

Project Update: May 2014

The number of crop raiders in the Dahaiyagala village was escalating during May 2014. We observed eight elephants on the 27th and six elephants on the 28th entering the village. There were four elephants inside the Dahaiyagala elephant corridor and were approaching towards the village in the evening (plate 1) and entered the village in the same night (watch attached videos).



We could see that elephants had been all over the village and destroyed young paddy, mango and coconut trees and most of home gardens in the area (plate 2) the following day.



Plate 2: A Mango tree and some coconut trees in a paddy land and uprooted by elephants.

Villagers were fed up of this noisome elephant problem and very hostile even to us. However, we have been trying hard to build a good rapport with the villagers talking to them nicely, explaining the value of our study. We have managed to build a good connection with most of the villagers and they have been involved in our study. We managed to give a lecture about individual identification of elephants and its importance for conservation. We demonstrated and gave hands on practice about night vision camera traps to some of young village boys

(plate 3). They were thrilled by seeing the alien gadget. We also could train a farmer to set night vision camera traps (plate 4) in his own farm land.



Plate 3: Demonstration on individual identification of elephants and night vision cameras



Plate 4: Training a farmer to set night vision camera traps at his paddy land.

It was simply very difficult to talk about conservation with villagers at the beginning. They ignored us and did not want to concentrate on things like conservation but on crop protection from the elephants. So we had to find different ways to approach the villagers and to convince them about the elephant conservation. Therefore, we have been addressing the villagers individually and have been teaching them some conservation aspects of the human elephant conflict and importance of scientific data collection. Thus, we were able to train more than fifteen villagers to collect data on crop raiding incidences in their own lands. This is a great achievement in the conservation arena as we could educate many people with the monetary support of the Rufford small grant and persuade them to believe in importance of scientific studies and conservation. We have provided them with necessary stationeries for data collection (plate 5).



Plate 5: Talking to villagers about human wildlife conflict, conservation and distributing data collection books.