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MINUTES OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE STEERING
COMMITTEE OF PROJECT ELEPHANT HELD AT 1100 HOURS
ON 11TH DECEMBER 1996 IN CONFERENCE ROOM NO.403,
PARYAVARAN BHAWAN, NEW DELHI.

The list of Members and Special Invitees who attended the meeting is annexed.

The meeting was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister for Environment and Forests, Capt. Jai Narain Parsad Nishad. Prior to the inauguration, Shri S.C. Dey, Additional Inspector General of Forests(WL) gave a brief resume of the global scenario of the status of elephant. He mentioned that there was sharp decline in the total population of the African Elephants from the earlier figure of about 1200,000 in seventies to about 450,000 in 1996, whereas the Indian elephant population had registered an increase from about 18,000 in mid-eighties to a figure of about 25,000 in 1993. The index of the success of conservation of elephants is the survival of a viable elephant population and to the extent Project Elephant represent a success story on conservation. Along with the rise in elephant population certain problems have also cropped up due to the fragmentation of the forest habitat over the years specially outside Protected Area network and absence of optimum number of corridors, and demand of development projects causing serious man animal conflict in some areas. He then referred to the loss of 150-200 human lives in a year over past few years of which 80% could be attributed to the two States of West Bengal and Assam. Yet, he stated, the people had refrained from demanding elimination of the elephants from these forests. Despite our inability in controlling the increase in human population, which is causing pressure on Elephant habitat, he felt, that the elephant population in India still has a future due to ethics, culture and constitutional provisions. Thus one has to consider the future strategies to be pursued for conservation of elephant with the changing situation.

Welcoming the members of the Steering Committee to the fifth meeting, the Hon'ble Minister took the opportunity to congratulate Dr. R. Sukumar on his being elected as the Chairman of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the Species Survival

Commission of the IUCN which had enhanced India's image in the international sphere on wildlife conservation. Announcing his happiness for being in the midst of eminent experts in the field of elephant conservation, he emphasised the crucial importance of the Project Elephant in Wildlife Conservation. He indicated that the Annual Meeting of the Steering Committee should be held in February in future to commemorate the launching of the Project Elephant. He invited the members to give their valuable comments and in particular the size of viable elephant population which should be sustained, and assured that the Government will take all possible steps for the implementation of the various action point which is recommended by this Committee. He suggested that the next meeting of the Steering Committee could be held sometime in February, 1998 to be preceded by the celebration of 'Elephant Day'.

After the inaugural address, Shri S.C. Dey, Addl. I.G.F.(WL) drew the attention of the members towards the criticism of the Project and the authenticity of the census figures at very high quarter in India, and invited the comments of the members on the census figures of elephants for 1993, and the current approach adopted by the Government in conservation of Asian Elephant in India.

Mr. Daniel indicated that since he was not a coordinator for the 1993 census exercise, he was not in a position to comment upon the census figures. He drew the attention of the members to the fact that even in case of human beings it was not possible to arrive at exact figure. Therefore, he felt that it was not necessary to debate on the exact number of elephants. What was important was that how many animals could be protected on sustained basis.

Shri V. Krishnamurthy stated that in South-India the census was conducted in a systematic way and the census figures are reliable.

Shri Mike H. Pandey stressed the importance of viability of population, and suggested that the figures for demesticated animals should also be collected.

Prof. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury stated that the quality of 1993 exercise for census could be stated as unequal in different parts of the country and the overall figures are reasonably accurate and can be depended upon. He also stated that the approach undertaken by Project Elephant over the past five years is not wrong. He referred to the burning problems of loss of habitat, particularly in North-eastern and Eastern India where encroachment of forest areas has assumed serious proportions. He indicated that in Assam massive encroachment has taken place. Although in State Govt's land records, accurate data was not available, he felt at least 337 Sq. miles had been encroached upon during the past three years in Assam. The terai region also had similar problems. Next to encroachment is the problem of jhum cultivation. The third problem faced by Elephant conservation relates to lack of political will because of private ownership. Registration of domesticated elephants has not been carried out systematically. He suggested that it would be necessary to highlight the importance of registration and maintenance of proper records by the State Chief Wildlife Wardens. Apart from tackling the current problems, he stated, it will be useful to draw up a long term Action Plan by identification of Elephant Reserves, fixing targets for intensive management, defining elephant reserves, and allocation of functional thrusts in the elephant habitats under general management of State Forest Department and special management under Project Elephant. He observed that though the Steering Committee had laid down certain guidelines for elephant capture in the past, it might now be necessary to consider and adopt some amount of control over this activity.

