

Human Elephant Co-existence HECx : A Successful Training and Successful Follow-up

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Human Elephant Conflict HEC is one of the burning issues of conservation today. Although conflict can take place between humans and any size of animals, the conflict between some of the charismatic mega vertebrates, and human has generated extreme fear, bitterness and even hatred among the afflicted persons, which causes them to consider wildlife their enemy. Teaching wildlife protection in such an environment requires special methods to have practical effect. When Zoo Outreach Organization started this project few years ago, although HEC has been indeed a hot topic, there was no available educational texts, materials, modules, etc. devoted to address this issue. We realized that human beings living in or near where elephants will or may appear, need to be taught to love and respect the wildlife that causes them so much pain and hardship. This is for their own welfare as well as that of the animals.

HEC created bad will between humans and elephants. It is no wonder that community support for conservation of elephants has deteriorated, as the people are suffering and retaliate against the elephant. They do not care about conservation in this context. They simply want to be rid of their tension, terror and loss. Thus the need for long-term conservation of the elephant in Tamil Nadu requires that elephants and people co-exist with minimal or no conflict so that the current trend of dramatic demands for the removal of elephants can be extinguished.



Never rescue elephants yourself, call the concerned people to rescue. Photos by B.A. Daniel

Humans sharing space with wildlife need to learn to avoid conflict. They should develop right attitudes towards these animals. Human beings sharing area with wild animals need to develop a very strong appreciation of wildlife indeed in order to develop the level of behavioral and attitudinal changes needed to avoid conflict.

Realizing the need for educating the public a series of three trainers training programme was conducted in Tamil Nadu to bring behavioural and attitudinal change towards problem elephants. The USFWS sponsored training programmes were conducted in HEC districts of Thirunelveli, Viruthunagar, Nilgiris, and Krishnagiri (Map 1). The last workshop of this series was conducted in Krishnagiri

District from 11-13 April 2013 at Vidivelli Training Centre, Sundampatti Village, Krishnagiri in collaboration with a local NGO the SWORD.

Krishnagiri district is bounded by Vellore and Thiruvannamalai districts in the East, Karnataka state in the west, State of Andhra Pradesh in the North Dharmapuri District in the south. In Krishnagiri District HEC is steadily rising with incidents of wild elephants straying into human habitats and destroying crops. In 2007-2008, 200 cases of crop damage caused by elephants are reported. According to an estimate, crops worth 16000 US\$ are damaged every year by elephants

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Drama make every one participate.



in these areas. Depredations by the elephants have been going on unabated, almost daily, especially from October to February in Thally and Pennagaram areas.

The three-day training programme was inaugurated by Mr. Ghouse Basha, Tamil Nadu Forest Department in the presence of Mr. Babu, UNICEF coordinator, M Thiruneelakandan, District youth coordinator, Nehru Yuva Kendra, and Mr. V.S.S. Jalaluddeen, President, SWORD. The training was given for selected 45 people from HEC areas of Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri District such as schoolteachers, NGOs, Village heads, Self help group leaders and individuals involved in education. Trainers from ZOO, Dr. B.A. Daniel and Mr. R. Marimuthu, handled the sessions

all three days.

The workshop combined two themes: Human-Elephant Conflict and Human-Elephant Coexistence in order to satisfy the following major objectives: 1. To empower educators to confront the issue of HEC and a partial "solution" HECx (Human-Elephant Coexistence) and 2. to demonstrate innovative teaching and learning techniques designed to change human attitudes and behaviour for the better.

To achieve the above objectives Zoo Outreach Organisation developed a teaching module which suggests human beings should coexist with elephants to the extent possible for the sake of saving life and limb. Without demeaning villagers' suffering, the ZOO model and materials lead workshop participants to think about conflict in a different way. The following are the education materials used:

Elephant teaching guide – This Manual includes chapters and components for training with the theme of Asian Elephants and Man Elephant Conflict. Each participant received one teaching guide in Tamil or English.

"Getting along with Elephants" – Ele-kit packets. These learning packets contain items constructed of paper and string which help teach younger children the basic concepts of HECx at their level. These learning packets were given to training participants in numbers sufficient for

use in their own workshops, meetings or classes. Each participant received 50-100 packets.

Drama kits – drama kits contain a range of masks and props for use by trainers with their target groups. Each participant received 2 sets.

Utilizing the above teaching tools, efforts were made to bring positive attitudes and bring about behavioral change of human beings in relation to elephants.

The workshop also focused to teach that the people who live in HEC areas take personal responsibility for their life and that of their family. The method of coexistence used in the training explained this approach and also the methods which have been collected from people many of whom have lived a long time in conflict areas in four South Asian countries (India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh) and in South East Asian countries (Indonesia). Thus the workshops, with all the activities, games, dramas, role playing, etc. taught effective preventative and practical behaviour with respect to elephants and Human-elephant conflict. The other objective was to utilize the methods employed in the workshop to train teachers and other educators how to teach more meaningfully and effectively, combining active learning techniques with a burning issue.

On the third day the participants were thoroughly familiar with the themes of Asian elephants as such and HEC. They were also familiar with a variety of "do's and don't's" relative to elephant conflict from an individual's point of view of protecting himself and his family from elephants. Apart from these, the training also made the participants comfortable with this new way of teaching about elephants and elephant depredation and danger.

At the end of the training, participants committed to practice what they learned in the training and to send us reports about their own programmes. During valedictory function of the workshop, the participants were given a set of education materials to help them conduct their own awareness programmes in their village to promote Human Elephant Coexistence.



Elephants in human culture: Role play

Follow up programme: - Report by **Raisa Dawood, Conservation Program Manager, Projects Abroad, India.** Email: modelfarm@projects-abroad.org

The three-day training particularly kindled the interest of the educators. Ms. Raisa Dawood, a participant of the workshop and a Programme Manager in Project Abroad, organized a one-day learning event for the village people in Chinnupatti. The event was part of a summer programme at a model farm in Chinnupatti on 18th April this year. Raisa wrote, the actual day was as follows:

"We invited the local children, who were on holidays, for a one day summer camp at the model farm. The topic of the day was the Asian elephants. We asked the children to prepare for drama 1 on the manual provided and gave them the set of masks from the drama kit. Younger children also wanted to join us and be a part of it and so we gave them the role of fruits in forest. We also invited the parents of the children to watch the drama and at the end they were asked to interpret the concept, which they did quite well. The children showed up a brilliant performance totally self motivated and the parents were happy to see their kids perform too. We think this program helps in confidence building too apart from the awareness it creates.

For elder children we gave them hints of the elephants' history and asked them to draw it. For younger ones our volunteer drew the comparison of Asian and African elephant pictures and asked them to draw step by step.

All the drawings were hung up on strings and looked very nice. There was a history of elephants in front of our eyes, even though it was just 8 hints that were drawn.

In another activity using the map, I showed the picture depicting the elephants distribution all over the world 100 years before and after and the children admitted the cruelty done to elephants. The children were happy with the things inside the Ele-kit packet and took the oath that they would not support the trade in which elephants are hurt physically.

We knew the children enjoyed the day very much because none left even



Art teaching compassion



Participants proudly pose with their masks and their drawings. Photos by Raisa Dawood.

after lunch! We thank ZOO for providing us with the education packs! They all liked the bands, the masks and the elder ones were after the booklets inside the packs, surprisingly. With that the day ended with a farm

made malt drink and small grain cereal snacks. That was an interesting day for us too and gave us a confidence that the word would spread.

