CAPTURING MUSTH ELEPHANT (A CASE REPORT)

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A middle aged tusker about eight feet in height, in good health became violent and disobedient to the mahout all of a sudden near Haflong town in Karbi Anglong district. With chained forelimbs the animal escaped to the nearby deep forest. Nearby police station and the forest officials were kept informed for public safety. Further, to prevent the animal to come to the nearby village, a female elephant was released near the tusker.

We arrived the camp in the hilly terrain next day. A dozen of us were in alertness expecting arrival of the tusker any moment. We were told that the elephant kept charging at those who attempted to go near and was in company with the female within a distance of $1^1/_2$ to 2 km.

We had taken with us a Distinject syringe projector (Model 60 N) and 5 ml aluminium dart, a 30 ml vial of Xylazil (Xylazine 100 mg/ml), 50 ml vial of Ketamil (Ketamine Hcl 100 mg/ml) and Antagozil (Yohimbine HCl 20 mg/ml) since we had no M99, etc.

Jainuddin (1970) successfully immobilized a domestic male Asian elephant in 'Musth' with 8 mg of etorphine hydrochloride; ataxia developed 5 minutes post injection, and within 12 minutes collapsed into lateral recumbency. During this period all the legs were chained.

The action was reversed with 25 mg of i.v. cyprenorphine hydrochloride. Jainuddin *et al.* (1971) also immobilized 4 Asiatic elephants (3 of them in musth) with etorphine (5-8 mg) and reversed the effect with cyprenorphine (15-25 mg) i/vly. These drugs have also been reported to be successfully used for immobilizing elephants for various purpose (Pienaar *et al.*, 1966, Wallach and Anderson, 1968). Thakuria and Borthakur (1994) controlled a captive African male coming into musth in three occasion using Diazepam (400 mg and 200 mg) orally in the morning and evening for first 5 days then reducing the dose to 100 mg/day till 20th day. On subsequent development of 'Musth' they used Lorazepam (400 mg for 10 days, then 150 mg/day for another 10 days). The authors concluded that Lorazepam was found better in controlling musth. Sabapara and Raval (1993) captured two aggressive musth elephants with immobilon which was reversed later with Revivon. Xylazine was used to prolong the period of tranquilization.

As we had no alternative, after assessing the situation we decided to use 500 mg of Xylazine, correlating with the height the body weight was assumed to be approximates 3+ ton. If we take the weight as 3 ton, then the dose will come to 167 mg/ton. Further, we had no scope to increase this dose as we had only 5 ml dart. We planned that both of us shall stay in the camp. Three persons including a shooter will go. The latter with one man will be on a tree top. The mahout will be on the ground away from tree. The tree will be selected after seeing the elephant. The mahout will call the elephant by name and provoke charging. When the elephant charges the mahout, the latter will run towards and below the particular tree. The shooter will shoot from the nearest possible distance, should the elephant pass below the tree. Only after a successful shooting someone of them will shout so as to send signal to the camp. The plan was detailed to them several times. The shooter was told not to shoot unless the elephant was within the targetted range. Both of us with nine others were waiting anxiously to hear the signal which could be heard after 2 hours and 10 minutes from the time, the three persons left the camp. Leaving one all left the camp including both of us. On our way we had to cross a river with waist deep water to enter the hill. The mahout came forward to receive us and pointed towards the elephant standing quietly about 100 meters away in a thick bamboo forest. All of us approached the elephant from the rear side. The ears were raised, trunk, relaxed, penis fully erected. After 27 minutes of shooting (the time between shooting and our arrival), 200 mg of Xylazine was injected i/m as the animal was not fully sedated. In the meantime, person accompanying us started chaining all the four legs to nearby trees and bamboos. After issuing necessary instructions and observing the animal for one hour we left for the camp leaving 2 persons by the side of the elephant. We appreciated the confidence of the shooter, who said that the elephant ran about 200 meters from the darted site and had he not been chained (fore legs) he would have gone still further, he added.

All the worker immobilized the aggressive musth elephants either with etorphine or immbilon while Thakuria and Barthakur (*loc.cit*) only managed a chained 'musth' elephant with Diazepam and Lorazepam where chemical immobilization was not required.

None of the above workers used Xylazine for immobilizing 'musth' elephants. Xylazine has been in use fro several decades because of its potent sedative and relaxant properties in elephants for various purposes by various workers including the writers. This drug has been used for controlling and management of musth after immobilizing with M99 or immobilon. Xylazine is not a drug of choice for immobilization, but procuring a narcotic drug like Xylazine where action is almost similar except the introduction time was tried under the prevailing circumstances to capture a musth elephant successfully.

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