

## HECx EdTrain workshops all over Sumatra, 1-12 December 2009

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The 4th series of 'Getting Along With Elephants- HECx which is the 5th iteration of WCS-inspired active learning workshops was conducted by Zoo Outreach Organisation outside of South Asia for the first time. We've conducted them in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal with one scheduled for March 2010 in Bhutan and possibly Sri Lanka in future. Normally we won't go outside South Asia for fear of conflict with other NGO's, particularly western NGOs which we can't bully so easily. When we got an invitation from FFI's Sumatran Elephant Conservation Programme via Heidi Riddle, our Promoter, Mascot and Cheerleader, we forgot our principles and agreed. Not only that we even have agreed for Thailand, also Heidi's doing. Heidi also knows a little about elephants !

Cutting to the chase, the objective of these workshops is to train local people who can play an educator role (teacher, ngo, forester, ranger, local official, etc.) in HEC localities to lead local people into changing behaviour that puts them in harm's way, to behaviour that avoids confrontation altogether if possible and therefore avoids conflict.

This is controversial because (we have observed through survey) people living in HEC areas might have become a bit careless, which is, (we believe) a product of government overkill with compensation, provision of mechanistic (which are easily abused) methods of running elephants away, and reassurance of help during conflict. We feel this reassurance is unwarranted as it creates a false sense of security when no government can provide protection to every possible case of conflict, round the clock and throughout the year. The department can't even be expected to protect at that level but people *do* expect it and become furious when the forest department doesn't come through, often enough, taking it out on the elephants. (It is a bit like airport security to prevent terrorism, only worse!) Also the mechanistic methods of deflecting elephants are quickly understood by our clever elephants who learn ways to thwart these obstructions.

Unfortunately some of these methods also inadvertently put weapons in the hands of irate villagers, who can ramp up the current on electric fences and literally fry an elephant. The less said about the track record of translocating elephants the better, but one cannot leave out the fact that any mechanistic method has the potential for harming, possibly fatally, the elephant and also for making the elephant very angry which is dangerous for human beings. No method is perfect. There is actually no solution in sight.

ZOO's method also is not perfect but if followed, it has some potential to reduce conflict by avoiding confrontation. It **promotes coexistence with elephants** (which is actually a form of solution) by

teaching various behavioural and biological facts about them, which aids in understanding their psychology, convincing people of the intrinsic worthiness of elephants and of their unbeatable strength. It **stresses wildlife conservation and habitat protection** by teaching about elephant decline and ecosystem degradation and theft which (we hope) would instill a more sensible attitude in the youngsters who are taught by participants. It also **teaches old methods** which have been used by villagers when they had no help at all, which promotes coexistence.

The hoped for result is **less conflict** and therefore **less death, injury and destruction** for elephant, habitat and homo sapien.

These workshop were hosted by Flora and Fauna International - Sumatran Elephant Conservation Programme (FFI-SECP), and their CRU in Tangakhan near Medan, Saree near Aceh and Bengkulu. \*See the map on our website.

**We gratefully thank our sponsors and collaborators for the Sumatra HECx workshop**

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