

Project Update: July 2014

As usual, incidences of crop raiding were recorded in all the study villages. The belated male [m1000] that has been identified as a crop raider during this study was observed while the male was coming to the Dahaiyagala corridor from Dahaiyagala village in the morning (6.00 am) on 16th of July 2014 (Plate 1) when we were removing our night vision cameras at one of the entrances to the corridor.



Plate 1: [m1000] was entering the Dahaiyagala corridor spending the previous night at the village

Though the villagers guard their crops during the day and night (plate 2) hardly to protect their crops from elephants and other wild animals, another adult male elephant that was raiding some bananas in a home garden was observed at Pokunuthanna village during our night observations. The elephant ran away seeing us and we could not identify it.



Plate 2: villagers guard their crops from wildlife during the day and night

I was invited by the chief incumbent of the Dahaiyagala temple and the committee members of the temple to participate in the full moon Bana preaching and goods auction which was held to raise funds to develop infrastructure facilities of the temple on the 12th July 2014. There was a

big gathering –about 200 villagers – for the event though it was held in the late evening at an elephant dominating area. I participated in both the activities (Plate 3) and the villagers were very friendly with me. In fact, they were kind enough to offer me (and my assistant) some tea. I actively participated in the auction buying some elephant unpalatable crops and opening a window to make them think to grow such crops. The major concern of almost all the villagers was how to reach their homes after the function in the mid night as elephants roam everywhere in the village.



Plate 3: Villagers participating Bana preaching and goods auction at the Dahaiyagala temple

A seasonal male elephant and a group of female elephants ([105]'s group) that I have been studying inside the Udawalawe national park was also observed in the Dahaiyagala corridor. The male - [m317] – was seen inside the park in 2010 and 2011 and there were some bullet marks in the body. In fact, the male was in musth in 2010 when he was observed in the park (plate 4 a, b).



Plate 4 a: male [m317] (first two pictures) and [105]'s group (last two pictures) inside the Udawalawe national park





Plate 4 b: Male [m317] (first two pictures) and [105]'s group (last two pictures) inside the Dahaiyagala corridor

Due to continuous breaking of the electric fence along the corridor and the national park, few villagers who can afford initial expenses such as electrical circuits, 12V batteries and wires are constructing solar powered personal electric fences around their own lands to protect their houses and crops from the raiding elephants (plate 5).



Plate 5 : Solar powered personal electric fences around farm lands

Sometimes, villagers find it difficult to travel along the main road which lie across the Dahaiyagala corridor especially in the evenings due to presence of elephants. I came across a terrified villager who was cycling along the corridor and stuck in the middle of two group of elephants helplessly. In another occasion, two boys had a narrow escape from two male elephants and saved their lives by creeping into a roadside culvert in the middle of the corridor (plate 6). It is essential to provide them some infrastructure facilities such as safety palces to rush if an elephant charges or transport facilities to ensure pedestrians' safety inside the elephant corridor as soon as possible. otherwise they may think that the elepaht corridor is also a threat to the villagers lives and might protest to close the corridor which will seriously affect the natural movements of wildlife, especially elephnats.



Plate 6: villagers who came across elephants while they pass the Dahaiyagala corridor

We took some young villagers into the corridor and spent some time with them observing a group of elephants that was near the main road. I used the opportunity to educate them on basic ecology of the elephants and the importance of the corridors for the survival of wildlife (plate 7).



Plate 7: Educating some young villagers while observing a group of elephant in the Dahaiyagala corridor.