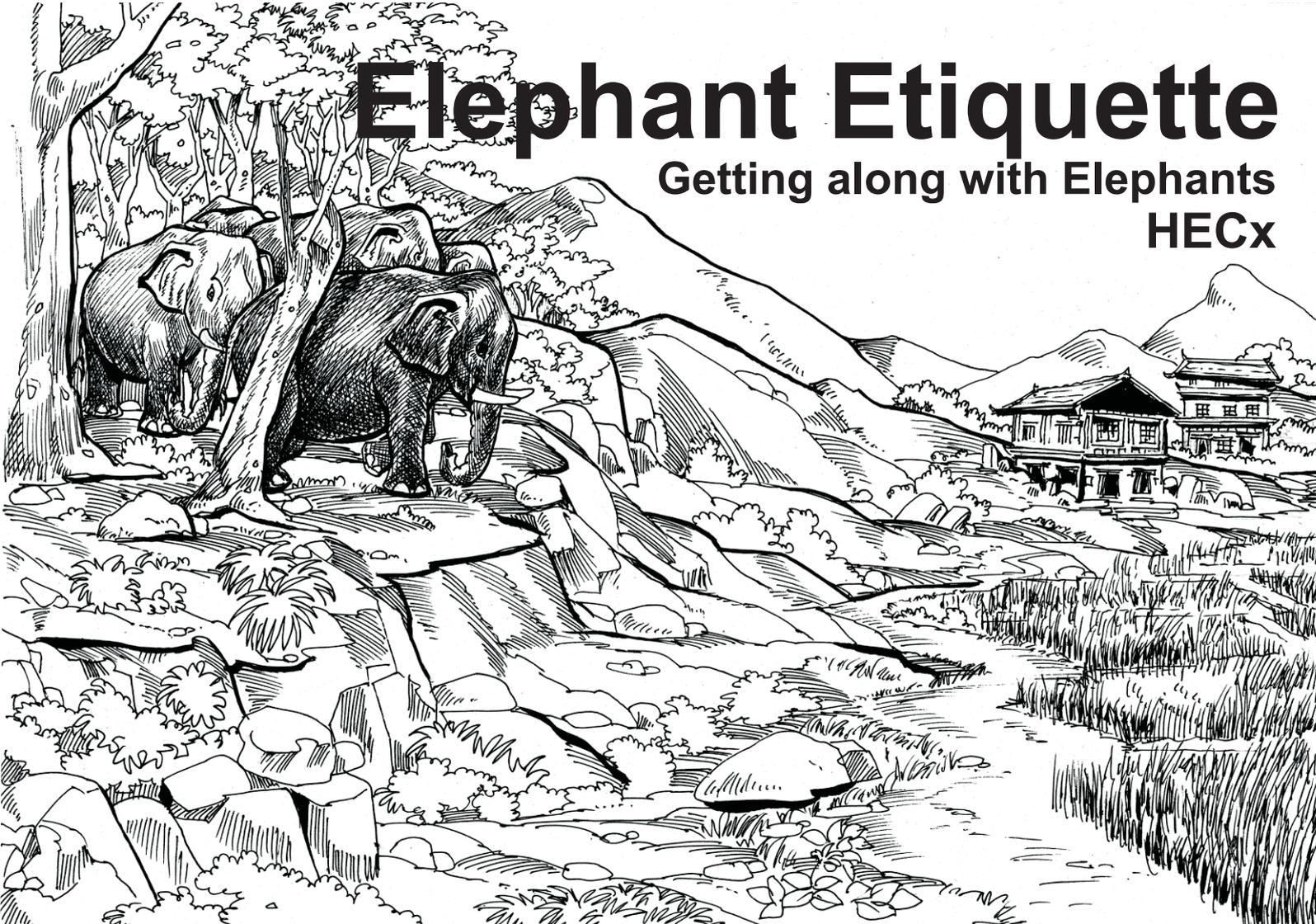


Elephant Etiquette

Getting along with Elephants

HECx



Credits

Compiled and designed by Sally Walker

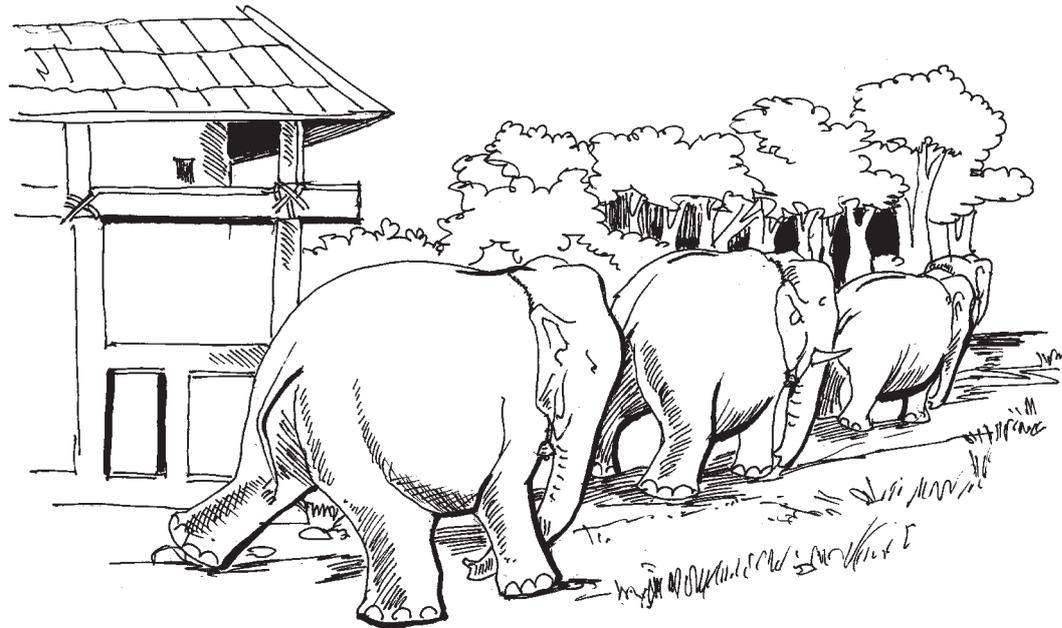
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Lets Look at our Elephant Etiquette

for the wellbeing of elephant and man

Who has not heard of "man-animal conflict" these days? The newspapers are full of reports of domestic cattle lifting by big cats, depredation of crops by wildpig, monkeys invading orchards, etc. The conflict between human beings and elephants has become so pervasive that it has its own acronym, or abbreviation, that is, HEC - Human Elephant Conflict.

