News Briefs

Compiled by the Editor

1. Rescue centre for elephants near Tiruchi (India)

The Hindu
July 1, 2009

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI - Ailing and old elephants in the wild and those in temples will get a place to rest with nutritious diet on hand if a proposal to set up a rehabilitation centre for jumbos at a zoological park near here gets the green signal. A proposal in this regard has been sent to Tamil Nadu government to segregate an area of about 50 acres within a 300 acre zoological park coming up in the reserved forests of M R Palayam near Tiruchirappalli Chennai National Highways.

The centre would maintain natural ambience with flora and fauna and adequate water resources for bathing elephants would be created by digging a large pond within the designated area. The centre could house about ten animals at any given time and the jumbos could be imparted intensive health care along with nutritious diet. Facilities would be created to impart appropriate training to mahouts on health care nuances of the animal, the officials said.

A jungle stream, sugarcane cultivation and planting coconut saplings within the area would also supplement the healthy ambience for the Jumbos. There were about 4,000 wild elephants in forest ranges like Mudumalai and Anaimalai.

Although rejuvenating camps are held every year in Mudumalai sanctuary, domestic elephants require regular care and maintenance which individual owners would not be able to provide. The proposed park, to be jointly developed by the state forest department and Central Zoo Authority, will house about 500 animals of 35 species that include spotted deer, hyena, Indian gaur, jackal, panther, lion, jaguar, peacock, aquatic birds, swamp birds, marine birds, monkey, fox, sloth bear and reptiles.

2. Indonesia's elephanticide: 15 endangered elephants killed by poachers with cyanide-laced fruit (Indonesia)

The Associated Press
June 24, 2009

Five wild elephants lie on the jungle floor after they were found poisoned to death in 2006. Elephant poaching has increased dramatically in 2009, an Indonesian official said Wednesday.

At least 15 endangered Sumatran elephants have been shot or poisoned to death with cyanide-laced fruit this year, marking a sharp rise in the rate of killing from 2008, a government conservationist said Wednesday. The giant mammals were mostly killed by poachers for their ivory. The number killed in the past six months is equal to the total for the whole of 2008, he said.

Indonesia's endangered elephants, tigers, rhinos and orangutans are increasingly threatened by their shrinking habitat in the jungle, which is commonly cleared for commercial farming or felled for lumber. Only 3,000 Sumatran elephants are believed to remain in the wild. They sometimes venture into inhabited areas searching for food and destroy crops or attack humans, making them unpopular with locals.

3. Forest Department drives elephants away from poisoned water (India)

Indian Express
June 29, 2009

Officials of the forest department on Saturday prevented seven elephants from drinking the contaminated water of the Kho river in Kotdwar. The contamination had killed thousands of fish.

Chief Wildlife Warden SK Chandola told The Indian Express, "When we came to know of thousands of fish having died in the Kho river.

We rushed to the area as it is a corridor for the movement of elephants." He said the officials reached just in time to find seven elephants ready to get into the river. "We resorted to continuous firing and had to explode strong crackers to scare them away into the jungle," said Chandola. He added the exercise continued for three hours.

Chandola said the forest department found an empty bottle of an insecticide that may have been emptied into the river. "It was after three hours that we saw fresh fish moving in the river. We later allowed the elephants to drink water from the river,"

4. Rs 78 crore plan for jumbo home (India)

The Telegraph
August 5, 2009

RANCHI - The state forest department is chalking out an action plan for managing the habitat of elephants in the state to prevent them from straying, thus checking man-animal conflicts. Rs 78 crore will be required for the programme, a part of the Project Elephant Scheme started by the Union government.

Under the programme, the department will take a number of measures to restrict the jumbos in their habitat. These include water harvesting, stocking of bamboos, solar electric fencing, solar power fencing, digging of trenches and radio-collaring system to detect movement of elephants in Dalma, Koderma, Sareikela, Khunti and Ranchi.

Besides, anti-depredation teams will be deployed in the village areas. The teams, comprising five to 10 members, will keep a tab on straying elephants. Armed with dragon torches and crackers, they will chase away pachyderms.

