

Human-Jumbo Conflict Mitigation Plan... Not a solution claim Environmentalists and Academia

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By Ranmini Gunasekara

Sri Lanka's elephant population can decrease by more than 50 per cent if the new Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) Mitigation Plan proposed by the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife, and regional Development is implemented, an academic attached to the Department of Zoology of the University of Colombo, Professor Devaka Weerakoon yesterday (1) said.

Speaking with Ceylon Today, Prof. Weerakoon said that, the HEC Mitigation Plan introduced by the Ministry proposes to relocate all elephants from human populated areas into protected areas of the Department of Wildlife Conservation and restrict the elephants within these protected areas via the use of electric fences.

"Presently elephants are not just limited to these protected areas. More than 60 per cent of the elephant population in Sri Lanka lives outside these protected areas. The protected areas have already exceeded their capacity and if we were to force more elephants into these areas, they will surely die due to the lack of food," he added.

He further said that the HEC Mitigation Plan was not a real solution for the human-elephant conflict.

"We are rapidly turning the land that elephants have inhabited into developmental zones, so they are losing territory to live and roam.

However, there are far more successful methods that we have experimented with to deal with these conflicts. One of the best is the construction of electric fences around the villages concerned; the other is the construction of an electric fence around farm areas only during farming times. We have done this in areas such as Galgamuwa."

Meanwhile, 18 environmental conservation organizations also released a joint statement against the proposed HEC Mitigation Plan yesterday stating that it goes against the National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wild Elephants in Sri Lanka and all scientific findings on the subject.

Deputy Minister of Wildlife, Palitha Thewarapperuma was not available for a comment.