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Abstract

This Progress Report primarily concerns the Research Period from September 2003 to March 2004. During this time we completed:-

- 120 days of Direct Observation, of which elephants were observed on 71 search days.
- RAS surveys of 8 trails totaling 178.8Km
- Plant surveys of 6 trails and the roadside blocks
- Camera Trap surveys

At present we can make the following observations and conclusions:-

- Block 11 appeared to have the highest use by elephants that could be observed from Park Roads, perhaps due to the presence of two roadside salt licks, good quality habitat and a number of forests trails within this Block.
- Most of the solitary males and family groups utilized the south side of the Park during the study period rather than the north side.
- Elephants use the roads more frequently in the evenings and night time, particularly between about 2000 hours and 2400 hours.
- The largest group seen at one time was 24 individuals.
- 22 solitary animals were identified and 7 family groups.
- Over 101 plant species were observed as being eaten by elephants in Khao Yai.
- From the Dung Surveys, it appears that elephants utilize different parts of the Park during different periods of the year, with some areas only being used at one time of the year and others being used almost all year round.

In addition, our Identification Records were greatly improved.

Current Status

In July 2004 we came across an injured sub-adult male elephant (Dengrue, S9). After ascertaining that the elephant had a muscle injury that was reducing his ability to walk and search for food, we decided to try and care for the elephant.

Our medical base camp was next to the road and many people stopped to find out what we were doing, including reporters. Due to funding problems, we were not sure if we could actually finance the treatment of S9, however donations from many members of the public enabled us to continue with twice daily treatment (the drugs were slipped into bananas which were then fed to the injured elephant).

The plight of Dengrue and our project as a whole came to the attention of the Thai TV company ITV. In addition to giving airtime to regular updates on Dengrue and the project as a whole which raised the profile of wild elephants in Khao Yai and Thailand enormously, ITV organized a charity concert to raise funds for the Elephant Project.

At this time, it became necessary for the project to become a Registered Organisation with the Thai Government, under the umbrella of the Thai Charity, General Chartchai Choonhaven Foundation of which Senator Kraisak Choonhaven is the Patron. Senator Choonhaven then became the Chairman of the Elephant Research and Conservation Fund.

We are currently applying to become a registered non-profit organization ourselves with the name of “The Elephant Research and Rescue Foundation”.

Money from the concert was used to

- a) Purchase equipment including 10 camera traps, 2 GPSs, Computers and stationary materials.
- b) Hire new staff and paying staff wages, and
- c) Cover general running costs of the project.

We relocated the project to a village outside of Khao Yai National Park to improve communication and to provide a base for our research laboratory, the coordination centre, the database centre and also a veterinary clinic. Ms Ludda Mathai kindly donated the project a house and further assisted in the refurbishment of the house and the building the veterinary clinic in the grounds.

Previous problems with the database have now been solved and we have tightened up our survey methods and data inputting methods.

We are now ready to submit a proposal for researching Elephant Endocrine, Genetics and Ecology to the National Parks Department.

In addition we have

- created a website for the project (www.thaielephant.org),
- made souvenirs such as T-shirts and postcards as part of our long-term fundraising,
- recruited specialist staff to assist in areas such as GIS, statistical analysis, veterinary care and public relations
- regularly presented our work to the public to encourage long term support and to increase public knowledge about and participation in wild elephant conservation, and

- introduced our organization to many Ambassadors to Thailand, inviting them to visit the project

We are currently recruiting specialist staff to focus on the genetic and endocrine research.