Talking to The Telegraph, chief life warden of the state forest department S. K. Sharma said: "Elephants stray as there are not enough provision for food and water in the forests. Hence we have decided to undertake water harvesting and plantations to improve the living conditions. If the habitat are improved, the population of elephants will also increase."

5. Nepal probes elephant 'attacks'

BBC News
July 24, 2009

Nepalese officials are visiting an area in the far east of the country to investigate attacks by elephants migrating from neighbouring India. More than 200 elephants are believed to have entered the region and have been blamed for destroying crops and killing villagers in border villages. With the onset of the annual monsoon, herds of wild elephants have crossed into Nepal from the forests of India. They are following traditional migratory routes. These routes lead them to rich paddy fields and fruit trees that lie over the border.

After Nepalis began shooting at the animals, the situation threatened to turn into an international incident. Last week the chief minister of the Indian state of West Bengal - which shares a border with Nepal - described the shooting as a crime. The Nepalese government say they will now pay compensation to villagers who have lost family members or been injured in attacks.



Elephants in southern Sri Lanka
Photo by Prithiviraj Fernando

6. Underage elephant's pregnancy baf es vets at TATR (India)

Times of India
August 1, 2009

CHANDRAPUR - The case of a minor elephant giving birth to a stillborn calf couple of weeks ago at Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) has shocked the forest authorities as well as the veterinary doctors. It is a unique case and probably the rst in history of the species, when an elephant conceived at an age when she is still a calf. The senior vets who examined the stillborn calf and its minor mother have decided to report this unique case to wildlife magazine with the consent of forest department.

According to the TATR record Laxmi was born in 2001 and had not attended the maturity for mating. Last year she was brought from Sironcha forest range in Gadchiroli district to the TATR. "According to forest authorities Laxmi was mere 8 years. Generally it is between 9 and 13 years that a female elephant comes into estrus phase. After entering this stage the elephant becomes ready to conceive (and is called a cow elephant).

7. Elephant found dead, suspected poisoned (Indonesia)

The Jakarta Post
August 11, 2009

A male elephant has been found dead at the Way Kambas National Park in Lampung with both its trunks missing, kompas.com reported Tuesday. The park's director, John Kenedie, said Tuesday the two-year-old elephant may have been poisoned. Park of cials found him dead at his cage at about 2 a.m. on last Friday. The trunks weigh close to 70 kilograms and are valued at tens of millions of rupiah.

"The thieves might have fed him with food that was laced with rodenticide," John said; adding that the thieves were probably familiar with the park. Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) activist M. Gio said trunk hunters are now targeting elephants bred in national parks due to the dwindling population of wild elephants. The Way Kambas park covers 125,000 hectares of land and is home to 250 elephants.

8. Indonesian elephant fossil opens window to past (Indonesia)

The Associated Press
June 23, 2009

BANDUNG (AP) – Indonesian scientists are reconstructing the largest, most complete skeleton of a prehistoric giant elephant ever found in the tropics, a nding that may offer new clues into the largely mysterious origins of its modern Asian cousin.

The prehistoric elephant is believed to have been submerged in quicksand shortly after dying on a riverbed in Java around 200,000 years ago. Its bones — almost perfectly preserved — were discovered by chance in March when an old sand quarry collapsed during monsoon rains.

The animal stood four meters (13-feet) tall, ve meters (16-feet) long and weighed more than 10 tons — closer in size to the woolly mammoth of the same period than to the great Asian mammals now on Earth. Animal fossils are rare in the humid, hot climate of the equator because decomposition occurs extremely quickly.

"We believe from the shape of its teeth that it was a very primitive elephant," but little else has been veri ed, said paleontologist Fachroel Aziz, who



Tea elephant in Assam, India
Photo by WWF India

is heading a 12-strong skeletal reconstruction team. Scientists agree it is the first time an entire prehistoric elephant skeleton has been unearthed since vertebrate fossil findings began to be recorded in Indonesia in 1863.

9. Tusker kills cow elephant in Rajaji Park (India)

Press Trust of India
September 17, 2009

HARIDWAR (PTI) - A cow elephant was gored to death by a tusker in Dhaulkhand range of Rajaji Park in Uttarakhand, officials said today. The incident took place yesterday after the two elephants fought over mating and the pachyderm pierced its tusks into the stomach of cow elephant resulting in latter's death. The postmortem report confirmed its death as a result of a violent struggle, they said.