More attention is given to HEC in rural areas because elephants having been deprived of habitat and food by developmental works, are entering villages and agricultural fields to find eatables in kitchen gardens and fields.

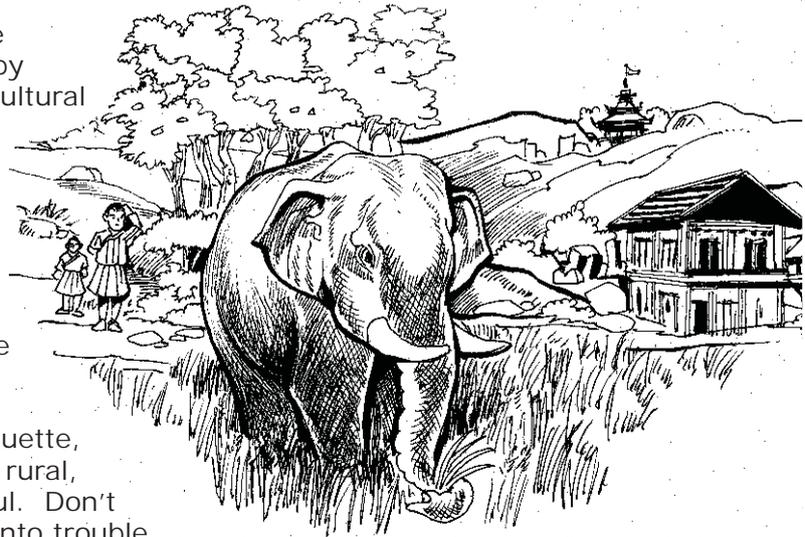
In some countries, however, captive elephants even in cities and towns have their own problems with human beings -- in zoos, temples, public roads, etc. Some people don't know how to behave around them, sometimes resulting in injuries or fatalities though no fault of the elephant. The elephant may be punished however.

