

Tusker translocated



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Subhamoy Bhattacharjee 28 August 2013 10645 views

A sub-adult wild tusker stranded in human-dominated area in Nagaon district of Assam was successfully translocated to the wild. The exhaustive two-day rescue operation was carried out by the Forest Department assisted by IFAW-WTI team, local elephant experts, mahouts and phandies, with local police and paramilitary forces fencing the crowd of thousands.

The tusker was separated from its herd, was disoriented and had been taking shelter for over 70 days in and around Kaki Reserve Forest. It had been caught in conflict with people, resulting in damage to property and crops and even casualty of a farmer; it was also treated for gunshot injuries by the authorities assisted by IFAW-WTI veterinarians from the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) last month.

“It was separated from its herd and had taken shelter in a human dominated landscape of the encroached area of Kaki Reserve Forest. There had been several encounters between the elephant and public,” said Rajen Choudhury, Divisional Forest Officer of Nagaon South Division.

For the safety of the public and the elephant itself, the authorities took a call to capture and relocate it to the nearby forest, making it the first instance of its kind in the region.

“This is really one of the toughest rescue operations we ever had, not just because of the size of the animal but also because of the weather! The elephant was chemically captured, traslocated using a truck and released in Lumding Reserve Forest, which is about 50 km from the capture location. This reserve forest is a good habitat connected to Nagaon, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district and located within Dhansiri -Lumding Elephant Reserve,” said Dr Rathin Barman who led the IFAW-WTI team.

“A white cotton rope has been tied around the animal’s left hind leg for identification. The animal was sighted today in Dhansiri Reserve Forest in Karbi Anglong,” he added.

“The elephant is about 10-12 years old and about 7 feet at shoulder height. We had treated it for gunshot injuries last month. When we captured it over the weekend, its injuries were almost completely healed and looked healthy,” said IFAW-WTI veterinarian Dr Anjan Talukdar who was part of both operations.

The rescue operation lasted two days (August 23-24) and was done with the help of twokunki elephants. Noted elephant capture expert Dipen Kalita helped with the operation that also involved forest veterinarian from Manas National Park Dr Prabhat Basumatary, in addition to WTI veterinarian Dr Anthony Phangcho from Karbi Anglong, and animal keepers Mahadeo and Samson.

“Capturing and relocating a wild elephant to resolve conflicts is not a usual solution for conflict. In this case, there was no other option,” said Dr Bhaskar Choudhury, Regional Head – Northeast India, WTI.

Large scale encroachment of elephant habitat has led to increasing instances of human-elephant conflicts in the country. As per the Gajah report prepared by the Elephant Task Force constituted by the Government of India in 2010, over 400 people and 100 elephants are killed annually in the country due to conflicts.

“It is widely accepted that the most viable long-term solution with us is to provide the elephants the right of passage by securing their remaining corridors, working in partnership with communities and governments. That is what we have been working towards across the country, including in Assam where we have made fairly good progress in securing the Kalapahar-Doigurung Elephant Corridor with the support of the local people,” Dr Choudhury added.

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BY SUBHAMOY BHATTACHARJEE

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