

ELEPHANTS-

The largest land mammal to exist on earth, the elephant weighs between 2,700kg to 6,000kg. The African elephants and the Asian elephants are the only two existing species of the Proboscidea order. Elephants have large ears, massive pillar like legs, a long trunk and tough but sensitive skin. The huge body and big legs help to maintain stability and balance. They come in either black or grey and are considered descendants of the extinct species-mammoths. Thailand is the only place where white elephants are found. They are found in different habitats, such as savannahs, forests, marshes and deserts. Elephants have hair all over their body, including long eyelashes. They're the only mammals that can't jump but can learn more than 60 commands. The elephant trunk serves as a nose, an extra foot, a signalling tool and it can be used for dusting, digging and much more.

The basic diet of an elephant consists of roots, leaves, bamboo and sugarcane. As they're constantly eating, a large amount of dung is created which produces a lot of methane gas which if properly equipped can help fuel a car which will be able to run for 20 miles on the amount of methane produced by one elephant in a single day. Elephants feed on more than 29,000 kg of hay and 2,700 kg of feed per animal in a year. The two species of elephants can be told apart by their ears, the ears of African elephants are bigger than the ears of the Asian elephants. There's also a difference in their trunks- African elephants have two 'fingers' while Asian elephants have only one 'finger'. Elephants love swimming in streams and rivers, they can get easily sun burnt hence, they cover themselves in mud. They are strong, massive and intelligent hence, they were ridden on for huge wars. Elephants are wild animals but gentle by nature, but if it gets aggressive due to any external irritating stimulation, it can be the most dangerous creature on earth. Elephant crushing or training crush, is a method by which the elephants can be tamed for domestication. Elephant crushing includes corporal punishments and usage of cages which are actually forms of animal cruelty, but if trained right these wild animals could become pets and are harmless unless they see you as a threat. These tamed elephants either become pets or are kept in zoos and circuses in harsh conditions. It takes about 20-22 months for the elephant to develop in its mother's womb which is almost 2 years long. No other child takes this long to develop in its mother's womb. A female elephant gives birth to only one child every 4-5 years. When the baby elephant also known as calf is born it weighs about 120 kg. The fact that it takes 2 years for an elephant to give birth to a single calf is difficult when the elephant population is dropping rapidly. Female elephants don't mate until they are 14 years old, those that are killed before never get a chance to bring its offspring into the world.

Elephants are known as keystone species, as they affect the environment in many ways, they are talented, faithful and they are very valuable in many aspects, those most valuable being its tusks. Many valuable things are made out of the tusks of elephants. Beautiful articles are also made from the bones of the elephants such as combs, buttons, ornaments and other decorative items. The dung of the elephant can be used for making paper, photo frames, gift wrapping paper and much more. Their dung also fertilises the grasses and trees making them vital for the health of grasslands and forests. They dig up water holes during the dry season, making them a vital water source for smaller animals. Elephants have found their way into the endangered species due to selfish activities carried out by man. They're being killed for their body parts, humans are wiping out their natural habitats for their own selfish needs which results in lack of food, water, area for live hunting and poaching for the thrill of it also leads to widespread death of the majestic beasts. Therefore, humans are the main reason behind their endangerment. We must educate the public about their importance. Poachers and hunters must be arrested or fined to stop the killing of these animals.

Recently, an incident that occurred in the Indian state of Kerala where a pregnant elephant was 'killed'. A pineapple filled cracker was left for the boars as these animals were destroying the farmers crops, but instead the pregnant elephant came across it and chewed on the pineapple. The cracker went off in the elephant's mouth and a week later she passed away in a nearby river in the district of Palakkad. This incident caused a lot of outrage and many celebrities used their platform to spread the news but a day after this incident, a similar incident occurred in Himachal Pradesh to a cow where it was fed dough-laced in crackers which burst on her face.

The outrage against animal cruelty soon became anti-Kerala after bjp leader and animal rights activist accused a certain Muslim majority district for being violent instead of actually seeking justice, though the incident did not take place in the accused district of Malappuram. In contrast, the case of the cow Nandini failed to get nationwide attention in the bjp ruled state of Himachal. Politics and sensationalism played an important role in the outrage expressed. Elephants, wild boars and other crop raiding species can make a farmer's life miserable leaving millions of farmers with only a fraction of their yield.

- The elephant poaching epidemic across the world is causing wide spread outrage and people all over the world are concerned for these majestic beasts. Some ways to prevent the killing of elephants are:
- Support action-oriented organisations that are anti-poaching
- Form movements, pressure groups and campaigns to ensure your government supports our fight against wildlife crime and animal trafficking
- Share and spread true information and awareness as widely as possible
- Reduce the demand of ivory -the best way to do so is to stop supporting the poachers, hunters and people operating on the front line of these smuggling networks financially

If ivory becomes a social taboo its value and demand will diminish. Soon, all ivory carving factories both government owned and privately owned will shut down as they will go bankrupt. With the human population growing, habitat loss and conflict with communities will remain major threat to elephant survival, hence we should empower conservationists to pursue forest regeneration and grassland restoration needed to reduce human- elephant conflicts.

by Mira Dhinoo