

Conservation of elephants in Trans-boundary (West Bengal-Nepal) region and mitigation of human-elephant conflict – local awareness camp at Panighatta Range.

An awareness camp on Human-elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation was held on 16th May 2013 at community hall near Chenga Junior High school, Panighatta in West Bengal. WWF-India, WBSO organized this camp in a location close to Indo-Nepal border, which is also a zone of intense HEC. The camp was attended by 81 participants from local communities including frontline staff of Forest Department, 10 members of forest protection committee, 40 school students, 2 representatives from tea garden, local villagers and also representatives from “Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha”, a state level conservation cum activist group. The objective was to sensitize the community about the mitigatory measures and minimize the conflict in the peak harvesting seasons.

The programme was conducted by Sangita Mitra, Coordinator WWF-India, West Bengal State Office with assistance from Panighatta Range office under the Kurseong division. It started with a welcome note and followed by three introductory speeches by Beat Officer, Panighatta Range; representative from “Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha” and Marapur Tea Estate respectively. Meanwhile a set of drama and educational kits were distributed among the students for use in the schools and performing a play in today's programme. They were also given four sets of different storyline on which group of students acted under the guidance of 4 facilitators. Facilitators were selected from the senior participants who supervised the drama activities.



To understand the mindset of local communities towards elephants and the related conflict, a simple feedback form was used among the working groups involving students and other participants. Eight such teams responded by filling up those feedback forms. A film by Earth Care on “The Elephants - God or destroyer” was screened for sharing the experiences of similar conflict incidents across India and the means of mitigation.



A special activity on problem solving was the final task given for the participants. This was also conducted among four working groups who contributed their viewpoints on four specific situations assigned to them based on socio-economic issues and its relationship with elephants.

The educational kits used here were developed by Zoo Outreach Organisation under the sponsorship of Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, UK.

WWF–India handed over display boards with conservation messages to the local beat officer and distributed handouts for each participant. Finally the programme ended with a vote of thanks to all the invitees with a special mention of local Forest Ranger Mr. Bhupen Biswakarma who has been an exemplary source inspiration to local communities in mitigating the HEC problem in the transboundary region.

