

172

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE
OF PROJECT ELEPHANT**

The VIIth meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant was held on February 27, 2001 in Paryavaran Bhawan, New Delhi. The forenoon session, chaired by the Secretary (Environment & Forests), was devoted to a review of the action taken on the recommendations of the VIth meeting of the Steering Committee. The formal session in the afternoon was chaired by the Hon'ble Minister for Environment & Forests (MEF). A message was received from the office of the Director General of Tourism that no officer would be able to participate in the meeting in view of the Parliamentary session. The Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of Kerala informed that he could not get permission from the State Government due to the prevailing economy measures. The CWLW of Jharkhand could also not be present. The list of participants is given in the Annexure.

In his inaugural speech, MEF expressed concern over the recent cases of killing of elephants in Corbett National Park and asked for a review of all ongoing projects and schemes relating to protection of wildlife. He also urged the foresters and the scientists to take measures for rehabilitation of elephant habitat and mitigation of human- elephant conflict. He also advised the CWLWs to take action for implementation of the Coimbatore Charter adopted in the recent conference of the State forest ministers.

Agenda Item No.1 Confirmation of the minutes of the VIth meeting.

The minutes of the VIth meeting of the Steering Committee were confirmed.

Agenda Item No.2 Action taken on the recommendations of the 6th meeting.

6.2(1) Frequency of the meetings of the Steering Committee.

Secretary (E&F) desired that the meetings of the Steering Committee should be held at least once every year. Shri S.C. Dey suggested that in the regional meetings of the members of the Steering Committee, other interested members should also be invited. Dr. Lahiri Chowdhury suggested that the annual plans of operation (APOs) of the States should be discussed in the regional meetings.

Recommendation VII.2(1): It was the general consensus that the meeting of the Steering Committee should be held at least once every year and frequency of the regional meetings should also be increased.

6.2(2) Registration of captive elephants.

Discussion on this item is presented against Item No.6.

6.2(3) Notification of elephant reserves.

Discussion on this item is presented against Item No.4.

6.2(4) Acquisition of land for corridors.

Director (PE) informed that the earlier decision taken by the Steering Committee to restrict the acquisition of land for corridors was being followed. Shri S.C. Dey was of the opinion that the new categories of protected areas, viz. Conservation Reserve and Community Reserve being proposed under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, would be useful for protecting elephant corridors and it would be advisable to frame guidelines for setting up such reserves.

6.2(5) Action plan for elephant corridors.

Director (PE) informed that an action plan for the southern India had been prepared in a workshop jointly convened by the SACON and Project Elephant at Madumalai in December 2000. He also informed that some of the CWLWs had asked for technical support for survey and evaluation of corridors. Dr. Lahiri Chowdhury pointed out that the working group proposed in the 6th meeting could never meet in the absence of a convenor. He pointed out that many corridors have now ceased to exist. There was some difference of opinion between Dr. Lahiri Chowdhury and the CWLW (Assam) regarding the utility of some land acquired by the State Government for the purpose of a corridor. Director (PE) suggested that help of Research Institutes could be taken to assess the utility of designated corridors. Shri S.C. Dey pointed out that the corridors could be given a legal cover under the Environment Protection Act. Secretary (E&F) desired that a time bound programme should be undertaken for developing action plan for corridors.

Recommendation VII.2(2): It was decided that action plan for elephant corridors in all the regions should be prepared within 2001-02.

6.2(6): Training of mahouts.

Dr. Cheeran informed that handouts for training of mahouts were available in English and Malyalam and these could be translated into other languages. He also offered to help in the training of trainers. CWLW (Karnataka) offered to host the training of trainers in case Kerala was not in a position to organise the same. Addl. DGF(WL) stated that separate training courses could be held for the southern and the north-eastern regions which have different styles of elephant management. CWLW (Orissa) suggested that a separate training programme should be organised for Orissa.