Dr. R. Sukumar thanked the Minister for Environment and Forests for his encouragement and kind words and stated that in India there is a large number of experts and elephant specialists, besides himself. On the subject of 1993 census, he stated that the figures arrived at are more or less accurate. Even on a conservative estimate, he stated that there are about 10,000 elephants in South India and 25,000 in the entire country. He further stated that if one

were to analyse the 1993 census figures, it could be observed that male to female ratio which was earlier 1 : 4 is now 1 : 15 in some areas, and in some other cases specially in South-India it was as low as 1 : 50. Some other serious problems for elephant conservation mentioned by him included factors like fragmentation of habitat, construction of railway lines, highways, dams etc. in the consevation areas, alignment of electric transmission lines through elephant habitats, and escalation of elephant-human conflict. He also then referred to the International illegal ivory trade as additional serious threat to elephant conservation in India.

Shri P.C. Bhanj Deo, expressed his views to indicate that what was important in the present context is the political commitment to implement the policies and programmes. He stated that it would be necessary to understand the human problems, and possibilities of co-existence between man and wildlife would have to be conceived and overall policy on conservation should be taken up seriously by the State Governments for execution by them.

Agreeing with Dr. Sukumar, Shri Bhaskar, Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka stated that the census figures could be considered as accurate. He also explained some of the problems such as loss of habitat, crop damage etc. being faced in his State in implementing effective elephant conservation. He stated that the elephant proof trench needed consolidation & 12 elephants were caught last year to reduce threat to human life and properties.

Shri R. Agarwalla, Field Director, Manas Tiger Reserve, representing Chief Wild Life Warden, Assam referred to similar problems of loss of habitat, man animal conflict etc., in his State.

Shri Arin Ghosh, Chief Wild Life Warden, West Bengal referred to the consequences arising out of the memorandum of understanding between Bhutan and India on the Sankosh Hydro-electric Project in Bhutan, and the threats likely to be posed to Buxa Tiger Reserve and Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary due to the alignment of

canals and powerlines through them. He requested Government of India to take appropriate steps in this regard. The Addl.I.G.F.(WL) informed that he was already aware of the problem and would take up the matter with Ministry of External Affairs. He requested Shri Arin Ghosh to furnish the copies of relevant correspondence and also the views of the West Bengal State Government immediately.

Shri Shekhar K. Niraj, representing Chief Wild Life Warden, Tamilnadu, confirmed the accuracy of 1993 census. He then expressed his concern over lack of political will in his State and also the need for greater interstate coordination.

Shri Gour Kanjilal, Deputy Director General from Department of Tourism, Government of India informed that Tourism Department needs elephants for use in tourism. He also expressed their concern and support for elephant conservation and the need to keep them abreast with information on elephant conservation in order to combat the ill founded adverse criticism of Indian wildlife, particularly from the western countries. He also indicated that the information on corridors was needed by them to avoid obstruction of corridors by tourism industry.

Shri Mukherjee, Acting Director, W.I.I. referred to the stock piling of ivory in Africa which could lead to opening of trade in ivory and create a serious impact in India. He mentioned that clandestine stock piling of ivory is going on even in India and the future consequence would depend on the outcome of the June, 1997 CITES meeting at Harare.

Shri S.C. Dey, Addl. I.G.F.(WL) informed that while Namibia, Botswana; and Burundi are likely to submit proposals for downlisting of African elephant in the Appendix of CITES, India's stand was very clear on the issue and was against the re-opening of international trade in ivory. Asian Elephant Range states & specialist group will also have to take a view on this.

