

MINUTES OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF PROJECT ELEPHANT

The 9th meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant was held on December 22, 2003 in Paryavaran Bhawan, New Delhi. In the absence of the Minister of Environment & Forests, the meeting was chaired by Dr. Prodipto Ghosh, Secretary (E&F) and Vice-Chairman of the Steering Committee. A message was received from Shri S.K. Patnaik, non-official member, that he would not be able to attend the meeting due to sickness. Shri J.C. Daniel (non-official member) and Chief Wildlife Wardens of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa (invitees) could not reach Delhi because of fog. The Committee gave them leave of absence. The list of participants is given in the Annexure.

Agenda Item No.1: Confirmation of the minutes of the 8th meeting.

The minutes of the 8th meeting of the Steering Committee were confirmed.

Agenda Item No.2: Action taken on the recommendations of the 8th meeting.

Director (P.E.) presented a report on the action taken on the recommendations made by the Steering Committee in its 8th meeting. Secretary (E&F) released a handbook on "Techniques & Procedure for Post-mortem of Elephants" brought out by Project Elephant in collaboration with the Central Zoo Authority in pursuance of a previous recommendation of the Steering Committee.

The Committee took note of the action taken by the Ministry for shifting the army ammunition dump and Khandwala village from Chilla-Motichur Corridor (Uttaranchal). DGF & S.S. informed the Committee about his discussion with the Chief Secretary of Uttaranchal. Addl. DGF (Wildlife) remarked that Satyanarayan corridor could provide an alternative and viable migratory path for elephants. Dr. Sukumar expressed doubts about the advantage of establishing Chilla-Motichur corridor at such a high cost when there were more important corridors in the country needing protection. The Steering Committee agreed to the proposal that the matter should be dropped from its agenda as the same was now being handled by the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife.

Director (P.E.) informed the Committee about the discussions held on human-wild animals conflict in the National Workshop on Wildlife Management organised by the Ministry at Chennai on 31st July-1st August 2003. CWLW (Assam) explained the difficulties in availing the benefits of the National Crop Insurance Scheme in elephant depredation areas. CWLW (West Bengal) intimated that some forest protection committees in North Bengal were covered by group insurance scheme in respect of deaths and injuries caused by wild elephants. Addl. DGF (Wildlife) informed that the Wildlife Institute of India was developing a proposal for insurance against damage by wildlife. Director (P.T.) informed the Committee of his interaction with the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture who felt that the damage to crops by wild animals, being a preventable risk, was not eligible for crop insurance scheme. In response to a query raised by CWLW (Assam), Secretary (E&F) explained that Project Elephant could pay only the incremental premium in respect of crop insurance. He summed up the discussion by stating that the ultimate strategy should be to pay the insurance rather than compensation.

for crop damage. **The Committee recommended that DGF & S.S. would hold a meeting in this regard with the appropriate authorities.**

Director (P.E.) informed the Committee that evaluation reports of Project Elephant had been received and follow up action initiated in all the States except Uttaranchal, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. He explained that the evaluation was carried out in each State by a team comprising a representative each of the Steering Committee, State Government and a Scientific Institute. DGF & S.S. opined that evaluation should ideally be done by an external agency. Dr. Sukumar pointed out that an outside expert might not have full understanding of the Project and it would be useful to involve members of the Steering Committee in the evaluation exercise. Regional Dy. Director (South) suggested that monitoring of routine works should continue to be done by the regional deputy directors while that at macro-level could be done by an external agency. The Committee agreed to the suggestion made by Secretary (E&F) that **next evaluation should be carried out before getting into the 11th Five-Year Plan by a suitable agency. For this purpose, a background paper along with draft Terms of Reference should be prepared by the DGF & S.S. and the Addl. DGF (Wildlife) and placed before the next meeting of the Steering Committee.**

Director (P.E.) intimated the Committee that some designs for the logo of Project Elephant have been prepared with the help of the Chief Wildlife Wardens of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal which needed some refinement. Secretary (E&F) suggested that the logo should be finalised in consultation with the non-official members of the Steering Committee and Director (P.E.) could consult them separately after the meeting was over.

