
HUMAN ELEPHANT CONFLICT IN THE MAHAWELI WILDLIFE REGION, SRI LANKA

B V P Perera

Department of Wildlife Conservation

The Mahaweli wildlife region is mostly in the dry zone of the country with 1993. 44km² of protected areas. There are about 500-800 elephants habitats in this region. The Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) in this region intensified in the last few years, due to the civil war and Accelerated Mahaweli development scheme. This study is explored the (1) The DS divisional-wise distribution pattern of human and elephant mortalities, (2) The causes of elephant mortalities and (3) How the HEC affect on the rate of elephant extinction. The data for the study is based on cases reported to the Department of Wildlife Conservation between 1990-2000 and descriptive post mortem finding of most recent 25 elephant mortalities. The possible causes of deaths, ages, breeding efficiency and physiological status were evaluated during post mortems using various indicators. Between 1990-1999, 316 elephant mortalities and between 1992-1999, 105 human mortalities have been recorded. The sex ratio of elephants that died were 3.18 male: 1 female. The post mortems findings revealed the causes of death as 12% natural, 64% gun shot injuries, 8% electrocution, 8% railway accidents and 8% drowned in canals. Among those that were shot, 69% were injured by automatic guns, 25% by shotguns and 6% by trap guns. The 72% males that died, 68% were good sound breeding bulls, between 15-35 years of age.

Many scientists have attributed the HEC to the associate with rainfall and cultivation pattern. Today the lands are cultivated year round and the HEC is spread throughout the year. The present rate of elephant mortality, sex imbalance and weakening of the gene pool due to the death of breedings bulls, all contribute to the extinction of this flagship species.