

WNPS Monthly Lecture

ELEPHANTS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Conservation of the Asian Elephant in Today's World



By DR. SREEDHAR VIJAYAKRISHNAN

Thursday 18th January ,6 pm ,
Jasmine Hall, BMICH

Increasing demand for natural resources globally has intensified anthropogenic pressures on our environment, further resulting in the loss and widespread fragmentation of natural habitats. There is a dire need for species exposed to such pressures to adapt to these changing ecologies in order to ensure their long-term survival. Habitat generalists such as elephants seem to find their ways to live within and around human-dominated landscapes, often also getting into (negative) interactions with people. The general assumption of elephants using human-use areas only as temporary refuges or movement pathways does not seem to hold true for several populations that subsist almost entirely in such modified landscapes. Despite decades of research on Asian elephants, both in the wild, and in captivity, our understanding of their behaviour, especially in the context of their usage of changing environments, continues to be limited. This is particularly important in the context of managing the larger-than-life problem of human–elephant conflict.

Conflict management needs to take into account behavioural plasticity in elephants, while also acknowledging the importance of site-specificity of mitigation strategies. **The inherent urge for quick-fixes results in inevitable failures, and sometimes, even increased conflict.** It is hence

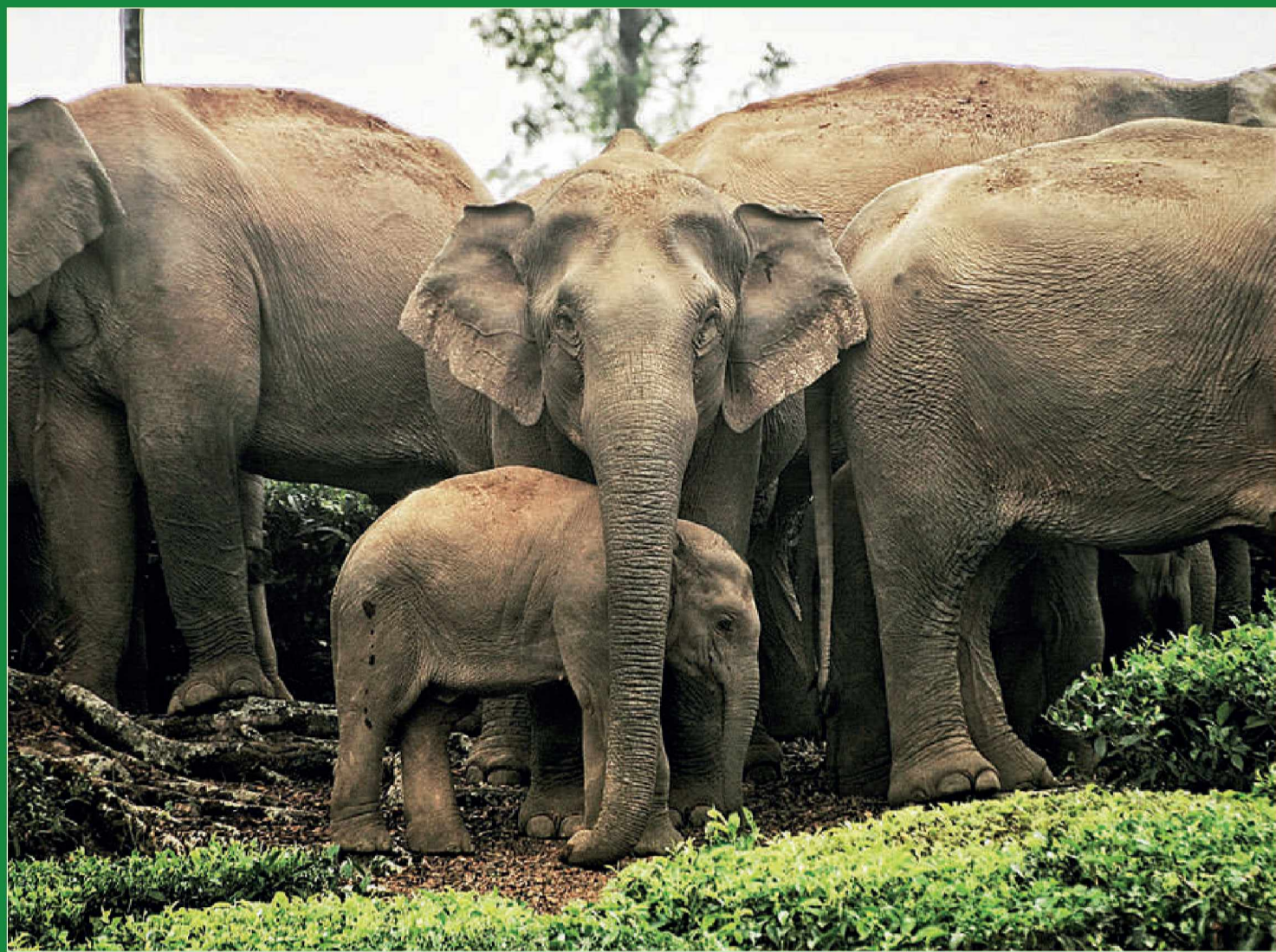
imperative to examine the now-difficult lives of many of these populations and individuals, and reflect on the uncertainties they face in today's Anthropocene. In this NTB WNPS Monthly Lecture, Dr Sreedhar will share his experiences studying Asian elephants across different landscapes in the Western Ghats and briefly, in North Western India, while also discussing the various (conflict) management strategies adopted in each of these areas.

Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan, a wildlife biologist by training, has had research interests, over the last decade, in behavioural ecology, wildlife endocrinology, population ecology, movement ecology, and human dimensions of wildlife conservation. Growing up watching elephants and listening to never-ending elephant tales, Sreedhar developed a deep passion for the species, which motivated him to choose a career in conservation biology, closely following and observing them, both in the wild and in captivity. He has been particularly interested in understanding behavioural adaptations by elephants in human-modified landscapes and has extensively studied them in the Western Ghats and the Western Himalayas. He is also interested in human–captive elephant relationships, as shaped by the rich cultural history of elephant captivity in the state of Kerala and the traditional elephant-keeping practices of the Malasar communities of the Anamalai hills in southern India. His PhD looked at the socioecology and physiology of Asian elephants in a human-dominated landscape.

Currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Conservation and Research, Sreedhar is a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Asian Elephant Specialist Group. He has served on several regional committees, and have worked closely with the Kerala and Tamil Nadu Forest Departments on various aspects of elephant conservation. **Sreedhar was also the scientific advisor to the Oscar-winning documentary, *The Elephant Whisperers*.** He was also featured in the *40 under 40* list of socially responsible influencers by The New Indian Express in 2020.

The monthly lecture of the WNPS is supported by the Nations Trust Bank. It is open to both members and non-members, **ENTRANCE FREE.**

(The Anthropocene Epoch is an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the most recent period in Earth's history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems.



Elephants huddling Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan



People crowding near wild Elephant Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan



An adult female and its calf negotiate a road that cuts through rainforest fragments and tea plantations in the Anam Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan



A mature adult bull in a typical dry thorn forest habitat in the valleys of the Nilgiris, southern India. Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan



A herd of elephants cross a village road one busy evening, to access a perennial water source on the other side. Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan



Elephant in banana field Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan (1)



Livestock grazing in Elephant habitats leads to competition Image by Dr. Sreedhar Vijayakrishnan