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Elephant Wars



Twenty years on from the worldwide ban on the ivory trade, elephant populations in several African countries are now on the rise, causing some governments to reconsider culling. With more and more people and elephants competing for increasingly limited resources, a dramatic new problem has emerged that now threatens both species: human-elephant conflict.

On the other side of the world, in India, people go daily into battle with elephants, resulting in dozens of deaths on both sides. With deforestation on a massive scale, Asian elephants are running out of space and running out of time. People and elephants are now embroiled in a bitter struggle for survival, a war which neither side can win.

In this powerful film, Animal Media Australia and Off The Fence reveal how four countries are coping with their jumbo problem, from using hot chillies in Zambia and innovative science in Botswana to 'elephant drives' in India. With amazing visuals and candid interviews, it unveils both sides of the coin, to tell the stories of elephants across both continents and those of the people who live and work with them. Told through the eyes of the widows of conflict, orphaned elephants, cutting edge researchers and traditional chiefs, this is a story of fear and devastation, of touching emotion, simple solutions and ultimately of hope.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

Terror in the paddy fields

10pm. October, 2011: It is late at night in rural Assam, India, in the middle of the rice harvest. While women and children huddle together, fear preventing restful sleep, fathers and husbands prepare to go into battle with a highly intelligent enemy. They gather in small groups beside fires lit by the road, waiting for the call to war. In small fires lit beside dirt tracks, they light long spears with sharp tips wrapped in cloth and doused in fuel. Along with the spears, they carry other defensive weapons - home made guns, fire crackers and torches.

A mobile phone rings. It is the call to battle. The men are immediately on their feet and running across the paddy field. Their combined deep voices form a terrifying war cry as they charge; their fire spears the only illumination in the dark night. And in the distance, hazy forms appear in the muted light. The enemy. A breeding herd of elephants is running for its life.

This is not a dramatization. This is what happens every single night in villages across rural India for many months of every year. As the forests are rapidly being whittled away, taken over by tea gardens, rice paddies and towns, elephants enter rice paddies and villages looking for food. In the last thirty years, 65% of the lowland forests in India's north east state of Assam have been destroyed. With a rapidly increasing human population, both natural and through immigration from neighbouring countries, former elephant habitat has become human territory. Elephants now have no choice but to raid crops in order to survive.



This is a new war. In the past, elephants and people fought on the same side.

They were used in the Greek and Roman period as war weapons, being used to charge and trample the enemy in battles such as the Punic wars. While not used directly in wars anymore, elephants still experience the devastation of war on a daily basis. Caught in the crossfire between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers,

villagers armed with guns to fight the rebels take elephant lives as well. Forced to avoid land mines from the long civil war in Angola, age old migration routes are now steeped in danger. Side-stepping rebels hiding out in the dwindling forests of Assam, India, their once safe home at the foothills of the Himalayas has become a haven of fear.

Attitudes towards elephants are changing in India.

Traditionally, they have been revered and tightly interwoven into human culture, treated as gods. But in this remote Indian state in 2003, the largest mass retaliation by humans towards elephants occurred, with more than twenty wild elephants killed by poisoning. Many Indians still worship the elephant headed Hindu god, Ganesh, building shrines to him in their simple dwellings worshipping him in temples throughout India.

Interestingly some people in Assam do not differentiate between the elephant-headed god and the wild elephants that raid their crops, some referring to elephants as ‘baba’ (god) and praying to him to stay away.

Ganesh is known as the protector, yet ironically, it is the elephants than many villagers now need protection from.



Is the long held and deep reverence that Indian people feel towards elephants enough to save them now that human lives and livelihoods are increasingly at stake?

In Assam, we meet the rural widows of the conflict and find a boy who sleeps in a tree house ever since his father was killed by an elephant the year before. We meet WWF’s Soumen Dey, a conservationist who will try anything to reduce the conflict between his people and the elephants he loves. We visit the Wildlife Trust of India’s Centre for Wildlife Research and Rehabilitation, where veterinarian, Dr. Prasantha Boro is raising a small herd of elephants orphaned by the elephant war. With slashed trunks and other injuries, the eyes of these small refugees tell a story of devastation and despair. We ride with rangers from the Ministry of Forestry who go into combat every night, risking life and limb to prevent further devastation in a war that cannot be won. And we watch elephants on the run, dodging fire spears and guns in the daily battle to find enough food to survive. But India is not alone its problem with human-elephant conflict. On the other side of the world, Africa’s elephant population is on the rise in many countries. Forced by burgeoning populations of people and elephants to come up with simple, effective solutions, there are now glimmers of hope.

