

Does tusker's attacks on female elephants are indicating towards sexual conflict in north-western Shivalik landscape?

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ABSTRACT

Unusual interaction between male and female elephants was observed once in Chilla and twice in the Dholkhand forest range of the Rajaji National Park, in which two female elephants were killed by the tuskers. Preliminary field observations indicated that these interactions were the results of male aggression during musth and female's avoidance of courtship. In 1970s, after the establishment of Chilla hydro-electric power plant/channel, Rajaji National Park had divided into two major parts—the eastern and western part. Further, after the establishment of Uttarakhand state in 2000, increased traffic pressure in Haridwar–Dehradun national highway and railway track, which are running across this protected habitat, has restricted elephants to inter-change these forests. In Chilla forest's case, since some non-resident males are known to arrive on seasonal basis, sometimes from the Corbett Tiger Reserve area, the chances of such conflicts are lesser, but in respect of Dholkhand forest range, as most of the bulls are resident, the chances of such sexual conflicts are higher. It is therefore proposed that these attempts of the tuskers were the results of habitat's isolation and disconnectivity of larger migratory corridors, which is affecting inter breeding between different populations. An adaptive management approach will be crucial with corridor connectivity being of paramount importance, as we continue to gain knowledge on elephant's behaviour and response to such derisive impacts.

Key words: Asian elephant, male-female interactions, sexual conflict, Rajaji National Park, Shivalik Elephant Reserve