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One World...One Elephant at a Time

CHAIN FREE MEANS PAIN FREE - NEPAL
PROJECT COMPLETED April 2015

REPORT



Nepal Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
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In collaboration with
Elephant Aid international-USA
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INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, Elephant Aid International's Chain Free Means Pain Free Program in Chitwan National Park, Nepal, was completed. Nepal is the first Asian country to release its elephants from chains, in order to improve the welfare of the government's anti-poaching patrol elephants.

Over a 16-month period, building sites were identified, fence lines in the National Park were cleared and specialized materials were imported. Skilled technicians from India, assisted by paid local laborers, constructed the multi-acre solar-powered chain-free corrals in 15 government hattisars (elephant stables), which house 63 captive-held elephants.

Fifty-four elephants, male and female, ranging from four months to seventy-plus years, were freed from a life in chains. They now live in multi-acre interconnected chain-free corrals designed to improve their welfare.



The elephants are working animals, who patrol Chitwan National Park for signs of poaching activities. In the past, when not working, their front feet were chained tightly together and secured to the ground, preventing natural posturing and healthy physical activity.



Now, living in chain-free corrals, each elephant is free to move at will and engage in natural behavior such as dusting, foraging, sleeping, bathing, exploring, playing and socializing. Bonded individuals are housed together in compatible groups consisting of mothers and their suckling calves, attentive aunts and friends, all free to engage in normal social behavior.



Corral construction and operating system

The solar-powered corral can be used in the most remote locations. The system consists of an energizer, regular car battery and a solar panel. The battery stays charged for one week on three hours of light. Specifically designed for wildlife, the corral gives off an uncomfortable sensation upon contact. The 10-volt pulsating current is harmless.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Reduce or eliminate stereotypical behavior caused by chaining
- Eliminate low-level long-term stress caused by chaining
- Increase physical activity
- Encourage engagement in natural species-specific behavior such as foraging, dusting, bathing, walking, playing, socializing and exploring
- Eliminate injuries and bone and joint damage
- Improve foot health
- Maintain elephants' compliance with mahout authority

METHODS

- Husbandry protocol
- Management protocol
- Feeding protocol

1. HUSBANDRY PROTOCOL

Manure removal and corral cleanliness standards were established to ensure the highest level of hygiene.

2. MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL

Training and management practices for inside the corrals were established to give elephants a sense of freedom and security.

3. FEEDING PROTOCOL

Changes to traditional feeding practices were established to promote increased physical activity and alleviate boredom.

PROGRESS AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The elephants spend approximately 15 hours each day in the chain-free corrals. The remainder of their time is spent in Chitwan National Park engaged in grass collecting, anti-poaching patrols and conservation work.

Upon first introduction to the chain-free corral, each elephant calmly explored the area, foraging, dusting and scratching on trees. At night they dig in the soft dirt of the forest, creating a comfortable sleeping spot; none return to the stable area to sleep.

Photographic and medical records are kept to track foot health and bone and joint conditions.

Collectively, the elephants' behavior represents a substantial improvement in natural activity and reduction in stress and stereotypical behavior.

CONCLUSION

The goal to eliminate stress caused by chaining and the resulting stereotypic behavior has been achieved. Since being introduced into the chain-free corrals, all elephants engage in appropriate, beneficial, species-specific behavior; respond favorably to their mahouts; and appear to be calm and comfortable in their new environment, indications that the project is meeting its goals and objectives.