

Crop raiding behavior of elephants in the northwestern region of Sri Lanka

Northwestern region of Sri Lanka supports a substantially large elephant population. Yet there are only few protected areas in this region, and these protected areas are not large enough to support a elephant population of this size. Furthermore, this area has undergone rapid development under Mahaweli development program leading to a reduction and fragmentation for available habitats for elephants. This has brought elephants closer to human settlements and thus over the years elephants have made a major impact on the farming practices in this region. Aim of this study is to determine the crop raiding behavior of elephants in the northwestern region of Sri Lanka in order to develop a suitable management strategy to conserve the elephants in the region.

First, an interview survey was carried out to identify the level of conflict that exist in the area. Based on this survey 100 farmers from 50 villages were selected and their farmland was monitored at 10 day intervals over two cultivation cycles. Of the farmers monitored 23 farmers received damage to their home gardens while paddy fields of 20 farmers were raided by elephants. Elephants also raided "chena" cultivation's of 8 farmers. The estimated total cost of damage received by farmers over this period was approximately Rs. 120,000/=. Of the elephants causing damage 43% were solitary bulls, 38% were bull groups, and 19% were herds. It can be concluded that elephants have a major impact on the farming practices of the study area and that bulls and bull groups engage mainly in crop raiding behavior.