



Living with Elephants

“Living with Elephants”, a self help handbook has been launched by the Assam Haathi Project; one of Chester Zoo’s in-situ conservation programmes and recipient of a prestigious Darwin Initiative grant. The handbook has been distributed to 41 villages in Assam, NE India with the aim of providing information to people negatively affected by elephants. The handbook, available in English and Assamese, presents step-by-step guides on making low-cost mitigation methods from locally sourced materials that can be used to deter elephants from causing damage to property and crops.

The conflict between elephants and people is a complex and pervasive problem in Africa and Asia and is widely recognized as a major threat to the long-term survival of the species. Elephants are known as “flagship species” as due to their large habitat requirements their protection resultantly protects many other smaller species dependent on the same habitat. Assam harbors one of the last remaining strongholds for the endangered Asian elephant. However, with an increasing human population, expanding agriculture demands and resultantly wide scale destruction of natural forest habitat; more people are coming into conflict with elephants. As elephants search for food they pose a serious threat to people’s livelihoods through crop raiding and personal damage and in turn people retaliate by persecuting the elephants. Whilst the elephant is traditionally revered by the people of Asia escalating conflict is eroding this traditional respect. Developing strategies to reduce the impact of the conflict and increase people’s tolerance towards the animals involved is an essential short-term measure. This

then paves the way for long-term conservation solutions, such as habitat restoration and/or protection, to be determined and implemented.

The Assam Haathi Project works closely with local communities to develop practical and innovative ways to reduce the impact of the elephants, whilst also monitoring and studying elephant movements to develop long-term conservation solutions. The handbook includes information on basic elephant biology, alternative crops and various strategies for protecting villagers’ crops and property. These include deterrents, early warning systems and barriers that have been developed, tried and tested through the AHP. All methods use locally available, low cost materials, and following the step-by-step, illustrated guides are easy to implement. Deterrents included in the handbook include chilli, a local cash crop that can be used in various ways to deter elephants. Mixed with grease and smeared onto ropes it makes an effective barrier, whilst burnt chilli produces a smoke that also deters elephants. Easy to follow methodology has also been included on establishing early warning systems such as trip wires and watch towers. Barriers include electric fences and whilst these are more expensive they provide effective protection for smaller areas.

“Living with elephants” has enabled a wider audience to be made aware of the practical mitigation methods available. It is hoped that a wider adoption of these methods will greatly reduce the number of lethal mitigation methods and retaliatory killings often resorted to by local communities and ultimately help to create a sustainable co-existence between elephants and people.



Pictured above: (top) damage caused by elephants (below) Community members installing an electric fence and right: the process of making Chilli smoke.



Household surveys are being completed either side of the distribution of the handbook in order to determine the effectiveness of the material as an outreach method. If deemed successful, there are potentially huge benefits to community conservation programmes around the world. It will show that a wider audience can be reached in a less time intensive manner than traditional outreach meetings and there would be the potential to distribute the handbook to an even wider audience across Assam, India and other countries where Human-Elephant-Conflict is a serious problem. It is anticipated that the results from the surveys will be ready to report by June 2009, so watch this space!

For further information on our work, please visit:
www.assamhaathiproject.org or contact AHP@chesterzoo.org



Chester Zoo runs HellRunner!

A Zoo team ran in 'HellRunner' – a tough multi-terrain event held in Delamere Forest – to raise funds for the 'Year of the Frog' campaign.

The event was between 10-12 miles (the actual distance was never disclosed to runners) and involved running on tracks and trails, through waist deep water running up the 'Hills of Hell' and through the 'Bogs of Doom'! Luckily, the team displayed tremendous athleticism and light-hearted spirits to get them around the course. The mud was so thick in places that some runners lost trainers and everyone finished plastered in dirt!

With the generous support from staff at the Zoo, the team has raised approximately £750 for the YOTF Campaign.

Gordon McGregor Reid, Director General and Chair of Amphibian Ark, said "this is a great team effort on behalf of amphibians and I'd warmly like to thank the Chester Zoo Hellrunners and everyone who sponsored them."

Team members included Director of Corporate Services Alasdair McNee, Head of Finance Alan Sykes, Kim Halliday, Andrew Wolfenden, Mark Roberts and Claudine Gibson, Karen King-Sharp, Nadine Wohl, Karen Entwistle and Marie Whatmough.

