

## Elephant and Human: Socially Unsocial?

Learning from the experience of eminent biologists in the field of elephant science and conservation has markedly improved from the times of independent Asia to modern day 'elephant affairs'. Elephant and human per say have lived in the realm of coexistence to



A herd of wild elephants being driven back into the forests

exacerbating conflict regimes especially in the Indian sub-continent. Forests of the south have harbored vast areas of contiguous green cover, water and refuge to both these inhabitants since time immemorial. Elephants have colonized such areas for centuries for their biological and ecological needs, but however – colonization has always been regarded as a

status of 'conflict' from naïve perspective of the human. However propensity towards conflict is subjective to both parties be it elephant or human.

For long India's elephants have suffered from hunting for ivory, game and other products, as well as illegal capture to meet local need and to be traded in the form of gifts to private parties. In some way it could be assumed that the capacity for enforcing national and international laws pertaining to wildlife protection are in a sense weak owing to poor wisdom and knowledge behind the subject. Managing elephants in protected areas can be quite a bit of challenge, especially understanding a species which has its importance when correlated to a given landscape or by just merely being a species.

Some of the discussions, by eminent speakers and worthy representatives of elephant conservation and science, seek the understanding of elephant from these two perspectives. Like knowledge from the pre-history and proto-history right up to elephant in the modern era the animal enjoyed the status of a cult. The glory and glamour behind the social elephant has had its enchantment in varying degrees. Use in culture, literature, art and comics, elephants have struck the audience with spree of wonder and joy, sensitizing people and communities of its importance as a species living in harmony in the natural world and its reverence in most of the religious facets, especially in Asia alone.

On the contrary elephants, in the context of protected forest areas, have a different opinion. Broken corridors, crop raiding to rampage killings to murderous tendencies have left make believers with a conundrum. Given the spectra of isolated elephant groups' authorities

planned two courses of action to mitigate problems such as conflict and agriculture. Some of the landscapes have clearly indicated degree of conduciveness and non-conduciveness for elephant living. Fragmented home ranges serve as typical refuge ground for elephants primarily for ready source of gain, not to ignore the mismanagement of resources in the same region by the human counterpart. Agriculture



A commercial transport road cutting across a forest

development as result of tea estates for instance in the Anamalais has further complicated the already widespread conflict and mitigation seems to be a 'pro bono' sense of an affair. However modern day interventions by using technology based conservation approaches have been attempted at reducing the onslaught suffered by the elephants.

The conventional terminologies 'rogue', 'weed', 'kheddha' etc depicting the status of the



A captive elephant in musth taken back to camp

modern day elephant, much has been written about the prodigious taste of the elephant but this is rather misleading. The drivers to conflict is not necessarily the 'rogue' who targets the local villager to gain his benefits of the soil or not the forests that 'weed' off the resources that it is meant to provide or nor is the traditional management practice of 'kheddha' eviction of some such populations, but a mere lacking of consensus to the cause. The socially

savvy human is a deleterious design when it comes to the art of survival. The elephant's penchant for feeding agricultural crops has been noticed since ancient times, and crop raiding factors can be broadly explained by habitat factors, such as fragmentation of forests which increase the contact between elephants and cultivated fields. As per a foraging theory the animal should try and obtain the energy it requires in the least time possible. Now who's reinventing the wheel?

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