh, but not for elephants. The two countries are working with

their respective external affairs and home affairs ministries to ensure that jumbos can cross the international boundary with ease.

India and Bangladesh are cooperating on trans-boundary conservation of elephants and safe cross-border migration of elephants is on the agenda of our cooperation. We have submitted our proposal to our external affairs and home affairs ministries for approval so that elephants are allowed smooth passage across the international border. So far the response of the ministries have been positive,” Project Elephant inspector general, R K Srivastava said. Experts said cross-border jumbo movements are primarily affected by border fencing, which at many places are right on the elephant corridors.

“Elephants are by nature migrating animals. Blocking their corridors actually do not work as elephants manage to overcome the barriers. However, we need to ease their cross-border movement of elephants. There are about 200-odd elephants left in the wild in Bangladesh. If we do not allow safe migration, there genetic stock will be affected,” Srivastava said.

17. Indonesia uses trained elephants to control forest fires

AP - 11.11.2015

Officials in Indonesia are using trained elephants outfitted with water pumps and hoses to help control fires that have claimed vast amounts of forest while sending thick haze into neighboring countries. For nearly three months, Riau province in East Sumatra has been blanketed by smoke from forest fires and land clearing, especially in peat-rich areas where flames are difficult to contain.

At the elephant conservation center in Siak district, 23 trained elephants are being used as “forest watchdogs.” Carrying water pumps and other equipment, elephants and their crews patrol burned areas in the national forest to ensure that fires don’t reappear after smoldering beneath the peat lands.

Elephants had earlier been trained to help patrol forests to find people encroaching illegally, as well as to resolve frequent conflicts between wild elephants and people by driving the wild elephants that enter human settlements back to their habitats.

So far, Indonesia has been unable to put out the raging fires this year because of intentional burning and a rain shortage. Much of the forest land that was burned in the past 17 years was converted into oil palm and pulp plantations. Data from the Riau Forest Fire Prevention Taskforce show more than 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of forests and land have been burned in the province.

18. Chased jumbo under train (Alipurduar, India)

The Telegraph - 22.11.2015

A wild elephant chased by a group of villagers was run over by a train near Madarihat early this morning, bringing to the fore the constant man-elephant conflict that has led to the deaths of several jumbos in the Dooars. The people of Haripur village said the train was running at a high speed when the adult male elephant, being chased by villagers who were guarding their paddy, moved towards the tracks between Madarihat and Shishubari stations.

Fifty-nine elephants have been mowed down by trains, including the animal killed this morning, since the 163 km long stretch between Alipurduar Junction and Siliguri Junction was converted into broad gauge in 2003. Around 90 km of the tracks pass through forests in the Dooars.

Both the tusks of the animal were wrenched out in the impact of the collision. The animal's hind was badly injured, which shows the train was coming down at a high speed. Later it was known from foresters that the spot fell in a zone where trains have to move slowly at night.

However, Sanjib Kishore, the divisional railway manager of Alipurduar, said the stretch where the accident happened was not among the speed

restriction corridors where trains cannot run faster than 25 km/h at any time of the day. "After every incident, we record the statement of the driver and conduct an inquiry. If any elephant suddenly comes on to the tracks, it is not possible for him (the driver) to stop the train and save the animal," Kishore said. "Drivers always try to save animals."

19. Elephant population growth needs to be addressed (Malaysia)

New Straits Times - 6.12.2015

There is a need to have better management of the growing elephant population and its limited habitat size, said Sabah Wildlife director William Baya. He was commenting on the department's largest translocation operation involving 24 elephants back to Tabin Wildlife Reserve here today. "Translocating the herd (that comes into conflict with humans) does not serve as a permanent solution. "It has been proven that the same translocated elephants made their way back to the conflict area," he explained.

In 2013, the department had a similar translocation operation involving 10 Borneo elephants that were introduced into Tabin Wildlife Reserve. The department had spent about a month to conduct the elephant control by herding them back to the forest reserve but decided to translocate them to prevent further damage and ensure the safety of people.

The herd, comprising of 22 females and two males pachyderms, were first reported in a village area located less than 10 km away from the town. Four of the elephants were captured from Kampung Sri Putatan, 15 from Jalan Sin Hwa, three from Layung and two from Kampung Binuang. Two elephants are also fixed with satellite collars sponsored by Danau Girang Field Centre for future movement monitoring to better understand the human-elephant conflict in Sabah.

Meanwhile, the department also announced a statewide elephant population survey would also be conducted next year to look into the increasing human-elephant conflict in Sabah.

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