Recommendation VII.2(3): It was decided to hold training of trainers and also to arrange for translation of training material in regional languages.

6.2(7): Guidelines for post-mortem of elephants.

Director (PE) and Dr. Cheeran informed about the progress made in the development of protocol for necropsy of elephants.

Recommendation VII.2(4): Dr. Cheeran was requested to send the final draft to Director(PE) by 15th May.

6.2(8): Census of wild elephants.

Director (PE) informed that census reports had been received from all the major elephant bearing States except Arunachal Pradesh where census operations were going on. He further stated that financial assistance under Project Elephant was also provided to Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram to conduct elephant census. He proposed that census should be done on a 2-year cycle in the elephant reserves and on a 5-year cycle in the States. Shri S.C. Dey suggested that a national census should be in 2001 to get a baseline data in the beginning of the millennium. He was of the opinion that census in the States could be done on a 4-year cycle to coincide with the census in the elephant reserves. Addl. DGF(WL) informed that the practice of tiger count every alternate year had been dropped and continued monitoring of tigers and their prey base was now being resorted to. He suggested that the same practice could be adopted in the elephant reserves while the States as a whole should have census every fifth year. CWLW (Karnataka) suggested that during the census operation detailed information regarding age-structure, home range, movement routes etc. should be collected. He explained the financial and logistic constraints involved in census exercise and suggested that census of elephants once every five year was adequate. Director WII mentioned that 'Direct Census' was most effective method that gave all the crucial information about elephant population.

Recommendation VII.2(5): It was decided to hold a nation wide elephant census on a 5-year cycle beginning from 2002. It was decided to hold simultaneous census in contiguous regions for which dates could be fixed in consultation with the concerned CWLWs. It was also decided to do monitoring of elephants in the elephant reserves on a regular basis.

6.2(9): Shortage of staff in the Project Elephant Cell.

Secretary (E&F) and Addl. DGF(WL) were of the view that this matter may be decided by the Ministry itself and this was generally agreed to.

6.2(10): Barriers for controlling elephant depredation.

Director (PE) informed that, except in Waynad district of Kerala, participation by local people in construction and maintenance of barriers was yet to be ensured in other areas. CWLW (Karnataka) informed that elephant proof trenches were more effective than power fencings in low rainfall areas in Karnataka. He suggested that instead of discarding trenches, their use should be permitted on a site-specific basis. According to CWLW (Orissa) trenches were effective but needed periodic maintenance. Addl.DGF(WL) suggested that in addition to trenches, inputs for power fencings should be given under eco-development programme to the communities for erecting and maintaining fences around their cultivated fields. CWLW (Andhra Pradesh) corroborated the suggestion by pointing out that in his State about 142 km long power fencings were operating with active support of the eco-development committees.

Recommendation VII.2(6): The general consensus was that elephant barriers should be supported as eco-development activities.

6.3: National Elephant Conservation Action Plan.

Director (PE) informed that the draft National Elephant Conservation Action Plan was far from complete and it made many policy statements on which no decision by the Steering Committee or the Ministry was available. He suggested that a separate document for national action plan for elephants be prepared on the lines of the draft wildlife action plan while the regional and State plans could be prepared when the requisite information for them was available. Dr. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury felt that radical changes had taken place in the elephant management scenario in the country necessitating recasting of the draft National Elephant Conservation Action Plan. Shri S.C. Dey suggested creation of some technical posts in the State Forest Departments to facilitate implementation of Project Elephant. Addl. DGF(WL) suggested for hiring of suitable personnel which could be funded by Government of India.

Recommendation VII.2(7): There was general consensus that the National Elephant Conservation Action Plan should be prepared and released separately while action for completing regional and State plans should continue.

6.4: Poaching and illegal trade.

Discussion on this item is presented against Item No.5.

6.7: Issue of ownership certificates for ivory.

