

The story of rescue and rehabilitation of an injured elephant calf

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'Rajani', a wild elephant calf who got separated from the herd met with an accident when she fell down into a well near the village Berdih of Seraikela district, Jharkhand. The villagers tried to remove the calf from the well with their local technique and left it in the forest. The next morning the calf was found struggling for life in the river bank of Subarnrekha near the same village. The news came to the forest office.

A team led by the Conservator of Forests, Jamshedpur, S.B. Gaikwad and Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, Ranchi S.E.H. Kazmi rushed to the spot. The forest team along with the villagers of that area tried to catch the elephant to transport where the calf can be treated. It was decided that the calf would be transferred to the veterinary hospital in the Tata Zoo. With the local methods using trap and rope the calf was taken in a mini truck and transported to Jamshedpur.

The calf was taken to the hospital campus of the Tata Zoo hospital and a thorough enquiry of the calf was done by a team comprising of the Director of the Zoo, Bipul Chakravathy, the Veterinary Doctor, Dr. Manit Palit and the local Divisional forest Officer, Dhalbhum Forest Division, Jamshedpur. After a thorough check of the external part of the animal it was found that the calf was having multiple injuries and critical. The injuries were on the forehead, on the back and on the right thigh. Maggots had already formed. The injuries were so deep that a hand could go inside the injury. One of the forelegs had swelled and the calf was unable to walk.

The maggots were removed from the wound and the wound was dressed. The calf was given plenty of succulent food. She was also given glucose water, antibiotics and pain killers. The injured areas were cleaned and dressed every day. Antibiotic creams were applied in the injured areas. Slowly the injuries started curing. The calf also started taking more food. Seeing the symptom of improvement I was very much encouraged. I used to visit the calf every day. It was a new experience to us.

When the calf showed sufficient improvement, we decided to take her for a walk. The walking brought quick recovery to the injured leg. During the course of treatment the calf was named Rajani. When Rajani became almost normal, the Zoo authorities started writing to the forest department to take away the calf. It was really disturbing to us to lose the calf from the zoo but there was no facility for us to keep the elephant. The zoo authorities were quite emotional about the calf, but it was not



Rescued calf (above); with foster parents at Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary camp (below)

permitted be kept in a zoo. Finally after a lot of discussion it was decided that the calf will be taken to the proposed rehabilitation center in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary at Makulakocha. In the Dalma wildlife Sanctuary already there were 3 domesticated elephants which had been brought from Jamtara Forest division. They had been confiscated for illegal possession. We were advised to take Rajani to Maklakocha but strictly advised to keep her separately, because the interaction between the wild calf and the domesticated elephants may lead to fatal consequences. Rajani was kept for two days in Maklakocha in isolation but I noticed that the calf was uncomfortable in isolation. I thought she could stay with the three elephants. There were uncertainties but still I decided to go for a trial with precaution. One of the legs was tied with rope and slowly the calf was brought near the 3 elephants. To our great surprise the 3 elephants reacted normally and the baby elephant rushed in to them. As soon as the baby elephant joined them, the three cordoned the calf as a motherly elephant herd in the wild will guides and protect the young ones. It was a new experience to

see the domesticated elephant accepting the wild one at once.

Now the elderly three look after the feeding and care of Rajani. Rajni is no more tied with a rope when taken to forest for bathing with the elder ones. The elder ones are ensuring the safety of Rajani when they are moving together. Now they are behaving as if Rajani is their lost child and Rajani is also happy with them.

It taught me a lesson that the motherly instinct never dies whether taught or not. It made me believe that elephants are more humane than humans!

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