Director (P.E.) informed the Committee that the matter regarding establishment of Mayurjharna Elephant Reserve was taken up by the Secretary (E&F) with the Chief Secretary of West Bengal and the said E.R. had since been notified on 24.10.2002. As such, no further action was necessary.

Agenda Item No.3: Enumeration of Elephants.

Director (P.E.) presented the final report of All India Enumeration of Elephants carried out in 2002. He pointed out the inaccuracy in the figure reported from Kerala on account of inaccurate dung-decay rate adopted in the computations. Secretary (E&F) expressed concern at the large variation in the reported figures of sex-ratios across the country. Dr. Sukumar cautioned that the reported sex-ratios might not present an accurate picture of the ground situation as the field staff in many States apparently made mistakes in categorising adult and sub-adult elephants. He, therefore, suggested that these sex ratios should not be treated as 'bench-marks' for the MIKE programme. He explained the importance of correctly estimating the decay rate while using dung-count method for enumerating elephants and recommended that the estimated elephant population for Kerala in 2002 should be accepted as 3850 as suggested by Director (P.E.) rather than 6965 as reported by the Chief Wildlife Warden (Kerala). The Conservator of Forests representing Kerala had no objection to the downward revision of the enumeration figures of his State. Dr. Lahiri Choudhury was of the view that most of the discrepancies could have arisen because of non-observance of the standard enumeration formats by the field staff. He pointed out the lack of reliable methods for estimating elephant populations in the difficult terrains of the north-eastern States and suggested that the apparent variation

in the elephant numbers in Meghalaya during different census operations could be on account of inaccuracies in the earlier estimates rather than due to any real decrease in population. Director (P.E.) stated that some variation in the sex-ratios in different parts of the country was inevitable in view of past management practices, such as large scale capturing of elephants in the north-east. Addl. DGF (Wildlife) stated that the census techniques kept on evolving and the enumeration figures presented only the best estimates with reference to a given year. He pointed out that on all previous occasions, Steering Committee had accepted the enumeration results finally rather than provisionally.

On the advice of the DGF & S.S., the Committee took note of the enumeration reports of all the States for the year 2002 except the figure for Kerala, which was corrected to be 3850. **The Steering Committee also decided that a committee comprising Director, WII; Director (P.E.); Dr. Sukumar and Dr. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury should prepare a comprehensive guideline for enumeration of elephants in different parts of the country.**

Agenda Item No.4: Progress of Elephant Reserves.

Director (P.E.) informed the Committee that Rayala Elephant Reserve had been recently notified by the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the number of formally notified Elephant Reserves in the country now stood at 24. He also informed that Intanki E.R.(Nagaland) was yet to be notified by the State Government while the proposal for Deomali E.R. (Arunachal Pradesh) was under examination in the Ministry. He intimated that three more proposals, viz. Eastern Arunachal E.R., Central Arunachal E.R. and Khasi Hills E.R., had been received which did not form a part of the original network of Elephant Reserves recommended by the Task Force of the Project Elephant in 1991. Dr. Lahiri Choudhury endorsed the establishment of elephant reserve in the West Khasi Hills but cautioned against any acquisition of land for this purpose in the absence of cadastral survey maps in Meghalaya. He also supported setting up of additional elephant reserves in Arunachal Pradesh for effective protection of elephants on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The P.C.C.F. (Meghalaya) explained that the Survey of India maps were not readily available due to proximity with the international boundaries, but he stated that acquisition of land was not a priority item. He emphasised the need for timely payment of ex-gratia relief to the people to ensure their active participation in protection of elephants. Addl. DGF (Wildlife) suggested that most of the areas could be notified as Community Reserves with the consent of the local people.

The Committee decided that a team comprising Director (P.E.) and regional members of the Steering Committee should visit Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya and submit a report regarding the suitability of the proposed Elephant Reserves. It was also decided to request the Government of Nagaland to expedite the notification of Intanki E.R.

Agenda Item No. 5: Management of domesticated elephants.

Director (P.E.) informed the Committee that the Ministry had constituted an Expert Committee under the chairmanship of Shri S.C. Dey, former Additional DGF (Wildlife), to look into the status of captive elephants in different parts of the country.

