Prevalence of ocular problems among captive Asian Elephants of Kerala
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Kerala, the southern-most state in peninsular India, possesses a large captive Asian elephant population, which is mainly utilized during temple festivals. Even though most of them are cared well, there are reports of ill-treatment once in a while. Many animal lovers have raised concern over the increasing occurrence of eye disorders among captive elephants in Kerala. This might be due to mismanagement or injuries inflicted during work or transport. In a detailed study extending over two decades, Chandrasekharan et al. (1995) recorded 55 cases of corneal opacity among captive elephants of Kerala. According to McGauhey (1965), discharge from the eye, whitish patch or ulcer on the cornea and defective vision were the common symptoms noticed in elephants with corneal opacity. Chandrasekharan et al. (1995) opined that corneal opacity was more among elephants brought to Kerala from northern states than native elephants and the reasons were primarily vitamin A deficiency and injury. Opacity of cornea as a consequence of pox was also noticed in one elephant.

In order to estimate the prevalence and nature of various ocular problems in captive elephants of Kerala, a study was carried out in and around Thrissur district of Kerala. By close monitoring of 100 randomly selected elephants owned by temple trusts and private individuals, the vision as well as the existence of gross eye lesions was checked. Personal interview of mahouts and elephant owners were also carried out to gather as much detailed information as possible on these aspects. The data obtained were compiled, analyzed and summarized in Table 1.

Out of the 100 elephants surveyed, both eyes were normal in 80%. In 86% of elephants, the left eye was normal and in 84 percent, the right eye was normal. Six percent of elephants had corneal opacity of both eyes; five percent each had corneal opacity of right or left eye only (Fig. 1). One animal had cataract in left eye, and two had cataract in right eye (Fig. 2). Two percent were confirmed to be blind in the right eye and one, in both eyes. Three percent had purulent ocular discharge from one or both eyes.

References