Elephants hate chilli in Zambia

As elephants flee from poaching in trouble-torn Zimbabwe, in the Zambian border town of Livingstone, subsistence farmers are bearing the brunt of the elephant exodus. Using fire crackers and drums, each night villagers try to scare elephants away from their meagre crops, but elephants soon overcome their fear of these techniques.



Recognising the need for a stronger deterrent, the *Elephant Pepper Development Trust* (EPDT) shows farmers how to harness the power of chillies to deter elephants from crops. Not only do elephants hate chilli, but the fiery red fruits also provide rural people living in elephant territory with a valuable cash crop. Now the Zambian government is taking advantage of the strategy too, bringing hope to a situation that until now held little hope of a positive outcome. The Elephant Pepper Development Trust's Malvern

Karidozo, working with the Zambian Wildlife Authority's top ranger Mr. Zimba, are two men on the front line using chilli as a peaceful weapon.

In Namibia's arid environment, the battle is over water.

During the hottest months of the year, the Bushmen of Nyae Nyae Conservancy must compete with elephants for water and food. The elders say there were never so many elephants here before. Now, people are afraid to walk at night. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism's Dries Alberts has come up with some simple solutions that are beginning to make life easier – for the Bushmen and the elephants. He is using strategically located concrete cribs to provide clean water for elephants both in Nyae Nyae and in neighbouring Khaudum National Park, drawing elephants away from the villages and saving lives.



There are more elephants in Botswana than in any country in the world.

What does a country with 150,000 elephants do to protect its people? A savvy combination of wildlife-based tourism, far-sighted leadership and cutting edge science appear to be working. On the surface, while human-elephant conflict is a problem, people and elephants in Botswana have a relatively harmonious relationship. But for how long?

Dr. Mike Chase, founder and director of *Elephants Without Borders*, is using science to reveal the movements of elephants based on a number of satellite-collared animals. His research is pivotal in plans to protect elephant migration routes and safe corridors as the population continues to grow.



But as Mike is quick to point out, “Elephants don’t have passports. They don’t ascribe to national boundaries set by people, but follow rivers and age old migration paths”. Working together, African governments are developing Transfrontier Conservation Areas that cross country borders and enable elephants to move back into range where they once roamed.

As the land mines are being cleared in Angola, one by one, elephants are returning to this former civil war zone, taking pressure off the enormous populations in Botswana and other countries.

Elephant Wars delves into the heart of each of these conflict zones in Africa, then returns to the battle in India where there is at last the beginning of some steps in a positive direction. A chilli crop is being planted in Assam and others are experimenting with chilli-based elephant deterrents.

Through intensive interviews of the people living and working with elephants, amazing visuals of Asian and African elephant behaviour in captivity and the wild, *Elephant Wars* is simply an unforgettable journey. It will change the way you look at elephants and leave you wondering if there is hope for our old friendship with elephants to be rebuilt.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE



Using a five part structure, the film begins in the chaos of Assam, India. We then go to Africa, visiting Zambia, Namibia and Botswana, in search of solutions, before returning to Assam with the results of the journey as the chillies are being planted. In each part, we follow in the footsteps of human-elephant conflict specialist and author, Dr. Tammie Matson, meeting local characters affected by the conflict and those working to combat the problem. They explain what it's really like to live with elephants, their fears and their hopes for the future.

Each part shows the contrast between countries and cultures, with unique solutions presented through candid interviews and striking visuals. The situation both for the elephants and for the people in each site is focused on, showing the complexity of the problem but also the common ground between countries.

Key local characters in each part include:

India

- Dr. Prastantha Boro – veterinarian and elephant carer, Wildlife Trust of India
- Soumen Dey & Dr. Garga Mohan – WWF conservationists
- Supporting characters – widows and children of elephant conflict, rangers of the Ministry of Forestry



Zambia

- Malvern Karidozo – Elephant Pepper Development Trust conservationist
- Mr. Kanga – Zambian Wildlife Authority ranger
- Supporting characters – local people growing chillies

Namibia

- Dries Alberts – Ministry of Environment & Tourism of Namibia area warden
- Leon #Tsamkao – Spokesperson for Bushmen of Nyae Nyae Conservancy
- Chief Mayuni – traditional leader and conservationist, Caprivi region
- Richard Diggle – IRDNC/WWF representative
- Supporting characters – local Bushmen affected by elephants

Botswana

- Dr. Mike Chase & Kelly Landon – researchers, Elephants Without Borders
- Supporting characters – local people affected by elephants

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