

## Manas Chapter

Most of the elephant population estimation was based on direct count method. In 2005-06, Aaranyak for the first time in northeast India had conducted elephant population estimation by using dung count method. The exercise was repeated again in 2015-16. This revealed that Manas has a stable elephant population.

Besides population estimation various other activities were carried out in and around Manas Tiger Reserve for long term conservation of elephants in the region. In 2009, *Red Cap* project was initiated wherein, three red caps-three local youths from fringe villages were identified to assess the number and extent of HEC and work cohesively with the communities to resolve them. The traditional crop guarding system has become more systematic and effective under the leadership of the *Red caps*. To strengthen this, 54 earthen watchtowers surrounded by trench has been constructed along the park boundary to safeguard the crops. These watchtowers are renovated after each monsoon. *Red caps* are also actively engaged in creating awareness and providing technical support to the villagers to keep off the elephants of their crop field. Capacity building of the *Red caps* is one of the priorities and under this they have been given several trainings time to time. Now they act as master trainers to the villagers.

In the eastern part of Chirangripu Elephant reserve, Aaranyak and Manas Chouki Ecotourism Society- have jointly launched a project to strengthen the protection of Asian elephants and its habitat. As a part of the project activity the existing nursery was renovated, making room for 60000 saplings of native species. To restore the elephant habitat, plantation with the help of villagers are undertaken periodically. Electric fencing was deployed around the villages to keep the elephants at bay. The villagers actively participated in the deploying the fencing and this has significantly reduced the incidents of elephant venturing in the villages and 50000 people are benefitting from these fences.

In the westernmost part of Chirangripu Elephant Reserve, there is limited number of anti-poaching camps and frontline staffs. As a result local NGOs have been involved by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in ensuring the protection of the rich biodiversity. To complement with this, a GPS based patrolling was implemented with the active participation of 100 volunteers from Green Forest Society. These volunteers alongwith 40 frontline staffs were provided training on GPS use and other field activity. They were supported with uniform, rain-jackets, caps & shoes. A systematic grid based approach was followed to assess the elephant occupancy and patrol the area. To garner greater support from the communities, awareness camps and art competitions are organised.