

Austrian Sri Lankan Elephant Research and Conservation (ASERC) project

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Last year, ASERC (Austrian Sri Lankan Elephant Research and Conservation Project) was founded. This is an agreement on cooperative research and species protection projects dealing with Asian elephants in Sri Lanka. This involves elephants both *in situ* (wild-living) and *ex situ* (under human care).

This project was initiated and undersigned by Brigadier H.A.N.T. Perera, Director of Colombo Zoo and Pinnawala, Ing. Lalith Seneviratne, Pokunnatena, Dr. Harald M. and Gaby V. Schwammer from the Vienna Zoo and is designed to coordinate and promote all the work and programs related to the above aims.

The first four projects were defined last July and are currently in the implementation phase.

An electronic warning system – the so-called Elephant Detection Project (EDP) – has been developed by technicians from Sri Lanka. It is designed to detect infrasound emitted by elephants approaching rice paddies during the night, allowing them to be chased off in time. We have already had the opportunity to test the first prototypes, but further technical improvements still need to be made. Lalith Seneviratne, Harald M. Schwammer and Angela Stoeger Horwath are participating in this effort. The Pokunnatenna field station on the border of the Udawalawe National Park is the geographic hub of the trials. The whole village is involved in the project.

Parallel to this, an educational project is currently being set up by Gaby Schwammer and Pali Udugampola in the Training, Research, Education & Extension Centre (TREE Centre) of the Wildlife Trust. It is designed to promote the local population's awareness for nature conservation. A further goal is to develop optimal tourism strategies. After lectures by experts last year at the zoo in Colombo and at the University in Kandy, students and teachers were instructed in February 2006 in the vicinity of the Udawalawe National Park, and the schoolchildren held a joint 'day of action'. The work with local residents is a cornerstone of the process.

We are working on two additional projects at the elephant orphanage in Pinnawala:

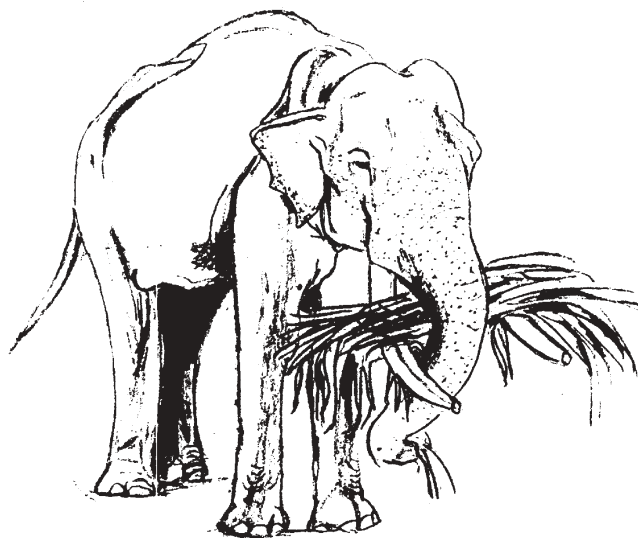
A comprehensive, holistic, new elephant management concept is being implemented by Brigadier Hant Perera, Harald M. Schwammer and Wolfgang Zenker in Pinnawala and in Colombo's zoo. The concept encompasses professional health care along with directed breeding programs, including the training of veterinarians, zoologists, mahouts and private elephant owners. Key aspects of the project include the provision of darting equipment, blood analysis machines, narcotization monitoring equipment, etc.

Great value is also being attached to student training and to developing ethological programs.

An additional research project is devoted to thermo-regulation in Asian elephants. For nearly a year now, Nicole Weissenboeck has been working as a research assistant at Schoenbrunn Zoo. Her work involved deploying a very expensive thermo camera. Nicole has just completed her Diploma thesis with honours and was already busy working in Pinnawala in February 2006, studying the behaviour of the 75 animals there.

We also hope to be the first to analyze the temperature-dependent behaviour of elephants in the wild. The two National Parks provide an optimal setting for this attempt. All those involved are working feverishly on these projects. We are particularly proud of the trust that the colleagues from Sri Lanka have placed in us.

Meanwhile two other zoos have registered also for that special project: Le Pal/France and Zoo Halle/Germany.



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