Shri V.K. Sinha, representing CWLW Kerala stated that government lawyers fees are too inadequate in comparison to others and as such no interest is being shown by them in pursuing

litigation cases under the Wildlife Protection Act.

Concluding the discussions on general issues, Shri S.C. Dey Addl.I.G.F.(WL) suggested that the details relating to identified corridors should be circulated by the Chief Wildlife Warden to all the Department concerns and a wide publicity given in advance so as to minimise public litigation cases. He also stated that the CWLWs will have to take a lead role in sensitizing the State Government on the issue of Elephant conservation to draw their cooperation and support. Thereafter agenda items were taken up for discussion.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1 : Confirmation of the minutes of the Fourth Meeting.

Shri Vinod Rishi, Director, Project Elephant invited the reaction of the members on the minutes of the Fourth meeting of the Steering Committee held on 28.07.1995. The minutes were confirmed by the Steering Committee.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2: Action taken on recommendations of the Fourth meeting.

2.1 Director, Project Elephant raised the point that the prescribed format for reporting deprecation was not generally being used by the States. Further the requisite information was not being received from all the States on a regular basis. While some States followed financial year as the period for reporting, others followed the calender year. Shri Dey stressed the need for timely submission of the information to the Ministry which was required for monitoring, record, as well as for reporting to various important authorities like the Parliamentary Committees and also for answering Parliament Questions. After some discussions, it was decided that while the figures on elephant census would be referred to on calender year basis, other matters like elephant mortality, human death, crop damage ex-gratia relief paid, performance of Project Elephant in the states, etc. would have to be reported on financial

year basis. In all cases it was important to maintain accurate data at the appropriate levels.

2.2 On the question of insurance cover, Shri Dey observed that virtually there was no progress made by States for launching a system of insurance cover for loss of life and property due to elephant activity. Shri V.K. Sinha representing CWLW, Kerala replied by saying that as far as the tribals were concerned an insurance scheme was being implemented in Kerala. In other cases, the State had approached the insurance companies like New India Insurance Co. and GIC who felt that the proposals were not viable. Intervening in the discussions Shri P.K. Sen, Director, Project Tiger clarified that crop insurance is intended to guard against the natural calamities. Wildlife damage has not been included in the list of natural calamities and as such as the crop insurance does not cover any damage to crops by elephants. The point was dropped from taking further action.

2.3 With reference to identification of elephant corridors Shri Dey, felt that the corridors should be clearly demarcated on the ground. CWLW, Karnataka mentioned about the importance and problems of corridors in the coffee plantations in Karnataka, and assured that he would take up the matter with the Coffee Board to explore the possibilities of arriving at an understanding that they cooperate in the matter of not doing something that obstructs elephant movements. Shri Dey, emphasised the need for proper planning of corridors and timely execution of proposals for land acquisition where absolutely essential in order to avoid lopsided restoration of corridor and cost escalation. Shri V.K. Sinha, representing CWLW, Kerala replied to say that since 1991-92 a total amount of Rs.1.33 crore was provided by the Ministry for land acquisition for restoration of corridors in Kerala, and the amount utilised was Rs.1.4 crore in acquiring 117 Hec. Shri Dey reiterated that in all such cases proper demarcation is necessary and habitat improvement work is also to be taken up simultaneously wherever required, because enrichment takes a long time. Shri Arin Ghosh CWLW, West Bengal, suggested that it would be advisable for the states to adopt their own procedures as conditions vary from state

to state. Shri Diwakar Kumar, Director, Rajaji National Park, representing Chief Wildlife Warden Uttar Pradesh, mentioned that the proposal on restoration of Chilla-Motichur corridor had been submitted to the State Government. Shri Dey urged that the matter be pursued vigorously.

2.4 In regard to alignment of Railway track through Satyamangalam forests, Dr. V. Krishnamurthy stated that a fresh location survey for the line through the Satyamanglam forest connecting Chamarajpet with Satyamanglam has been included in Railway budget of this year.

2.5 Regarding the pay scales of mahouts, Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala informed that in his State the scales are on a par with the drivers. After some discussions it was felt that the mahouts though are small number in the states, belong to the skilled category of workers and to encourage induction of sufficient numbers in their cadre, they should be brought at par with the drivers of the Government vehicles in the states. The matter should be prusued in the states at appropriate levels.