So, in this booklet, when we talk about Elephant Etiquette, we include all instances of human elephant contact : rural, city, captive and wild. Elephants are big and powerful. Don't risk either injury to yourself or putting the elephant into trouble.

Learn some rules and principles of *Elephant Etiquette*.

Elephant etiquette

means appropriate behaviour with elephants ... avoiding confrontations, refraining from annoying them, from exciting them, from goading or tempting them ... to put you and others in danger.



Elephants have been around a long time

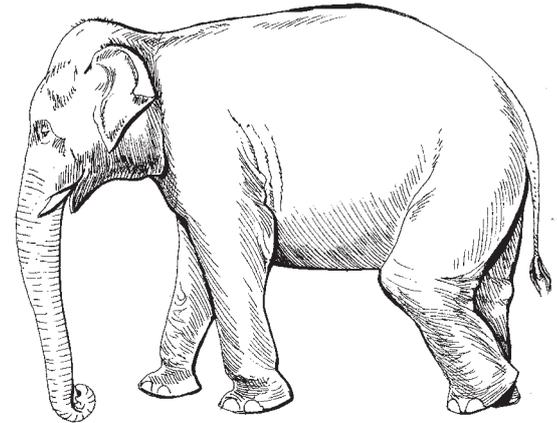
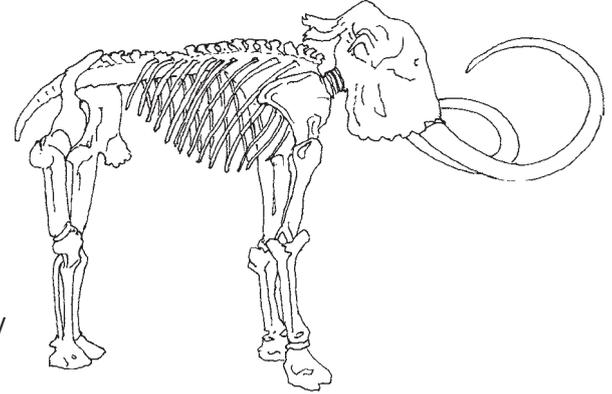
Elephants, as such, once lived in completely different parts of the world and in a very different form. They were from *Primelephas* that will include *Loxodonta*, *mammuthus* and *Elephas*. Instead of warm tropical forests their habitat was cold tundra such as in northern North America and northern Eurasia. These elephants have been extinct since 2000 BC and are called Woolly Mammoths. They existed as long as 20,000 years ago.

Elephants today are the subject of an enormous amount of scientific research. Like monkeys, our closest relatives, elephants have very interesting and intelligent minds, with thought and behaviour processes which defy explanation.

Because of elephants' great size and the wants and needs of human beings, it is not impossible that this important animal could follow the Woolly Mammoth into extinction.

Today's elephants have many problems.

