

PRESS RELEASE

Village Champions crucial component in HEC mitigation efforts of Aaranyak

Guwahati, April 30: Premier biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak as part of its sustained research-driven efforts for mitigation of human-elephant conflict (HEC) and facilitation of human-elephant coexistence in Assam and Meghalaya, conducted a training cum sensitisation workshop for 'Village Champions' from 15 targeted villages HEC hotspots in Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts in Dibrugarh on Friday.

The workshop conducted by a team of resource persons from Aaranyak led by senior conservation scientist, Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, was also participated by Field Assistants and Project Assistants from all these districts.

Dr Lahkar addressing the workshop told the village champions about the crucial role they could play in mitigating the HEC in hotspot areas. He explained in detail about responsibilities of village champions as well as the procedure of getting compensation from the government against crop and house damage caused by wild elephants.

He called upon village champions to sensitise villagers in their respective villages about the procedure so that affected villagers in HEC hotspots could get such compensation prompt.

"Elephants are not entering into human settlements. In the true sense, human beings have occupied elephant habitats," said Jayanta Kumar Pathak, senior conservation educator at Aaranyak while interacting with participants in the workshop which was organised under a project sponsored by British Asian Trust and Darwin Initiative.

He also interacted with the participants on inseparable human-elephant relationship in respect nature conservation, religious and cultural traditions.

Anjan Baruah, a senior conservation manager at Aaranyak made a presentation on the benefits and management of low-cost community-managed solar-power fences for HEC mitigation and coexistence. He said this short-term mitigation measures can give a great relief to the society under stress in HEC hotspots.

With the phenomenon of HEC becoming more discerning every year, there is urgent need for creating awareness among the communities on effective ways to tackle and cope with HEC situation.

For the purpose, Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) has created a pool of 'Village Champions' in 20 elephants-affected villages across five districts – Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of eastern Assam and West Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

Village Champions are honorary positions 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 Aaranyak team is working to facilitate coexistence between humans and elephants. They will help deliver the outreach programme to raise awareness about elephants, avoiding HEC, and conservation.

Aaranyak has trained these champions to deliver HEC awareness which it to reach at least 70% of households across 20 target villages in eastern Assam and West Garo hills of Meghalaya. Educating villagers about elephants, and HEC through village champions is a part of Aaranyak's goal of promoting human-elephant coexistence, in partnership with British Asian Trust (BAT), and supported by Darwin Initiative.

The introductory session was initiated by Aaranyak's official Zakir Islam Bora while the workshop was coordinated by Aaranyak's team members and officials Niranjan Bhuyan, Rimpee Moran through interactions with participants.

*Press statement issued by Dr Alolika Sinha, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
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