

Press Release

Aaranyak takes up elephants' habitat improvement under Rowta RF to mitigate HEC

Guwahati, August 19: Habitat replenishment can have lasting impact in favour of mitigation of human elephant conflict (HEC) and serve as the long-term solution to promote coexistence between the wide-ranging wild elephants and people.

Keeping this as the goal, biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) has initiated an ambitious project for improvement of elephant habitat covering an area of 100 hectares in Rowta Reserve Forest under Dhansiri Forest Division in Udalguri district of Assam.

“The Aaranyak team is striving for habitat improvement and restoring degraded areas under the project to secure elephant habitat and facilitate elephant movement for long-term mitigation of human-elephant confrontation,” says Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, a senior conservation scientist in Aaranyak.

The area of interest for replenishment is a mosaic of grasslands and woodlands, with different soil substratum ranging from sandy coarse to rocky and swampy areas.

“Since June this year, we have planted over 25,000 saplings of various tree, and shrubs species. It is important to understand and have knowledge on what the land-use pattern is and what species were historically present in the area. Thus, we conducted a survey prior to the plantation in the nearby forest patches that are still intact, to make informed decisions on what native species to plant,” says conservation biologist Dr Alolika Sinha.

The 61st Battalion of the SSB, Dhansiri Forest Division and Dhansiri-Sikaridanga JFMC at Rowta Reserve Forest collaborated with Aaranyak on the plantation drive carried out on the occasion of World Elephant Day celebrated with the theme ‘Safeguarding Elephant Habitats for a Sustainable Tomorrow’. Around 2000 rhizomes of *Alpinia* spp. were planted on this day for securing the elephant habitat, as it is an important fodder species.

Raj Kumar Xalxo, Commandant of 61st Bn SSB helped the initiative by deploying 30 SSB personnel who actively contributed towards the plantation endeavour in presence of the SSB Deputy commandant, Sunil Kumar,” says Aaranyak field official Rabiya Daimari expressing her gratitude. The initiative is supported by SBI Foundation and UNDP.

Aaranyak officials Rabiya Daimari, Didom Daimari, Reshma Narzary, Mondeep Basumatari, Dibakar Nayak, Bikash Tossa, Bineswar Daimari and Rupam Goyari played key roles in execution of the novel initiative for HEC mitigation.

It may be mentioned Aaranyak has been on an overdrive to empowering local communities and securing habitats to promote human-elephant coexistence.

The Asian elephant being a wide-ranging species needs expansive resources for its survival, and thus comes in close confrontation with people, often resulting in human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the form of crop and property damages, human injuries and deaths and retaliatory killings of the elephants. Raging HEC undermines conservation efforts to safeguard elephants and their habitats and affect the well-being of people. It is a complex issue, and HEC mitigation requires a multi-pronged and multi-stakeholder's approach.

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