



The Wildlife Watch Binocular

PO Box 562, New Paltz, NY 12561

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

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Live Animal Markets

A NEIGHBORHOOD WINDOW INTO THE HORRORS OF ANIMAL FARMING

By Rebecca Sunshine

I am sure that most of you who are reading this publication are animal lovers. And that you likely have had one or several experiences related to the inhumane treatment of animals that have left indelible images in your mind. My first came as a child who loved going to game farms and feeding and petting the deer. And then seeing a dead deer strapped to the roof of a car on the drive home. Another heart-sinking moment came as an adult when I passed a live animal market in the neighborhood where I worked.

Did you know that in New York City alone there are about 80 of these markets? Species sold in these markets include chickens, ducks, guinea fowl, turkey, quail and rabbits. And although against regulations, sometimes goats, sheep and cows are sold. **These animals are kept in cramped, overcrowded, and squalid conditions. The small animals**

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Rice Paddy with elephant tracks

PHOTO © WILDLIFE SOS

MITIGATING MAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT IN CHHATTISGARH

By Bindu Gopal Rao

As people encroach on forest land, instances of man-animal conflict are on the rise, but there are ways this can be mitigated.

In the context of human-elephant conflicts (HEC) in Chhattisgarh, people were not used to living in a landscape with wild elephants, because of which people faced crop damage, property damage and often even death. Wildlife SOS decided to intervene to resolve the issue, saving an entire herd from being trapped, poisoned, or killed.

Cause of the Conflict: Habitat Loss

Due to the presence of a large coal mine in Orissa, the activity around the mine disturbed the ancient corridors that many generations of elephant herds had used. The herds had no choice but to move away from the area and they ended up in Chhattisgarh. "As a result, the state that hardly had any presence of elephants in 100 years in the landscape was suddenly seeing wild elephants. One among them was the Van Devi herd comprising

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21 individuals,” says Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-founder and CEO, Wildlife SOS. It is important to realise that the elephants did not choose to raid the agricultural fields. They were forced out of their natural homes and put in this position because of human interference and damage to their habitat, which was mainly due to a coal mine. “Deforestation also played a role in causing habitat fragmentation and habitat destruction, including those done for constructing infrastructure,” adds Satyanarayan.

Corridor Barred

When these kinds of habitat loss happen without considering elephant corridors and the movement patterns that herds have been following for generations, they often cause elephants to raid settlements. “In Chhattisgarh, elephants were not merely indulging in opportunistic raiding but being the intelligent mammals they are, they were raiding with an intention.

Paddy is the most common crop raided by elephants because it is preferred by these wild pachyderms. And in Chhattisgarh, paddy is the primary grown crop,” says Swaminathan S, Senior Biologist with Wildlife SOS.

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Radio collaring of the matriarch, Van Devi

Tech Help

The Wildlife SOS was requested by the Chhattisgarh Forest Department to find a practical solution. This is when the team studied the problem and found out the reasons that caused the Van Devi herd to move from Orissa to Chhattisgarh. “People were not aware of elephant avoidance behaviour. We worked in multiple villages with the local community in Mahasamund and surrounding areas and motivated the youth to become part of a rapid response group,” says Satyanarayan. Radio-collaring the matriarch Van Devi, of the Van Devi herd to track the entire herd’s movement also played a crucial role in enhancing the Early Warning Alert System (EWAS). “Our team tracked her on foot for weeks and it was a high-risk operation for us. They were finally able to tranquilise the female, and once the radio-collaring was done successfully, the team administered the reversal injection to put her back on her feet,” explains Swaminathan.

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Understanding the Issue

One of the most crucial steps to mitigate interaction with wild elephants is learning about elephant avoidance behaviour. As part of that the Wildlife SOS laid down some commonly used strategies to safely deter elephants, which include, using noise such as pots and pans being banged together, loud yelling,

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EYE ON THE NEWS

GARDENS FOR INSECTS

Read more here: [Why You Should Let Insects Eat Your Plants](#)



“They’re not just your plants – they’re someone’s dinner”, Chris Baraniuk from the BBC writes, referencing the little herbivores munching away in gardens across the world. Recently, there is an influx of green-thumbed individuals that embrace a new form of gardening – planting to feed insects. According to a study done by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, “insect populations are declining at a rate of between 1% and 2% every year”. Gardeners are recognizing that insects are a crucial part of our ecosystems and are coming to their rescue. A survey from 2022 states, “one in three US adults purchase plants to help wildlife”. A spokesman at the UK’s Royal Entomological Society, Luke Tilley, states, “a garden managed for biodiversity can support potentially thousands of species over a year.” **In the instances of “compensatory growth”, feeding insects can even allow plants to bear more flowers and fruit. Gardens for insects may just be the revolutionary idea needed for a better world, for us and for wildlife.**

MITIGATING MAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT IN CHHATTISGARH *Continued from page 3*

screaming and chillies being burnt on the edge of crop fields. **The villagers were advised to use lights, because when elephants see a place that is very brightly lit, they avoid that area.** Organic deterrence is by changing crop patterns through yielding crops that will not attract elephants, such as replacing paddy with a crop that is not palatable for elephants. **The conflict mitigation workshops focused on ensuring that every farmer and villager was armed with ways to protect themselves and their fields.** The workshop began with a brief talk about the Asian elephant, its characteristics, and its behaviour.

Warning Signs

A system was set up so that Van Devi’s movements are relayed to the forest department who relays the information to a rapid response ‘flying squad’. The squad is a crew specially trained to safely deter elephants and work with local community leaders and volunteers to keep people and elephants safe and informed via WhatsApp groups. “The idea of our team was to communicate measures to the local communities to avoid unforeseen interactions with elephants. **Locals were informed about basic measures if elephants entered their village. They came out of their house with various utensils and created loud noises on the fields. The villagers were also advised to light small fires around their houses.** The elephants then took a detour and went to the nearest forest instead of entering the fields,” says Satyanarayan.

The Impact

In 2019, the number of crop damage cases was nearly 4,800. But in 2020, a few years after the successful radio-collaring, setting up of the Early Warning Alert System and training workshops, the numbers dipped to a little over 1,500 cases. That is nearly a two-thirds drop in the number of cases. Before the project started, there were about 90 human mortalities. There was a dip in the number of human mortalities as well. One of the study areas, Mahasamund, which saw 10 human mortalities in 2021, did not experience a single case in 2022. “By looking at the above figures, we can conclude that it was extremely successful. Through the EWAS, Wildlife SOS was able to combat the elephant and human fatalities, and save the lives of both,” concludes Satyanarayan.

For more information, people can visit the following link and support our human-elephant conflict mitigation project: give.wildlifesos.org/page/135182/donate/1

Bindu Gopal Rao is a freelance writer and photographer from Bengaluru. She enjoys birdwatching and environment, as well as taking the offbeat path when traveling. You can follow her on Instagram @bindugopalrao and find her work on bindugopalrao.com



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