2.6 On the question of capture of elephants, Shri Dey suggested that proposals should be drawn up by the states on a rational basis on technical and scientific grounds. He cited that case of Assam where permission was given for capture of animals and a controversy had developed between the Animal Activist Groups and the Human Rights Activists Group. Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal indicated that the crop damage by elephants in the state is now on decline after the capture of 6 elephants in South Bengal.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3: Management Policy Review

3.1 On the subject of mortality of elephants in the forests, Shri Dey highlighted the need to reduce the time gap between death of the animal and its post-mortsem examination, Shri Krishnamurthy suggested that the State Governments should have its own forensic lab. Shri Dey then suggested that the natural death should be reported immediately even if the post-mortem examination takes some

time. Director, Project Elephant then reported upon his visit to South Indian forests of Bandipur, Nagarhole, Waynad and Mudumalai between 2-7 November, 1996, highlighted the problems encountered in reporting of death and ascertaining the causes of deaths. Sometimes the actual cause of death is lost due to postmortem invaders that contaminate the samples taken for veterinary examination. He informed that Waynad, Mudumalaia and Bandipur will be able to make use of veterinary- lab being sanctioned during the current year under Project Elephant at Waynad. It was also suggested that some kind of mobile postmortem system could be considered. Shri Dey then requested Dr. Krishnamurthy to prepare basic guidelines which could be circulated for observance in postmortem and examination of cases of death of Elephant.

3.2 Shri Dey then invited suggestions on the subject of elephant capture as population management option. Dr. Sukumar felt that the provisions under Section 12 of the Wild Life Protection Act continue to apply in order to tackle isolated cases. While viability is the basic important criterion for population management, the proposals for capture have to be tackled on case by case basis. This would call for an effective population monitoring system. Referring to the issue Prof. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury opined that conflict management is largely covered under Section 11(b) of the Act. Our efforts to reduce the number should be only by capturing the identified problem populations if need be. Capture should be taken up as a management tool only when adequate scientific data on population growth is available. Shri J.C. Daniel stated that capture will have to be considered as a management option in limited habitats. Shri Dey felt that there could be a market for about 500 elephants in India, but the problem will be that of post capture care and training. In this context he referred to the proposal for setting up a Mahout Training Institute for the Southern States and enquired whether any one of the three Southern States could consider providing the recurring costs to run the institution if capital cost is borne by Government of India. Chief Wildlife Warden Karnataka offered to take up the issue of providing recurring costs during the forthcoming meeting of the Forest Ministers of the Southern States being held on 20th January 1997 at Coimbatore and communicate the

update on the matter. |

3.3. On the subject of census proposed to be carried out in 1997, while there was a general consensus that the census figures of 1993 are reasonably correct, Shri Dey stated that in order to minimise any apprehensions in future, the census for the 1997 should ensure regional & local coordination and cooperation. The data census should be published widely and well in advance. recognised institutions, NGOs etc. addressed and involved in the census. Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka suggested that there should be a meeting of the 4 Southern States to plan and undertake the work. Prof. Lahiri Choudhury stated that for the States of North-Eastern and Eastern India a different methodology has to be decided and demonstrated. One of the Eastern or North-eastern States host the workshop. He was not in favour of the involvement of NGOs though he was not averse to participation by some recognised NGOs. It was decided that a workshop would be organised by Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa for census in Bihar Orissa very early. Similarly, Chief Wildlife Warden Assam should organise a workshop for Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh in the later part of January 1997 in which census methodology dates may be finalised.