10. State bid to end ban on wild jumbo-trapping (India)

Times of India
August 20, 2009

GUWAHATI - Assam has asked the Centre to lift a 1982 ban on mela 'shikar', a traditional way of trapping wild jumbos with the help of domesticated elephants. "We want the Centre to withdraw the ban so that we can acquire wild elephants and domesticate them for government duties," said state forest minister Rockybul Hussain on Thursday. The jumbos are needed for carrying guards and tourists in wildlife sanctuaries, transporting EVMs and polling officials to remote areas.

The mela shikar' method involves noosing a wild elephant from the back of a trained tusker. The capture of wild pachyderms was banned in India in 1982 after they were brought under the Schedule I species of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Prior to this, the Indian elephant was included in Schedule-II (Part I) of the Act under which they were granted the status of "Special Game" and could be killed or captured under licence as well as traded commercially.

According to the 2008 census, there are 5,281 wild elephants in the state. In 2002, the census counted the population at 5,246. On the other hand, there are about 1,290 domesticated and trained elephants owned by individuals across the state. But, after the Supreme Court ban on timber felling in 1994, the jumbos employed for the purpose were rendered jobless.

11. Police arrest ivory smugglers (Vietnam)

Saigon Giai Phong
August 21, 2009

Thanh Hoa Police detained two men who are suspected to smuggling 17 elephant tusks Thursday morning. The police stopped a car carrying 17 elephant tusks, weighing 94 kilos in total. The car was driving on Ho Chi Minh Road, the section running through Luan Thanh Commune, Truong Xuan District.

The car was driven by Cao Xuan Vinh, 20, resident of Dien Lam Commune, Dien Chau District, Nghe An Province. Police originally stopped the driver for a traffic violation. While checking the driver's papers, the police came upon an elephant tusk lying next to his seat.

Commander Le Minh Tam, head of the police unit, decided to search the entire car. The team then found a further 11 tusks under the hood and five others on the floor of the car.

Also in the car was Le Van Chien, 37, owner of the car, living at the same address as Xuan. Chien said that he was transporting the tusks from Nghe An to Hanoi.

12. 105 pachyderms killed in seven months (Sri Lanka)

Sunday Island
September 13, 2009

Under the government funded 300 million rupee 'Gaja Mithuro' elephant conservation program in 2009, plans had been drawn for setting up solar powered electric fences, elephant control units and elephant drives as solutions to reduce the

elephant– human con ict. Action had been taken to curtail the elephant-human con icts which had caused the loss of many lives.

The electric fences have a voltage of 8000 volts and an elephant would get thrown when the animal comes into contact with it, but it won't die. Eleven elephant control units have been set up in Kotavehera, Kekirawa, Kebetogollawe, Karuwalagaswewa, kanthalai, Pimburuwawewa, Wilgamuwa, Wellawaya and Baduluwewa and each unit has an driver with a vehicle and eight persons functioning under the direction of the respective District Secretary and Divisional Secretariat.

13. Elephant poaching racket busted (India)

Times of India
September 15, 2009

MADIKERI - Forest of cials have busted an elephant poaching racket and arrested four persons from Kodagu at Hunsur recently, trying to sell ivory worth Rs 75,000. The gang is involved in poaching and selling ivory and wildlife skins in Kodagu, Bandipur and Chamrajnagar. Ivory and other materials worth rupees Rs 3.5 crore have been seized.

Forest SP Krishnamurthy disguised himself as a buyer and went to Hunsur to track the criminals. As the gang sat for a deal, the sleuths rounded them up and arrested Raju, a gram panchayat member from Nagarahole Tribal colony, Appanna from Kumbarakatte Tribal colony, Ravikumar from Bommadu Tribal colony and national forest sanctuary watcher Shankara. Shankara owns four tempovehicles and a motor bike. The arrested were handed over to Hunsur police on Sep. 11.

