**Date**: 11th July 2014  

**Venue**: North Bengal Science Centre, Siliguri  

**Number of Attendees**: 58  

**Objective**: In the wake of intensive human-elephant conflict, casualties of both man and elephants and various threats on wild population in Northern West Bengal, a dialogue process has to be initiated among the pro conservation and civil society groups. To synergize the efforts of many local groups in a scientific and sustained manner it is vital to create coordination among all of them. Towards this, WWF-India WBSO has organized a consultation camp to discuss on all related issues and bring all likeminded people together in the same platform.

The Programme started with an introductory welcome to all participants by Dr. S. Mitra, Coordinator WWF-India, West Bengal State Office. Mr. Tapas Das, CF, Wildlife (North) was invited to Inaugurate the discussion on the matter.

He mentioned about the visible decline in the forest land and escalating human population along with growing elephant population in Northern West Bengal. This shows a clear imbalance while sustaining any healthy wildlife. While discussing on conflict it is necessary to know about the cause and its effect and who are the actual affected in human-elephant conflict (HEC). He also pointed out in the matter of studying carrying capacity of wild elephants in North Bengal.

Mr. Debashis Sarkar, Skywatchers Association of Siliguri expressed deep anguish over the repeated death of wild elephants on railway track and lack of any intervention. He spoke about non progress in any initiative taken up in last 10-15 years with respect to solving elephant --rail accidents.
Need for awareness programme in Kolabari and adjoining region was also discussed regarding Indo-Nepal transboundary HEC.

The next session was conducted with participants giving feedbacks on semi structured questionnaires. The attendees were divided into 3 working groups composed of representatives from forest department, local NGOs and media.

The representation of Forest department came out with following points, all of which have direct impact on the wild population of elephants and their habitat. It is significant to note that the consultation programme helped to figure out these points from the feedbacks of local stakeholders.

1. **Lack of staff strength in the field for protection**
   (50% vacant post in the Directorate of Forests)
   a) Lack of field equipments and shortage of vehicles
   b) Lack of veterinary staffs, medical units and Veterinary surgeon

2. **Lack of coordination with**
   A) Electricity deptt
   B) District administration and Police
   C) Tea garden Administration
   D) Lack of Coordination with ARD

3. To improve the relation with defence personnel
4. Start dialogue with Nepal govt. for protection of wild elephant and smuggling of wildlife articles
5. Local level coordination with Railway deptt.
6. Frequently required reports i.e. Foraging Reports (Timely submission)
7. Required Coordination among the NGOs
8. Lack of scientific management of Wild elephants through research Projects
Local stakeholders like Aranyak (Gayerkata), from Dhupguri (Mr. Gunamoy Banerjee) and Odlabari (NAAS), R. Biswas (SSSTE), Biswapriyo Rahut (SPAWN), People For Animals, Dr. Gopal Dey (Paschim Banga Bigyan Mancha) and Animesh Bose (HNAF) were among the participants in this consultation. Among various issues focused during the programme were

1. Elephant deaths on railway track
2. Obstruction in elephant corridor
3. Livestock grazing in forests
4. Defense establishments and their unutilized stretch of lands
5. Lack of adequate infrastructure to manage wild elephants

Mr. Kanchan Banerjee, Ex-Ranger of Sukna Elephant squad spoke about his practical experiences. Elephants in wild population need more space and for that Defence personnel need to be involved in these dialogues. Often their activities disturb the movement of elephant herd. Mr. A. Bose spoke about the insufficient veterinary service in North Bengal and need for coordination between animal husbandry and forest department. He presented the activities of HNAF and their involvement in rescue operations. He emphasized that a good number of injured elephants roam inside the forests and the system of hitting the animals or any such invasive technique will spoil man-animal relationship. During this consultation the incident of 2002 was again recollected, when an adult mother attacked man and teared his body parts to take the flesh. This was obviously a very unusual feature and reflects the amount of outrage in the animal, if any of its family member becomes vulnerable. He also stressed the need of a radiotelemetric study to know the

Mr. B. Rahut of SPAWN questioned the efficacy of regulating elephant population. Would it be an ideal situation, if there is no elephant? How far we can control the wild population? Is there any study on carrying capacity in Northern West Bengal? Then on which basis the existing population will be managed? He also mentioned the need of protecting the habitat by local efforts at the ground level.

The programme ended with the final roundup by Mr. K. Banerjee and vote of thanks by Dr. S. Mitra. Around 10 representatives of various print and electronic media attended the programme.

A tabloid was distributed among the participants on reports of elephant deaths and HEC from Northern West Bengal developed by WWF-India, West Bengal Office.

| Media report on the consultation camp |