Shri S.C. Dey wanted to know the reasons for the Ministry not issuing the guidelines regarding ownership of ivory items. Addl. DGF(WL) explained that the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 enjoined upon the CWLWs to exercise their discretion in recommending cases for ownership certificates to the Director of Wildlife Preservation and it was not proper for the latter to interfere in this discretion. He, however, informed that the CWLWs were informally intimated about the general principles to be observed in this regard. He also informed that some dealers had taken the matter before the Supreme Court. CWLW (Assam) asked as to how the ivory obtained from domesticated elephants should be dealt with. Addl. DGF(WL) explained that Section 49C applied only in respect of ivory possessed by the ex-dealers and the ivory obtained from domesticated elephants should be dealt under Sections 40, 41 and 42 of the Act.

Recommendation VII.2(8): There was general consensus that ivory lying in the custody of ex-dealers should be sealed and inventoried and action on issuing ownership certificates should be taken keeping orders of the courts in view.

6.8: Items proposed by Dr. J.V. Cheeran.

Discussion on this item is presented against Item No.6.

Agenda Item No.3: Evaluation of Project Elephant.

Recommendation VII.3: There was a general consensus on conducting the evaluation of implementation of Project Elephant in the States involving members of the Steering Committee and research institutes.

Agenda Item No.4: Notification of Elephant Reserves.

Director (PE) informed that proposal from Jharkhand for Singhbhum Elephant Reserve had been received and that from Meghalaya, Orissa and Tamilnadu were expected soon. Dr. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury explained the rationale of notifying elephant reserves. CWLW (Karnataka) pointed out that there were good elephant areas outside the Nilgiri- Eastern Ghat Elephant Reserve which could be considered for setting up a new elephant reserve.

Recommendation VII.4: It was the general consensus that each proposal for elephant reserve should be carefully examined and decided on merits. It was also decided that the States should complete the process of notification of elephant reserves within six months. The Steering Committee also agreed that at least 60% of the central assistance under Project Elephant for each State would be earmarked for elephant reserves in that State.

Agenda Item No.5: Protection of elephants.

Secretary (E&F) expressed his concern at the increasing threat to elephants, particularly in the light of recent cases of poaching in Corbett National Park. He advised the field officers that instead of wasting their time on accompanying each and every VIP visiting the Park, they should spend more time on supervising their field staff and gathering intelligence about poachers. He expressed the view that officers with right aptitude should be posted in the protected areas. Addl. DGF(WL) apprised the Steering Committee members about the discussions held in the meeting with senior officers of Uttranchal, U.P. and Andhra Pradesh and the CBI on 26.2.2001. He informed that the CBI had been empowered under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to take action against the offenders and the CWLWs should provide necessary information about wildlife offences to the CBI in the prescribed proforma. He cautioned the CWLWs that the media was ever ready to cash in on the death of each wild animal and they should not be found napping. Shri S.C. Dey said that there were discrepancies in the poaching cases reported by the States and there was a scope for improvement in record-keeping. He also emphasised the need for studying the correlation between poaching of elephants with downgrading of certain populations of the African elephants under CITES allowing limited trade. Addl. DGF(WL) clarified that India had succeeded in the last CITES meeting in getting a total ban on ivory trade for next two years. Dr. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury drew attention to his suggestion made during the 6th meeting of Steering Committee regarding use of metal detectors for the post-mortem of elephants.

MEF inquired about the possibility of translocating bull elephants to rectify the adverse sex ratios in the southern States. Dr. Lahiri Chowdhury and Dr. Daniel explained the difficulties faced in the earlier experiments of translocation of single elephants. They opined that translocation of entire group was preferable to that of single elephants but this was yet to be attempted in the country. They pointed out that while nature might set right the imbalance in sex-ratio in due course of time, States should take steps to prevent the situation from becoming worse. Dr. J.C. Daniel also stressed the need for long term studies for population management.

[No specific recommendations were made by the Steering Committee. The Ministry has issued necessary directives to the States separately.]

Agenda Item No.6: Domesticated elephants.