Woolly Mammoth skeleton



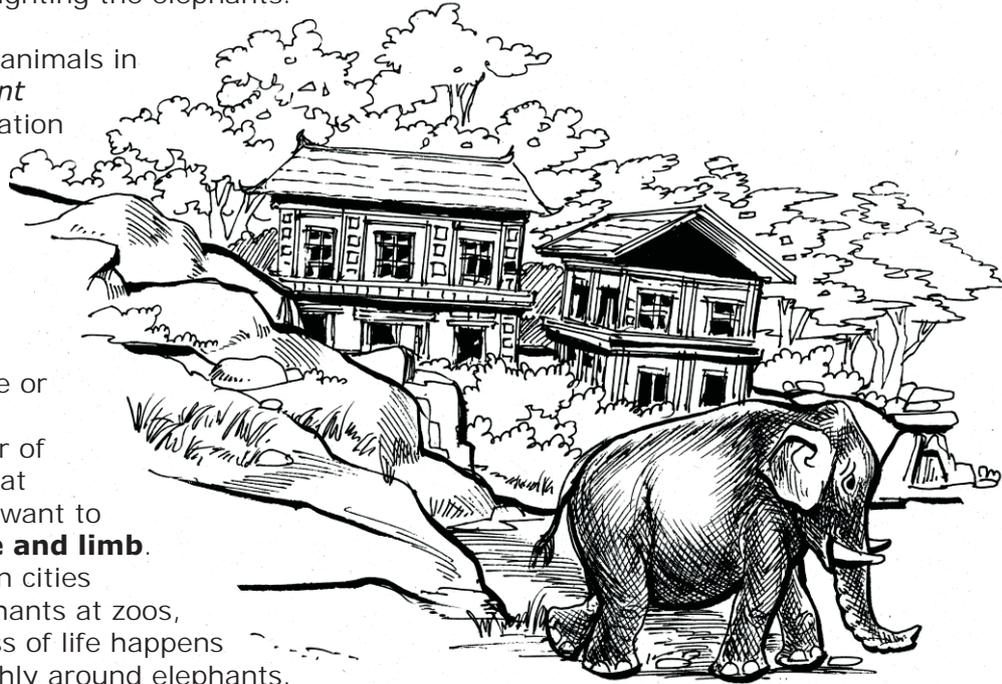
Modern day elephant

Human Elephant Coexistence HECx

Many rural people that we met while assembling this booklet seemed to be more “successful” in dealing with HEC. These were people who had adjusted to the elephant presence, who willingly coexisted with the animals and accepted them as part of life. These people seemed to have no more and possibly many less irrevocable tragedies, such as loss of life or limb, than people whose way of behaviour was fighting the elephants.

We sympathise with both people and animals in nature, so we adopted *human elephant coexistence* as our direction in education and philosophy. We have titled our programme “Getting Along with Elephants” meaning **H**uman **E**lephant **C**oexistence, **HECx**.

This booklet is about HECx and the well-being of both human beings and elephants. We do not mean to belittle or dismiss the suffering or seriousness associated with crop and home loss or of the inconvenience and aggravation that adjustment often carries. We simply want to focus on **minimising the loss of life and limb**. That is why we include the people living in cities where they come across captive elephants at zoos, temples, circuses, etc. Injury and loss of life happens to them also when they behave foolishly around elephants.

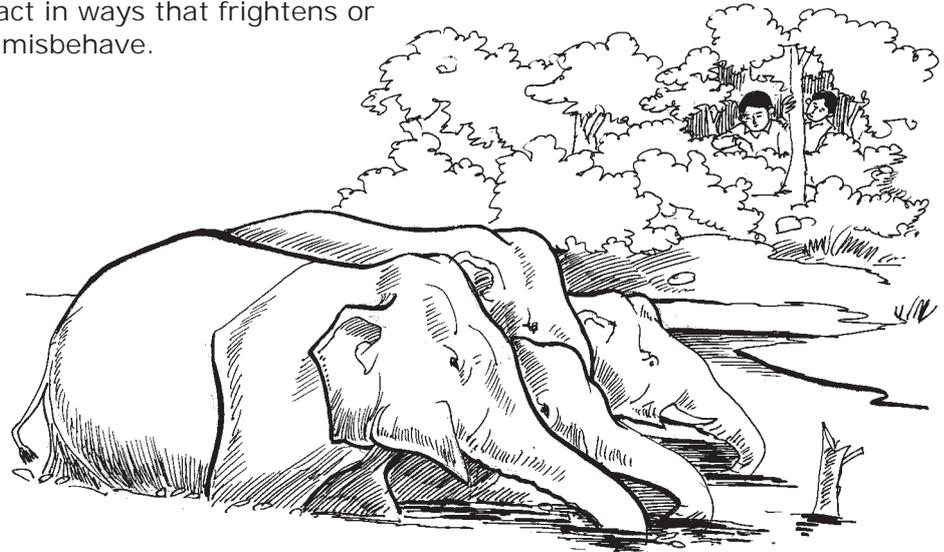


Etiquette means manners or people's customs of being polite, or what we call civilised. We don't break the queue; we don't push and shove; we try to be on time for engagements; we don't break our word; we try to speak nicely, etc.

When we speak of elephant etiquette, we don't mean good manners for elephants!. We mean good manners, eg. correct behaviour of humans toward elephants. And we define "correct" here as whatever will help you stay alive and in one piece and also keep elephants out of trouble.