Shri S Subramanyam, Regional Deputy Director (South) & the Member Secretary of the Expert Committee, apprised the Steering Committee of the progress made so far. He, in particular, mentioned about the demand made by the elephant keepers in Kerala to get the certificate of ownership in respect of their elephants with a right to sell the same. Dr. Lahiri Choudhury pointed out the self-contradictory formulations in the recently amended Wildlife (Protection) Act which effectively discouraged private ownership. CWLW (Assam) and DCF Wildlife (Arunachal Pradesh) pointed out the difficulties faced by them in disposing off applications for sale of elephants in view of the restrictions imposed by the amended Section 43. Addl. DGF (Wildlife) explained that the Ministry was already exploring suitable ways to get around the problem caused by Section 43. After some discussion, **the Committee recommended that the Ministry should take immediate action for amending Section 43 of the Act to remove restriction on sale of elephants covered by ownership certificates. It also desired that the Expert Committee should submit its recommendations by the end of March.**

Agenda Item No.6: Miscellaneous.

Director (P.E.) informed the Committee about the suggestion received from Shri J.C. Daniel regarding radio-collaring of elephants in South India. However, Dr. Sukumar pointed out that neither Dr. Daniel nor some of the concerned Chief Wildlife Wardens were present. Accordingly, the Committee decided to defer the discussions on this topic.

CWLW (Jharkhand) raised the issue of disposal of seized stocks of ivory lying in the forest offices. Director (P.E.) informed that a circular from the Ministry already existed recommending the destruction of such stocks.

DGF & S.S. concluded the meeting by recounting various decisions taken by the Committee and thanked all those present.

ANNEXURE

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE 9th MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE
OF PROJECT ELEPHANT ON 22.12.2003.

1. Dr. Prodipto Ghosh Secretary (Environment & Forests) (Vice-Chairman)
2. Shri N.K. Joshi Director General of Forests & Special Secretary
3. Shri Vinod Rishi Addl. Director General (Wildlife)
4. Shri S.S. Bist IGF & Director (Project Elephant) [Member-Secretary]
5. Sh. J.L. Chugh Director (Finance) [Representing J.S.& F.A.]
6. Dr. D.K. Lahiri Choudhury Non-Official Member, Calcutta
7. Dr. J.V. Cheeran Non-Official Member, Trichur
8. Dr. R. Sukumar Non-Official Member, Bangalore
9. Shri Nirmal Ghosh Non-Official Member, New Delhi
10. Shri C.C.S. Maunglang Non-Official Member, Marigaon
11. Dr. Sushant Chowdhury Scientist, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun
12. Dr. Arun Kumar Addl. Director, Zoological Survey of India, Dehradun
13. Dr. M. Sanjappa Director, Botanical Survey of India, Calcutta
14. Dr. R.K. Gupta Representative of Animal Husbandry Commissioner
15. Shri K.K. Singh Principal CCF (Wildlife), West Bengal
16. Shri V. K. Nautiyal Principal CCF, Meghalaya
17. Dr. S. Thakur Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamilnadu
18. Shri M.C. Malakar Chief Wildlife Warden, Assam
19. Shri U.R. Biswas Chief Wildlife Warden, Jharkhand
20. Shri S.K. Chandola Chief Wildlife Warden, Uttaranchal
21. Shri A.K. Bhardwaj Conservator of Forests, Kerala
22. Shri K.R. Lyngdoh C.F. (Wildlife), Nagaland
23. Shri S. C. Mukhopadhyay DCF (Wildlife), Arunachal Pradesh
24. Shri P.R. Sinha Member Secretary, CZA
25. Dr. Rajesh Gopal IGF & Director (Project Tiger)
26. Shri B.S. Bonal Director, National Zoological Park, New Delhi
27. Shri Aseem Srivastava Dy. Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife)
28. Shri Jagmohan Sharma Joint Director (Wildlife)
29. Shri K.N. Thakur Dy. Director (Wildlife Preservation), Northern Region
30. Shri P. Subramanyam Dy. Director (Wildlife Preservation), Southern Region