

PRESS RELEASE

Aaranyak trains ‘Village Champions’ to raise awareness on HEC mitigation

Guwahati, Feb 20: With the phenomenon of Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) becoming more discerning every year, there is need for raising the awareness level among the community on effective ways to tackle and cope with HEC incidents.

For the purpose, Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org), a premier research-based biodiversity conservation organisation, has created a pool of ‘Village Champions’ in 16 elephants-affected villages across five districts – Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of eastern Assam. Village Champions are entrusted to hold awareness programmes amongst the villagers on HEC and effective mitigation measures. This will ultimately build capacity of the community to cope with HEC through mitigation measures.

Village champions are local youths selected from the villages where we are working to facilitate coexistence between humans and elephants. They will help deliver the outreach programme to raise awareness about elephants, avoiding HEC, and conservation. We will train these champions to deliver HEC awareness which will help us reach at least 70% of households (n=1,800) across 20 villages in eastern Assam and West Garo hills of Meghalaya. It is worth mentioning that educating villagers about elephants, and HEC through village champions is a part of our goal of promoting human-elephant coexistence, in partnership with British Asian Trust (BAT), and supported by Darwin Initiative.

A resource team from Aaranyak headed by senior conservation scientist Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar conducted an orientation workshop for selected Village Champions at All Assam Sonowal Kachari Student Union campus, Kacharibari, in Dibrugarh.

Dr Lahkar made an elaborate presentation in the workshop on HEC and the role of village champions in mitigating the same. He shared Aaranyak’s experiences so far in dealing with HEC mitigation measures across the regions for enhancing knowledge of Village Champions. The programme was held under the aegis of Elephant Research Conservation Division (ERCD) of Aaranyak.

The introductory session was hosted by Aaranyak official Zakir Islam Bora who explained the purpose of the orientation programme and the key role that is expected to be played by the Village Champions in HEC affected villages among the community.

An interactive session was conducted by Jayanta Kumar Pathak, a senior Aaranyak official, with the coordination of Zakir Islam Bora, Dr. Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, Niranjan Bhuyan among the village champions on their views on environment and wildlife.

The village champions from various backgrounds shared their experiences, ideas and issues concerned. The inductive generalization of their ideas and experiences in agriculture, forest resources and livelihood generation are quite interesting.

They have given the idea of cooperation and connectivity in the conflict time and also shared some traditional methods of human animal conflict mitigation. Most of them are interested in wildlife and want to work further and showed their interest and gratitude towards this opportunity. This orientation program will

be effective in understanding the perspective and involvement of the people in the success of human animal coexistence.

Aaranyak's community coordinator Deepika Chiring Phukan, project officer Rimpee Moran and Afride Rahman played an active role in organising the workshop.

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