Director (PE) informed that only about 48% of the domesticated elephants were covered by ownership certificates. Dr. Cheeran complained that in Kerala there were many old applications for registration still pending with the CWLW whereas elephants recently brought from the north-east were being registered without any problem. Addl.DGF (WL) explained the legal procedure for registration of captive elephants. He also pointed out that an amendment in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 might be necessary to condone the delay in registration of elephants by most of the owners.

Recommendation VII.6: It was the general consensus that registration of domesticated elephants in all States should be completed on a priority basis.

Agenda Item No.7: Miscellaneous (Items proposed by Dr. J.V. Cheeran)

There was no discussion on this item.

Agenda Item No.8: Presentation by Chief Wildlife Wardens.

CWLW, Andhra Pradesh informed that the area inhabited by elephants had been notified as Kondilya sanctuary. There were 73 elephants (12 bulls and 61 cows) in Chittoor and Cuddapah districts moving in five groups and they were being monitored round the clock by groups of watchers. Eco-development Committees were involved in protecting elephants. There was no case of poaching in the recent years, though some cases of electrocution were on record.

CWLW, Arunachal Pradesh stated that elephants occurred over 9800 sq.km. area which was under stress due to various developmental activities. The 1993 census indicated 2071 elephants in the State and a census was underway with financial support from Project Elephant. He said that there were delays in release of central funds in the State. Human-elephant conflict was on increase and 3-4 persons were killed by elephants last year. There were also 2 recorded cases of poaching of elephants during the year.

CWLW, Assam informed that of the four identified elephant reserves in the State, two were protected while there were problems in the other two. Encroachment was a serious problem over elephant habitat. He said that capturing of elephants in small numbers was not helpful. He also expressed concern over increasing human-elephant conflict resulting in death of 45 persons during 2000.

CWLW, Karnataka informed that the Nilgiri interstate elephant reserve harboured about 12000 elephants with a sex ratio of 1:5. He referred to the problem created by 150-strong elephants in Bannerghatta National Park where no corridor was feasible. Karnataka lost 14-15 elephants due to poaching every year. He stressed the need for providing the field staff with anti-poaching camps, night-vision binoculars and short-range rapid fire arms.

CWLW, Meghalaya stated that the Forest Department administered only 5% forests in the State, the remaining forests being under the control of the district councils and private owners. The population of elephants came down from 2872 in 1993 to 1840 in 1998. Male-female ratio was 1:2. Over 60% of elephant population was in Garo Hills. He identified jhooming, fragmentation of habitat and crop depredation by elephants as serious problems. He informed that claims worth Rs.52 lakh were yet to be settled. To a

question by Addl. DGF(WL), he stated that the State Government was in possession of Rs.177.50 lakh for acquisition of land for corridors. Dr. Lahiri Chowdhury commented that decline in elephant population in Meghalaya could not be explained by poaching and it might be due to some mistake in either the 1993 census or the 1998 census.

Wildlife warden, Nagaland informed that there were 147 elephants in the State in 1999— 15 tusked, 107 cows and 25 calves. There were 5 corridors linking Nagaland with Assam. He also referred to the problems caused by a group of elephants trapped in Pagti valley.

CWLW, Orissa stated that there were 1827 elephants in his State with a sex-ratio of 1:2.6. He informed that there were spurts in poaching in Orissa in 1996 and 2000 which could be controlled. Orissa was in the process of setting up three elephant reserves.

CWLW, Uttranchal informed about the action taken by the State Government in the aftermath of killing of five elephants in Corbett National Park since December last. He said that anti-poaching camps had been set up in the interior areas and the staff were being supplied with ration at these camps. He also informed that combing and patrolling was being done in the forests according to chalked out plans.