Elephant etiquette helps both man and animal to survive. Elephant etiquette is when you agree NOT to act in ways that frightens or angers elephants, tempting them to misbehave.

This is for your well-being and for the well-being of elephants.



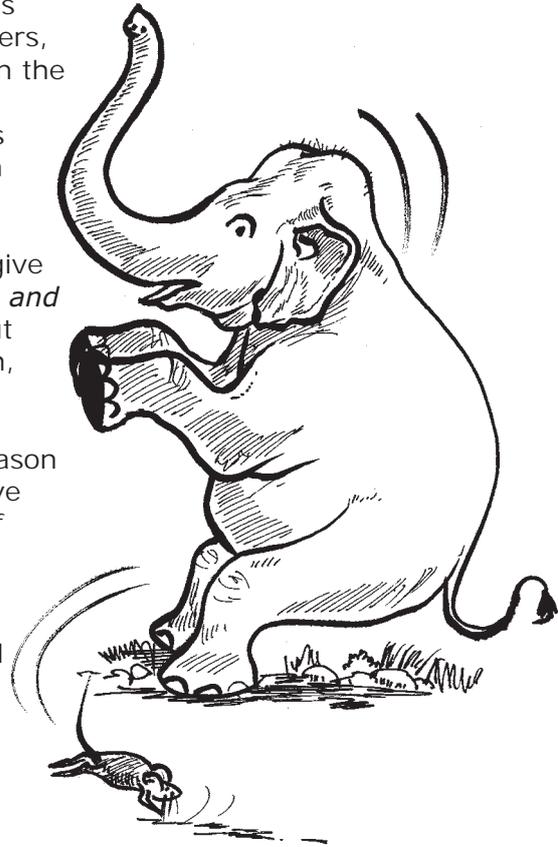
Etiquette for Elephants?

Elephants, as are all wild animals, are very unpredictable. Wild animals believed to be tame sometimes injure or even kill their trainers or owners, who trusted them. This is always because, although we know we mean the animal no harm, and the animal may return our love and trust, we can never know what in the immediate environment frightens or threatens the animal. As wild animals, they have a strong survival instinct which kicks in quickly, as if the animal were living in the wild.

Reports of elephants killing people for seemingly small offences don't give the whole picture ... *the whole picture includes what the elephant sees and does...* For example, the elephant may be warning his wayward mahout with a 'slap on the wrist' but - because they don't realise their strength, a slap could hurt or maim.

Fast movements are believed to frighten elephants ... it may be the reason behind the belief that elephants are afraid of mice. Rats and mice move extraordinarily quickly and this is probably the reason for the stories of elephants seeing a mouse and running amok.

This information should be useful to us ... we should be careful not to make fast or suspicious movements, or sharp loud noises when around elephants, even when they are securely tethered.



Elephant Quiz for people living in elephant areas. Just answer "yes" or "no"

1. Do you like elephants ? Can you imagine what it would be like to be an elephant ?
2. Do you ever get hungry ?
3. Can you imagine what it would be like NOT to have anything to eat in your area ?
4. Would you go to nearby areas and try to find food ?
5. If people tried to keep you away from food when you were very hungry, would you be angry ? Would you fight with them ?

Thanks for taking this quiz.

Now, if you replied "yes" to any questions 2-5, how do you think an elephant feels?



Elephant Quiz for people living in cities. Just answer "yes" or "no"

Would you like to be an exhibit in a zoo, or circus, or temple, to be restrained by a chain or cage and dependent on others for food ?

Would you like to have people throwing peanuts at you? or to have people pointing and laughing at you? or offering food to you then pulling it back when your reach for it?

Do you like it when people deliberately try and upset you to see your reaction?

When your schoolmates tease you, or throw things at you, do you simply stand down?

If you replied "no" to these questions, how do you think an elephant feels?



Elephant Quiz for Elephants themselves.

Just answer "yes" or "no"

Do you like human beings ?

Can you imagine what it would be like to be a human being ?

Oops ! As far as we know, elephants might be able to like human beings (at least some human beings), but for all we know today about elephant mentality, they may lack the ability to "imagine", to "put themselves" in another person's (or elephant's) place, to follow the Golden Rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

You, as a human being, have an advantage then. You can empathize with animals ... if you want to.

