

PRESS RELEASE

RRU volunteers from HEC-hit areas core to Aaranyak's mitigation strategy

Guwahati, Feb 7: As the frontline biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak has adopted a people-centric approach for mitigation of human-elephant conflicts in parts of Assam and Meghalaya, a large group of volunteers selected from HEC-affected villagers, has been providing outstanding services for facilitation of coexistence between communities and wild elephants.

These volunteers are members of several Rapid Response Units (RRUs) formed by Aaranyak in HEC- affected areas and entrusted mainly to manage the HEC-alert network to warn villagers in time about presence of wild elephants so as to facilitate their safe passage.

The RRU members are basically villagers who have volunteered to monitor elephants in their respective areas and act as an early warning system by share information about elephants movement promptly via assigned "WhatsApp" groups.

In order to build capacity of these volunteer groups, Aaranyak's resource team, organises specially-designed training workshops for the RRU members.

“We impart this training using a pre-designed training module where we conduct sessions on understanding elephant ecology and behaviour, effective ways to minimise HEC and how to monitor elephant movement in the human-use areas and pass down the information to the villagers through a dedicated WhatsApp group to alert them. So far we have formed six RRUs in eastern Assam, and four in West Garo Hills in Meghalaya,” said Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, a conservation scientist of Aaranyak

Aaranyak recently organised a series of three workshops for RRU members in eastern Assam districts of Majuli, Dibrugarh and Jorhat During January 30 to February 1 this year.

The RRU training workshops began with highlighting Aaranyak's efforts in conservation of biodiversity and ensuring people's well-being and the objectives of creating RRUs by Aaranyak as explained by Aaranyak officials Zakir Islam Bora and Niranjana Bhuyan.

This introductory sessions were followed by presentations of Aaranyak resource persons Rubul Tanti and Anjan Baruah who explained morphological characteristics to identify elephants in a herd, their distribution and the drivers of HEC. They also explained various roles and responsibilities that are expected to be shouldered by RRUs in minimising HEC. Baruah also delved into the tried and tested mitigation measures to promote coexistence.

“Our team also conducted a hands-on session on how to assess crop and property damage and fill in the applications for claiming ex-gratia for the losses incurred due to HEC,” said conservation biologist Dr Alolika Sinha of Aaranyak.

“These trainings are a part of the human elephant coexistence initiative undertaken by Aaranyak and British Asian Trust, with support from Darwin Initiative in eastern Assam and Meghalaya,” said Aaranyak official Zakir Islam Bora.

Aaranyak's official Ejaj Ahmed, who is also one of the "AAPDA MITRA" (volunteers trained by the State Disaster Management Authority) demonstrated administration of first aid in case of accidents caused due to HEC.

Altogether 133 villagers, members of RRU and Anti-Depredation Squads (a group formed by the Forest Department to address HEC) and forest officials were trained during these workshops.

During the series of training workshops, Aaranyak provided 10 rechargeable torch lights to ADS from Namsang Tea Estate where the wild elephants frequently visit the village and also to RRU in Majuli.

Aaranyak's officials Pranjit Borah, Junak Baruah, Ananta Dutta, Cheeranjeev Kalita, Lakhinath Taid, Dhantu Gogoi, and Bijoy Kalita along with the village champions actively took part in facilitating trainings.

Aaranyak resource team carried out pre and post evaluation the participants of training workshops to understand the knowledge gained by them.

***Press statement issued by Bijay Sankar Bora, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
Contact No. 8638229722, Email ID: bijaysankar@aaranyak.org***