CWLW, Tamilnadu informed that electrocution was a serious problem which accounted for 10 cases of elephant deaths during 2000. There were also 9 cases of poaching of elephants during the last year. He felt that a large number of water structures constructed in the agricultural fields under various development schemes were attracting elephants and resulting in increased human-elephant conflict. Kitchen gardens being raised inside tea estates were also inviting elephants. There were 10 cases of human deaths during 2000 in Coimbatore and Erode districts. He proposed translocation of entire group of elephants from Tirunavelli to Madumalai for reducing human-elephant conflict. He stressed upon the importance of setting up anti-poaching camps. He also informed that poachers were being booked in Tamilnadu under the Goonda's Act.

CWLW, West Bengal referred to the large scale elephant depredation in the State. He informed that the State Government was spending over Rs. One Crore on payment of compensation but was not getting enough support for this purpose from the Central Government. To a query by Dr. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury about a PIL in Calcutta High Court regarding widening of railway track in the northern West Bengal, he said that he would look into the matter.

In the absence of any representative from Jharkhand Forest Department, Dr. D.S. Srivastava informed about the distribution of elephants in the State. He referred to a rogue elephant responsible for killing 31 persons which was yet to be eliminated. He suggested formation of a joint monitoring committee for Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal.

MEF asked the CWLWs to come up with site specific proposals for more effective management of elephants on scientific lines. The Central Government would ensure that requisite funds were made available to implement these projects.

Recommendation VII.8: MEF desired that there should be exclusive meetings with the representatives of the north-east and the south to discuss problems relating to elephants. There was also a general consensus for having regular co-operation between the States on regional basis.

ANNEXURE

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE VII MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE
OF PROJECT ELEPHANT ON 27.2.2001.

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| 1. Shri T.R. Baalu | Minister for Environment & Forests, Government of India |
| 2. Shri P.V. Jayakrishnan | Secretary, Environment & Forests, Government of India |
| 3. Shri C.P. Oberoi | Director General of Forests & Special Secretary |
| 4. Shri S.C. Sharma | Addl. Director General (Wildlife) |
| 5. Shri S.S. Bist | Inspector General of Forests & Director (Project Elephant) |
| 6. Shri M.S. Bali | Director (Finance) |
| 7. Shri S.K. Mukherjee | Director, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun |
| 8. Dr. J.R.B. Alfred | Director, Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta |
| 9. Dr. N. Singh | Director, Botanical Survey of India, Calcutta |
| 10. Dr. B.M. Arora | Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izzatnagar |
| 11. Dr. J.C. Daniel | Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai |
| 12. Dr. D.K. Lahiri Chowdhury | Asian Elephant Specialist Group, IUCN/SSC, Calcutta |
| 13. Dr. J.V. Cheeran | Asian Elephant Specialist Group, IUCN/SSC, Trichur |
| 14. Dr. D.S. Srivastava | Secretary, Nature Conservation Society, Ranchi |
| 15. Shri S.C. Dey | Secretary General, Global Tiger Forum, New Delhi |
| 16. Shri S. Doley | Chief Wildlife Warden, Assam |
| 17. Shri S.S. Choudhury | Chief Wildlife Warden, Arunachal Pradesh |
| 18. Shri S.K. Chakraborty | Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka |
| 19. Shri T. Rama Krishna | Chief Wildlife Warden, Andhra Pradesh |
| 20. Shri C. Thangliana | Chief Wildlife Warden, Meghalaya |
| 21. Shri T. Lotha | Wildlife Warden, Nagaland |
| 22. Shri S.K. Patnaik | Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa |
| 23. Dr. S. Thakur | Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamilnadu |
| 24. Shri G.B. Thapliyal | Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal |
| 25. Shri A.S. Negi | Chief Wildlife Warden, Utranchal |
| 26. Shri B.S. Bonal | Director, National Zoological Park, New Delhi |
| 27. Shri A.K. Srivastava | Dy. Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife) |
| 28. Shri Kanwarjit Singh | Joint Director (Wildlife) |
| 29. Shri K.N. Thakur | Dy. Director (Wildlife) Preservation, Northern Karnataka |