Even the most uneducated villagers we spoke with very naturally empathized with elephants. Several villagers commented that "the elephant has a very big stomach. We people with our small stomach get so hungry ... they (the elephants) need more food. They have to eat."

The villagers thus "forgive" the elephants for trying to raid their crops. This is how they adjust.



What causes elephant problems anyway ?

1. In contemporary South Asia, there is less space for animals, particularly in rural areas near to forests, where people live. Elephants have been displaced by development ... clearing forests by humans. There is less forage and fruit for elephants because human beings are gathering for themselves and their livestock. Elephants maintain their family ties, living in large herds. It takes a big area of forest to provide them with sufficient food and "breathing room" to survive.

2. People have infiltrated forests and collect forest delicacies for sale, reducing the variety and nutritional content of available foods for elephants.

3. The lure of "easy food" from crops, domestic stores, rural markets, etc. is overpowering to the hungry and frustrated elephants.

4. Elephants sheer size and the complexity of their social behaviour cause tremendous difficulties in finding a place to settle. In any case elephants move around a lot but now there is scant space to do so. In zoos and other captive situations, elephants really suffer.

5. Elephants are much more sensitive than people think, in captivity as well as in the wild. Many a visitor to a zoo or other captive elephant site has unwittingly provoked an elephant with some silly behaviour resulting in injury, death or a very bad scare. In the process sometimes the elephant, who just behaved like an elephant, is punished.



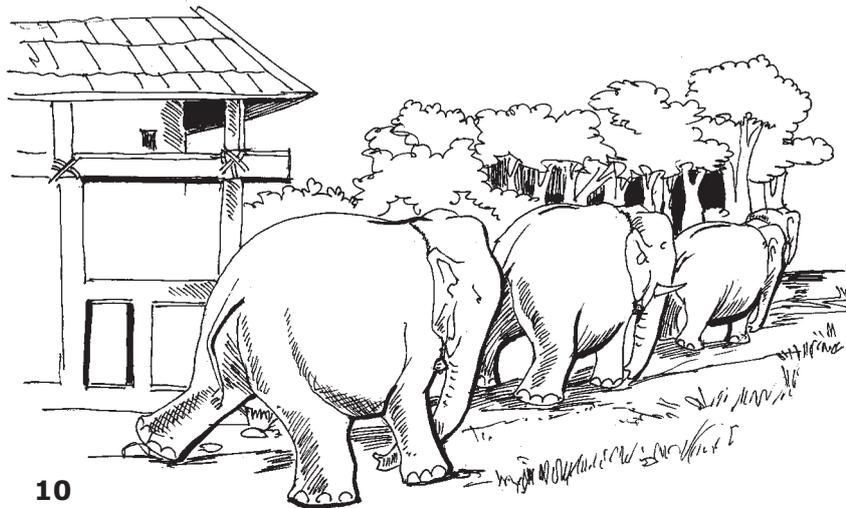
Who causes elephant problems ?

Some of you might be thinking : **"it's not fair !** its not fair for **us** to have to adjust to elephants. They should adjust to us. They come in our living and work areas and take what they want. **It is their fault ..."** **Well let's look at that.**

The problem of HEC is not because elephants are greedy, or stupid or mean. It is because we human beings have been shortsighted. We have developed most of the world with houses, industry, public services, etc. so that it is not habitable by large animals. Forests have shrunk because of human beings, not because of tigers or monkeys or elephants. Their number is growing smaller while our numbers are increasing a great deal.

We, who as a species had the intelligence to take over the Earth, do not have the intelligence or farsightedness to see that it was wrong. We went on breeding and building. Now we are in trouble. So how is it "not fair" really ? If elephants could talk they would say we were at fault ... aren't they right, in a way ?

If the elephants could read history and talk, they could say a lot about that.



Elephant gods and work horses

Temple, camp and farm elephants



Throughout Asia elephants are utilised for temple duty and also heavy duty forest and farm work. Temple elephants are often taken to beg for alms by temple mahouts. Often they are out in hot part of the day without access to sufficient water. As one can imagine, elephants need a lot of water !

Elephants in forest department-owned elephant camps seem to get a better deal than privately owned work elephants. For one thing they live in camps or near the forest and are generally better treated than privately owned elephants.

