

Project Update: November 2018

Death Track

Asian elephant, 'National Heritage Animal' of India, is listed as Endangered in IUCN RDB. Mayurjharna Elephant Reserve, only elephant reserve in West Bengal for the east-central population of Asian elephant, includes interstate elephant migration corridors which link Singbhum Elephant Reserve, Jharkhand and Mayurjharna Elephant Reserve, 414.06 km²) and its 'zone of influence' (1436 km²). In last 6 years, elephant populations here increased by more than 69% (from 118+ in 2012 to 198+ in 2018) and these elephants are subdivided into 135+ migratory, 38+ residential and 25+ Mayurjharna elephants with several subgroups which contribute <20% of the state elephant population, but claims more than 50-55% damages.



Left: Discussion on crop-raiding elephants with the affected farmers. ©AECF. Right: Physical verification by Samya Basu to understand the crop raiding nature discussion on crop-raiding elephants with the affected farmers. ©AECF.

The migratory herds are now extending their home range in the human-dominated landscape which is highly fragmented and a mosaic of forest patches, paddy or other cash crops, fields and villages. The entire migration range and corridor forests are highly fragmented by railways, motorways, villages and crop fields.



Left: Damaged boundary wall by migratory elephant herd in West Bengal, India. ©Samya Basu, AECF. Right: Estimating height of a residential tusker elephant during tracking. ©Samya Basu, AECF.





Top: Shoes for anti-depredation squad was sent to Medinipur Forest Division for distribution. ©Samya Basu, AECF. Left: Awareness programme on elephant conservation organised by BITM, National Council of Science Museum, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. ©Samya Basu, AECF. Right: Awareness programme on elephant conservation organised Asian Elephant Conservation Foundation at BITM, National Council of Science Museum, Ministry of Culture, Govt.

There are several committees and commitments from government agencies to coordinate with each other to secure a passage for migratory elephant herds. But, due to lack of continuous monitoring, there are always some communication gaps which sometimes lead to a fatal accident.

On 7th August 2018, Howrah-Mumbai Jnaneswari Super Deluxe Express hit elephants at 1.30 am while they were crossing the Kanimohali passenger halt in the Kharagpur division of South Eastern Railway (SER). The train was passing through Jhargram forest range at the time of the mishap. The Chief Public Relations Officer, SER, Mr. Sanjay Ghosh said that they had no intimation from the forest department about movement of an elephant herd from Jharkhand to Bengal. There had been no such alert in the section for the last 2 months. Hence, the train was moving at its normal speed of 110 kph. Though the elephants were roaming there for more than 10 days, there was not monitoring from the forest department. Apart from that, the railways also run the train at the speed 110 kph while there is a specific government order to run the train at a speed of 25 kph (West Bengal Govt. Order No. 02/WL/2016; Dt.21st September 2016).

The running train mowed down three elephants and injured another full grown tusker elephant in this incident. The dead bodies were recovered in next morning and after post-mortem, those were burned completely in a pit near local forest office.