

Report on Completion of Getting Along with Elephants HECx workshop - West Bengal

Subhatirtha Karmakar*

As per my pledge on 09-11-2008 at Educators Skills Training Programme held at Nature Interpretation Centre at Sukna, I conducted a workshop at Panjhora Beat near Chalsha. The 6 day long "15th



Annual Nature Study cum Rock-Climbing Camp" of Nature & Trekkers' Club of Jalpaiguri was held in the picturesque backdrop of Garumara National Park beside river Murti from 24-29th December, 2008.

Sixty participants and about thirty officials attended the camp, mostly school & college students from Jalpaiguri, Mynaguri, Dhupguri, Lataguri and Chalsha. They were enthusiastic and enjoyed the programme. The participants were from HEC areas.

On the first day of the workshop we reached the campsite at about 2:30 pm. After the tent & rope allotment of participants a brief inaugural function was held. The participants introduced themselves and officials were also introduced. At about 7:30



pm we heard a sound of fire cracker or gun fire when cultural programme was on full swing. Forest guards advised us to put all the participants in the adjacent school, as a herd of elephants raided the

nearby fields. After that incident we camp officials had a sleepless night as the camp is situated by the elephant corridor.

On the Second day after the breakfast we moved for a forest trek. The trek route was amazing. The forest guards navigated us and soon we realized that we are in the territory of wild animals. A class on Flora & Fauna of this region was taken by Ms. Himali Thapa and forest guards also shared their views and experiences about animals, specially elephant. After acknowledging the sponsors I started our course on Human Elephant Conflict. At first the attitude assessment of participants was done. Then I gave a statistics on HEC in West Bengal and tried to make them understand what HEC is. After that Elephant facts were explained. Some more facts such as their Habitat, Food, Drinking, Life Span, pregnancy period, maturity & weight at the time of birth etc were focused. After



that the major differences between Asian and African elephants and the identifying characters of the two species such as Head, Trunk, Foot, Ears, Tallest Point, Tusk, Skin etc were explained. Then I introduced an energizer on elephant food habit (grazing, browsing & giraffing (=foraging)). The role of elephant on Art, Mythology, History & Festival were briefly focused. The different kind of forest in our country their span & difference between sanctuary, reserve forest, National Parks & Biosphere Reserve were explained to participants. The Elephant Habitat in WB and in India and Distribution of Elephant Reserve in India are presented through maps. The present and past elephant distribution of elephant was elaborated using map. Next we move on to our main topic i.e. Causes of HEC and Managing HEC. The causes of HEC such as change of habitat, over grazing, defective forestry policies, over exposure to human beings, Abnormal Sex Ratio, Illegal Arms & country liquors etc and the efforts to mitigate HEC such as

use of elephant repellants, Hulla parties, Power fencing, Ex-gratia relief, Elephant corridor, Habitat



Improvement etc were elaborately discussed. At the end of the course Ele Kits were distributed and a rakhi wearing and oath taking ceremony was held.

The third day of the camp was reserved for rock climbing, we moved for the rock at about 8:00 A.M. After the journey of an hour we reached Jhalong in Kalimpong Sub-Division. Nature Study group had a "Sit & Draw" competition on Elephant. Kids have expressed their concern for environment in those pictures. On the evening children practiced & performed "Elephant Drama".

On the fourth day we moved for the jungle for classes on Fire & Shelter making and Survival. RC

group moved for a day out in the nearby forest meadow by the side of river Murti. Participants had lunch at day-out site and in the evening we had a game called "Treasure Hunt".

The fifth day was camp fire day. Like previous four days we began our day with physical exercise, camp cleaning. After Breakfast participants enjoyed fishing game. This simple game gave a unique message to the participants. At about 10 am we moved for water activities. After lunch participants got ready for camp fire activities and they have performed elephant dramas.

On the last day we took a feedback of camp activities. Then closing ceremony was held and after lunch at 11 am. Some participants were asked to share their views about the camp and the course on elephant conservation, they all told that this was amazing and they enjoyed it and will try to use those methods in HEC areas.

I acknowledge the help and assistance of Trainers, Resource persons & sponsors, without whose help the workshop would not be a success. Thanks to Mr. P.K. Das, Club President; Mr. Souren Sen, , Mr. D. Purokayastha, Secretary; Ms. Himali Das, Mr. Ganga Oranon, Panjhora Beat & forest guards of the Beat office.

***Member, Nature & Trekkers Club of Jalpaiguri, Loknath Complex, Babupara, Jalpaiguri, 735101 subhatirthakarmakar@yahoo.com**