3.4 On the subject of setting up of Project Elephant Directorate, Director Project Elephant stated that the II Plan operation period of the Project Elephant in terms of the EFC Memo would expire on 31.03.1997. Serious limitations have been encountered in the administration and management of the Project for the lack of a full time Director and the Central Project Elephant Cell. Addl.I.G.F.(WL) clarified that setting up of a separate Project Elephant Directorate was not being discussed at this stage and it was the setting up of a Central Monitoring Unit or Cell headed by a full time Project Director as was approved by EFC is the subject under discussion. This cell is yet to be established as the proposal has been under submission to the Ministry of Finance for more than one and half years. The Steering Committee expressed their grave concern and recommended that the Ministry should continue to make every possible effort to ensure that a Central Project Elephant Cell is established in the Ministry at the earliest.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4: Project Elephant Action Plan :

Director, Project Elephant, informed that the Action Plans for 15 States are now available in draft form and these, include plans for Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura prepared by Prof. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury. Prof. Lahiri Choudhury stressed the importance of these documents and suggested that the final job of editing proof reading, layout etc., should be entrusted to professionals and consultants. Dr. Sukumar suggested that the draft Action Plans be circulated to the Chief Wildlife Wardens of the concerned States and their response should be made available by them to Director Project Elephant within 15 days. Regarding the format, the document may be a compilation of State-wise, Regional and National Action Plans. It was also decided that the **National Action Plan would be a small and abridged one indicated as Part I of the Action, while others would be covered in the Part II of the document.** In both the cases, the work may be entrusted to professionals in the field for editing and publishing.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5: Miscelleneous

Shri Dey desired the Chief Wildlife Wardens to report their experiences regarding the efficiency of Elephant Proof Trench (EPT), Electric Fence (EF) and other barriers in mitigating man-elephant conflict. He also solicited feedback from the states on habitat improvement programmes, viable elephant populations, ideal carrying capacity and soil & water conservation measures, and emphasised importance of effective utilisation of funds under Project Elephant. He invited the reaction of the members on this issues.

Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka stated that elephant proof trench is fairly successful. In general it is not advisable to create the trench everywhere. It should be taken up only in sensitive areas. Shri V.K. Sinha representing Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala stated that EPT are effective normally for 2-3 years. Shri Dey then highlighted the importance of documentation of the facts

with necessary data indicating their efficiency and properly reflect them on maps for better perception. Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa, stated that the trenches were not effective in his State, electric fencing was found to be costly and pilferage of wire is also a problem. Shri Shekhar K. Niraj, representing Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamil Nadu stated that habitat improvement techniques needed innovations on scientific basis. The time being short the discussion on viable population and carrying capacity could not be done.

Shri Dey then invited Shri Ashok Kumar, Wildlife Preservation Society of India, a special invitee, to make the presentation on the present status of ivory poaching. Shri Ashok Kumar stated that poaching of tuskers was on the increase. In 1991 the international demand for ivory had fallen down. However, currently there is a renewed demand for ivory from the affluent Eastern and South-East Asian countries. In Japan, the ivory trade is legal. He also referred to the recent CITES meeting held in Rome and stated that considerable pressure was being built up internationally to remove the ban on the trade in African Ivory and if this materialises, it will have an adverse effect on Asian Elephant Conservation efforts. He strongly felt that such a move should be opposed by all concerned. Shri Dey further supplemented the information by indicating that in the meeting of CITES Standing Committee at Rome for African ivory, 6 alternatives were suggested as (1) destroy the ivory stock piles with out cost ; (2) destroy the stockpile on payment of cost ; (3) keep in indefinite secure storage ; (4) hand over the stock to museum ; (5) sell the ivory through legal well-managed domestic market; (6) down list the species to the CITES Appendix - II. He stated that out of 31 African Countries only 7 are thinking of bringing pressure for throwing open the ivory trade. Countries of Namibia, Burundi, Tanzania, South-africa, Botsowana, Sudan and Zimbabwe have with them a total stock of about 400 tonnes of ivory worth US \$ 50, million. There was a view expressed that if this could be sold, money could be recycled for conservation. Even then much will depend on the view of European Union on the subject. Japan which has funded all the meetings regarding review of stock pile of ivory, has indicated the

possibility of purchase of the entire stock. Incidentally, at present, Japan is the Chairman of the Standing Committee of CITES.