Privately owned work elephants may be used like a tractor without much concern for their welfare. Some of these may be owned by large farms, timber companies, and other commercial entities.

You may come into contact with temple or forest camp elephants. Although chained, they are still big and powerful. Be careful around any elephant.

Entertainment elephants ?

Zoos and circuses

There are thousands of elephants owned by zoos and circuses. Many of these elephants have very hard lives. Elephants are social, smart and energetic. In nature, they move with a herd and interact with other elephants. They also have challenges such as finding food, dealing with carnivores and man. They spend a lot of time moving around, gathering a variety of foods, bathing, taking care of young, etc.



In a zoo or circus they are normally chained, and in many cases, they are all alone. So from a very rich life of interpersonal relationships and activity, they are lonely, bored and lethargic. Sometimes their mahouts mistreat them, as if standing chained in one place was not enough punishment.

Elephants normally live a very long time and it is not unusual to hear of an elephant having spent half a century chained in a small stall or behind a building.

Some zoos have seen the light about elephants and as a policy will not even keep them. Other have improved their standards of care quite a lot.

Still, elephants on display for our pleasure have had to give up a lot. We owe it to them to behave in their presence and avoid irritating them.



Some Elephant Etiquette (rules) for being near captive elephants

Visiting a zoo or circus

- ? don't go close to the elephant
- ? don't try to give food to moving elephants
- ? don't give them food directly; give to the keeper
- ? don't touch elephants unless keeper is there
- ? don't make threatening gestures nearby elephants
- ? don't ridicule or laugh at elephants in their presences
- ? don't make loud noises or fast movements in presence of elephants
- ? don't run in front of elephants

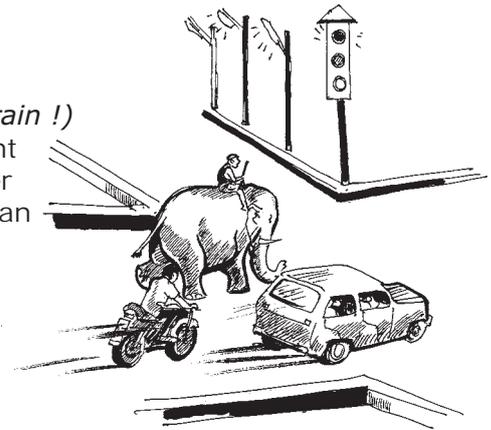
Encountering elephants in city traffic

(Sometimes we see elephants on city roads. Their Mahout or "driver" has to obey traffic rules. If you are also in traffic, use your brain !)

- ? don't put your hand outside car/bus window to wave to the elephant
- ? don't try to attract the attention of the elephant from a two-wheeler
- ? don't offer the elephant food in traffic even if the Mahout say you can
- ? don't do anything that might frighten or anger the elephant
- ? don't rev up your engine loud close to the elephant
- ? don't blow your horn loudly around the elephant
- ? don't discharge a burst of evil smelling smoke before an elephant
- ? don't cut in front of the elephant
- ? don't go close, either back or sides

Visiting a temple

- ? don't harass chained elephants; it is a cruel
- ? don't try to feed the elephant by offerings. Let the keeper do it.
- ? don't go too close or stay too long
- ? don't do any of the "visiting a zoo" "don'ts"
- ? don't burst crackers at a temple or anywhere near elephants



Suggestions for people in elephant areas

? If you are habituated to doing some activity (washing clothes or bathing at the river or walking to the shop at night for eatables, etc.) at a particular time every day, and elephants start coming there at the same time, stand down! Wash and walk some other time.