14. Rogue elephant captured (Malaysia)

New Straits Times
October 9, 2009

JERITH - A rogue elephant that has been causing havoc in Pelagat for almost a week was nally captured by wildlife authorities on Wednesday. The 12-year-old wild elephant walked into a trap set up three days ago by the State Wildlife department with the help of locals. For almost seven days before that, the elephant had caused havoc in three villages — Pelagat, Paroh and Padang Tapung — by destroying their crops. The rampage took place especially at nights, causing widespread fear among villagers for their safety.

The operation involved 21 members from Terengganu and Pahang wildlife departments, said Besut Perhilitan chief Edley A Jailium. The Pelagat area is notorious for rampages by wild elephant, Many of them come from the Terengganu-Kelantan border.Villagers are constantly living in fear, and there have been reports of elephant herds, some as many as 10-12, roaming the plains where their crops are cultivated. However, there have been no attacks on the villagers so far.

15. Cambodia villagers save elephants

BBC News
October 13, 2009

Elephants are losing their natural habitats, becoming a tourist attraction. Conservationists in Cambodia have brokered an agreement which should see elephants living more peacefully alongside their human neighbours. Villagers living near elephant habitats have promised not to harm the animals - or disturb their environment. In return the local farmers are receiving help to keep the elephants away from their crops.

Human-elephant con icts can develop wherever the animals live close to people. As villagers develop and expand their land, elephants lose their habitat. At the same time, they become more likely to wander into elds - destroying crops and occasionally attacking humans and livestock.
Wild alternatives

This situation has put wild elephant populations in danger in a number of countries.
Conservationists are keen to prevent the same thing happening in Cambodia.
Elephant numbers are nally on the rise here - after decades of war and deforestation.

The organisation Fauna and Flora International is helping to keep the peace between people and pachyderms. It is giving villagers funding to develop small businesses like chicken-farming - as an alternative to clearing the forests the elephants call home.

They are also giving advice on how to keep the elephants away from crops. “Growing different types of crops is one line of defence, such as chilli fences around the boundaries of their fields. Elephants don’t like chillies, so they will naturally turn the other way. If that doesn’t work, or if chillies aren’t available, then we can deploy solar-powered electric fences.

16. Fossils of ancient elephants found in Yunnan (China)

Global Times
November 5, 2009

Fossils of ancient elephants were found in Shuitangba community, in Taiping Village, Zhaoyang District, in Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province recently when local farmers were digging for coal. Archeologists say this is the largest site of fossils of ancient elephants in South China.

In the Zhaotong Basin of Yunnan where the fossil was found, over 10 new types of fossils of ancient elephants have been unearthed since the 1950s. Archeologists estimate that the fossil discovered in Shuitangba community lived 3 million to 7 million years ago. The restored fossils can form three skeletons of the ancient elephants, one of which has a tusk 2.6 meters long and weighed 150 kilograms.

According to Jiang Nina, an archaeologist from the University of Pennsylvania who participated in the excavation, the Zhaotong Basin was a swamp filled with water birds, lizards, tortoises and elephants millions of years ago, where old animals died and new ones came into being.

Moreover, Asia’s earliest primate tooth was also discovered at the site. Fossils of ancient apes living 3 million to 7 million years ago will be a significant contribution into the research on the origin of humans.

17. Elephants in Vietnam: Just 80 left

VC International News, quoting VietNews
December 3, 2009

At the rate it’s going, Vietnam will kill off all their wild elephants within two years. In 1975, Vietnam’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development estimated that the nation’s elephant population numbered about 2,000 individuals. Today, there are only 80 left.

Illegal poaching and loss of habitat through deforestation are the primary killers. Though trade in ivory was outlawed in 1992, a loophole in the ban -- that sellers can continue to sell ivory obtained before the band, makes enforcement nearly impossible. Traders can simply claim that new ivory is really old ivory. There is little that officials can do. Tusks can fetch up to $1,500 in the black market. Every year, around 4,000 tons of illegal wildlife products pass through Vietnam, according to a report by TRAFFIC, an international wildlife trade monitoring group.

Elephants have the largest brains of any land animal and exhibit a remarkable array of advanced behaviors associated with rituals, grief, music, art, altruism, play, use of tools, compassion and self-awareness.



Photo by Prithiviraj Fernando