There being no further items for discussion, the meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE FIFTH MEETING
OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE ON PROJECT ELEPHANT AT 11 A.M.
ON 11th DECEMBER 1996 IN PARYAVARAN BHAVAN,
C.G.O. COMPLEX, NEW DELHI

Members :

- | | | |
|----|---|------------------|
| 1. | Capt. Jai Narain Prashad Nishad
Minister of Environment and Forests,
Government of India, | Chairman |
| 2. | Shri S.C. Dey
Addl. IGF.,
Ministry of Environment and Forests | Member |
| 3. | Dr. V. Krishnamurthy | Member |
| 4. | Shri P.C. Bhanj Deo, | Member |
| 5. | Dr. R. Sukumar | Member |
| 6. | Prof. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury | Member |
| 7. | Shri J.C. Daniel | Member |
| 8. | Shri Mike H. Pandey | Member |
| 9. | Shri Vinod Rishi
Director, Project Elephant,
Ministry of Environment and Forests, | Member Secretary |

Permanent Invitees :

1. Shri S.K. Mukherjee
Acting Director
Wildlife Institute of India,
Dehradun.
2. Shri J.R.B Alfred
Acting Director,
Zoological Survey of India,
Calcutta.
3. Shri K. Jagan Mohan Rao,
Chief Wildlife Warden,
Government of Andhra Pradesh,
Hyderabad.
4. Shri Rajendra Agarwall,
Field Director,
Manas Tiger Reserve,
Assam.
5. Shri B.R. Bhaskar,
Chief Wildlife Warden,

Government of Karnataka,
Bangalore.

6. Shri V.K. Sinha
Chief Wildlife Warden,
Government of Kerala,
Trivandrum
7. Shri D.S. Patnaik
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,
Government of Orissa.
Bhubaneswar
8. Shri Arin Ghosh,
Chief Wildlife Warden,
Government of West Bengal,
Calcutta.
9. Shri Shekhar K. Niraj
DCF (Wildlife Planning)
office Chief Conservator of Forests,
Government of Tamil Nadu,
Chennai.
10. Shri Sanjay Srivastava
D.F.O. Wildlife Division,
Government of Bihar,
Ranchi.

Special Invitees

1. Shri P.K. Sen
Director, Project Tiger,
Ministry of Environment and Forests,
New Delhi.
2. Shri Ashok Kumar
Vice President
Wildlife Protection Society of India,
New Delhi.
3. Shri Gour Kanjilal,
Deputy Director General,
Department of Tourism,
Government of India,
New Delhi.
4. Shri Diwakar Kumar,
Director,
Rajaji National Park,
Dehradun (U.P.)

- 5. Dr. A.J.T. John Singh,
Joint Director,
Wildlife Institute of India,
Dehra dun.

The meeting was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister for Environment and Forests, Capt. Jai Narain Chaudhary. Prior to the inauguration, Shri S.C. Ray, Additional Inspector General of Forests (W) gave a brief review of the global scenario of the status of elephant. He mentioned that there was sharp decline in the total population of the African Elephants from the earlier figure of about 1,200,000 in seventies to about 450,000 in 1975, whereas the Indian elephant population had registered an increase from about 18,000 in 1975 to a figure of about 24,000 in 1977. The index of the success of conservation of elephants is the survival of a viable breeding population and to the extent Project Elephant represent a success story in conservation. Along with the rise in elephant population, several problems have also cropped up due to the fragmentation of the forest habitat over the years especially outside protected area network and absence of optimum number of corridors, and demand of development projects leading serious man elephant conflict in some areas. He then referred to the loss of 150-200 human lives in a year over last few years of which 80% could be attributed to the two states of West Bengal and Assam. He stated that the people had refrained from demanding elimination of the elephants in villages and towns and instead have started to exercise control on elephant poachers and to bring the elephant population under control. He said that the elephant population in India still has a long way to go in order to bring it to a level where it can be considered as a species of the world and he hoped that the Government of India will take the necessary steps to bring it to that level.

Following the meeting of the Steering Committee in the afternoon, the Steering Committee met in a separate session to discuss the various issues raised during the meeting. The Steering Committee decided to hold a meeting in the month of January 1979 at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun to discuss the various issues raised during the meeting and to take necessary steps to bring the elephant population under control.