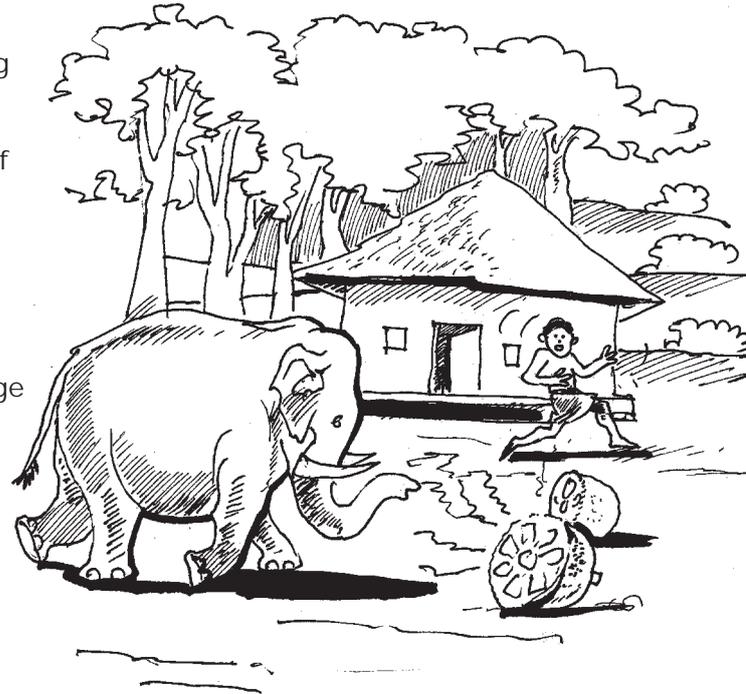
? Don't keep water, smelly food or garbage or fermenting liquours out in the open near your dwelling.

? Villagers of Anaikati village in India say "Don't talk ill of elephants, at least within their hearing. They can feel your bad words."

? Don't leave high smelling garbage around your home.

? Anaikati villagers say that they avoid moving about in elephant areas at night. "If elephants come to your village go in the house, turn on the lights and wait till they leave," they suggest.

? Some villagers in Nepal, India and Bangladesh recommended fire to discourage elephants headed for your village, such as a fire near the house. Fire wood, dry grass, an old cycle tyre, chilis ... or any fire that produces much smoke.



- ? Other villagers at West Bengal (India), Nepal, Bangladesh said they had various ways of making noise at elephants, such as shouting, whistling, clapping, crackers, Beating empty drums and tin, playing local drums, blowing a shell, making pigs to squeal!
- ? Some Nepalese, had religious practices that they believed helped, such as singing hymns, conducting worship, worshipping goddess (many people said). The singing of bhajans make people calm in their mind ... perhaps this also affects the sensitive elephant.
- ? Villagers in West Bengal, India changed all their habits ... they planted paddy during the night, harvested paddy very very quickly, and stopped planting corn.
- ? If you find elephants trashing your house or garden, think before you act. They are bigger and stronger. You can't win a fight. Stand down. You can build another house, plant another crop but not without being alive and fit.
- ? If elephants are taking something from you, think of its value!. Is it worthwhile to risk your life or your well- being for a basket of coconuts? ... says a social worker from Sri Lanka.
- ? These are a very tiny sample ... there are many, many suggestions and rules for avoiding or minimising conflict with elephants in villages. The main one is to try and stay out of the way, no matter what.

Give up your rights !

All human beings are very attached to what they perceive as their "rights". Sometimes if we are very stubborn about our "rights". It leads us to do foolish things.

Demanding our rights when dealing with elephants is like shaking our fist at a tsunami or tornado, or terrorist attack. In some situations you have to do what is wise and what will help you survive, not what you think you are entitled to!

Imagine a man holding a coconut nearby an elephant. The elephant reaches for the coconut and the man hits out at the elephant, and the elephant hits back. Now, see the man in hospital, bandaged from head to toe still holding his coconut saying "I won!"

Giving an elephant the right of way is usually wise.

Demanding your rights in some situations may cost you your life, or your backbone, or your leg.

What good are your rights then ?



Elephant tales -- helping humans and other animals

... an elephant in a western zoo formed a relationship with a rat which had come in its cage. He pushed food toward the rat and allowed the rat to sleep next to him in cold weather.

... Commander David Blunt in Tanganyika observed that an African woman had placed her baby in the shade of a tree while she worked. An elephant herd strolled by and saw the baby. Several of the elephants pulled leafy branches from the tree and covered the sleeping baby with them to protect the infant from the many flies. The elephants were so gentle and quiet about this that they did not even wake the baby as they departed.

... an elephant mahout had a heavy drinking problem. He would go into the village, get drunk and pass out. His elephant would take him home cradled in its trunk.

