



A Carol Buckley Project

ELEPHANT AID INTERNATIONAL

One World...One Elephant at a Time

ELEPHANT PEDICURE REPORT

**Elephant Foot Care and Mahout Training provided by Elephant Aid International
in collaboration with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Nepal**

March 2011 through January 2019

Summary of Services Provided, Outcomes and Recommendations

A comprehensive foot care program is a vital component of effective captive elephant management. Healthy feet are key to an elephant's mobility and, ultimately, his/her longevity. In the case of working elephants, foot health plays an important role in physical performance and psychological attitude. By addressing diet, stable sanitation, workload, mahout handling and foot care, foot health can be enhanced, resulting in healthier, longer lived, more productive, more contented elephants.

Elephant Aid International (EAI) conducted an introductory five-week foot trimming clinic in Sauraha, Nepal, from March 7 through April 12, 2011. In collaboration with the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), EAI provided foot health evaluations and full pedicures for more than 60 elephants used for elephant rides and conservation activities. Half the elephants who participated in the clinic were privately owned; the other half were anti-poaching patrol elephants owned by DNPWC.

Following the initial clinic, EAI developed and to date continues to provide biannual foot trimming inservices, free of charge, to nearly 200 private and government owned elephants. Additionally, EAI continues to provide elephant care and training seminars to all government mahouts and a great number of privately employed mahouts

EAI Foot Trimming Program

Elephant Aid International provides free foot trimming services for:

- National Trust for Nature Conservation, BCC
- Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
- Private elephant owners

The work is conducted under the direction of Carol Buckley of EAI with assistance from Dr. Kamal Gairhe, Kiran Rijal and Chitra Khadka, DNPWC.

Services provided include:

- Evaluation and documentation of the condition and cleanliness of the hattisar where each elephant lives: construction, drainage, substrate, shade, waste removal, sanitation and the location and condition of leg chains and hobbles
- Photographic documentation of all four feet
- Visual examination and evaluation of elephant foot health
- Complete pad, nail and cuticle trimming
- Training of two veterinary technicians in the most up-to-date methodology of foot trimming
- Individualized tutoring for mahouts on their individual elephants' feet
- Follow-up re-examinations for elephants experiencing serious foot health issues
- Reports for owners, including evaluation, photographic documentation and recommendations for improved foot care

Findings

Elephants who spend their days on natural substrate in Chitwan National Park with access to live vegetation, water, shade from the forest canopy during the hottest part of the day and who carry limited weight (only one or two mahout riders) have healthier feet than their counterparts who provide a full day of safari rides with multiple riders and walk on hot asphalt in the heat of the day.

In the majority of cases, the nails and pads of the NTNC and DNPWC elephants were healthier than that of the privately owned elephants.

Forest Dwellers

The NTNC and DNPWC elephants spend the majority of their day in the forest and do not walk on pavement. Generally speaking, their nails and pads are less overgrown and the nails are supple---not too dry---with fewer cracks.



Chronic nail problems, such as cracks, abscesses and bacteria growth, were limited to bulls and geriatric cows.



Private Elephants-- elephants used for tourist rides and not given access to Chitwan National Park

Most privately owned elephants spend all day providing tourist safaris and are not given access to Chitwan National Park. They make multiple, daily trips from their stable to the safari staging area on hot asphalt, carrying heavy loads of riders. When not giving rides, they are chained by two legs on unnaturally hard, bacteria-infested surfaces such as concrete or hard-packed dirt.

Most share the same chronic conditions: severely overgrown and infected nails; cracked pads, nails and cuticles; and pads that range from bruised and thin to overgrown. These conditions are harmful and even life threatening, causing pain and lameness. Left untreated, foot infections can develop into osteomyelitis, an incurable terminal disease.

Without exception the ride elephants display poor foot health.



The major factors contributing to the poor foot health of this group of elephants are their time spent hauling heavy loads (tourists), walking on asphalt, poor diet and unsanitary stable conditions.



Recommendations

- Maintain a foot care program with regularly scheduled examinations and trimming to ensure that pads and nails remain healthy.
- Provide more time off hobbles to allow natural posturing and movement, which have a direct impact on the wear pattern on the pads and nails.
- Monitor adult males and geriatric cows to prevent their nails from becoming necrotic.
- Improve stable sanitation; remove contaminated dirt and replace it with clean fill dirt.
- Limit time spent walking on asphalt, especially in the heat of the day.
- Reduce the weight load of safari rides and the number of hours worked for young and geriatric elephants.
- Provide nutritious food, including live vegetation such as grasses and browse.

Elephant Aid International - P.O. Box 283 – Attapulgus, Georgia 39815 - 229-465-3115

www.ElephantAid.org - elevisions@gmail.com

Conclusion

Foot trimming and mahout education are important components of sound welfare for Nepal's captive-held elephants. Some advancements have been made over the past 9 years including the effort to maintain elephants in chain-free corrals. Freedom to move at will improves foot and joint health and mental attitude.

But ride elephants continue to be overworked and poorly cared for. The majority continues to suffer from damaged nails and pads as a result of carrying too-heavy loads, excessive exposure to asphalt, unclean stables and poor diets. By establishing a set of welfare standards, elephant health and wellbeing can be ensured. Educating mahouts in elephant biology and psychology will increase their understanding of elephants, which can result in sustainable improvement to elephant welfare.

Carol Buckley
Founder
Elephant Aid International