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Chester Zoo produces elephant guidance handbook

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HOW do you manage when your next door neighbour weighs five tonnes? Chester Zoo has the answer.

And how do you stop your over-sized neighbour 'rampaging' through what is effectively your back garden?

Chester Zoo has come up with the answers to help people who live side by side with Asian elephants.

Living with Elephants is a practical handbook for the people of Assam, India, and has been launched in an effort to help both humans and elephants co-exist peacefully.

The aim of the guide, which includes top tips on how to elephant-proof your home, will help villagers stop elephants causing damage to their property and crops.

The guide includes advice on how to use super-hot chillis to make home-made 'chilli smoke' or create chilli fences as deterrents. It explains how to build early warning systems such as watchtowers and describes how to set up a solar-powered electric fence.

There is also advice on what not to do with elephants such as not throwing objects, or using weapons or dogs to scare them.

Chester Zoo's conservation department has produced the handbook together with project partner EcoSystems-India.

Five years ago the zoo - a conservation charity - set up the Assam Haathi Project with the aim of reducing conflict between elephants and people. The project is funded by the Defra's Darwin Initiative.



Alexandra Zimmermann, Chester Zoo's conservation manager, said: “While living with elephants may sound adventurous, for the villagers in Assam, and indeed many parts of Asia it causes many sleepless nights at best, and loss of livelihoods and life at worst.

“Assam, famous for its tea production, harbors one of the last remaining strongholds for the endangered Asian elephant.

“However, even here elephants are under threat; agriculture is encroaching into forest habitat and elephants searching for food - they need to eat up to 150 kg per day - end up ‘stealing’ crops from fields and raiding grain stores in villages.

“This creates a dangerous conflict in which both people and elephants are sometimes injured or even killed and which is unsustainable for the survival of elephants and the livelihoods of local communities.”

The handbook is being distributed to more than 50 villages throughout Assam and expands the work of the Assam Haathi Project which already works with over 5000 conflict-affected households.

Nandita Hazarika, director of EcoSystems-India, added: “Man shares a unique relationship with the elephant, particularly in Asian countries where elephants have been working and living alongside people for thousands of years.

“Many Asian cultures have special legends and stories about elephants and it is sad that such a majestic and culturally important animal could become extinct in the wild because of conflict with people.

“We hope this handbook will go some way in allowing both parties to co-exist safely.”

A survey is being carried out to evaluate the handbook and determine which form of outreach is most effective in increasing communities’ understanding of elephants and their ability to deal with this situation.