

Press Release on facilitating coexistence in HEC-hit areas

Aaranyak-SBI Foundation adopts multi-pronged strategy to mitigate HEC

Guwahati, January 29: As part of the sustained pursuit to facilitate coexistence and mitigate human elephant conflict (HEC), premier biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) has adopted a multi-pronged community-oriented strategy to achieve its goals in this regard.

The multi-dimensional strategy comprises of staging street plays to sensitise the HEC-affected communities on ways to usher in an ecosystem of coexistence with wild elephants as well as providing the community options of alternative crops not palatable to elephants so as to supplement their livelihood in HEC affected areas where traditional crop culture stands vulnerable to depredation by wild elephants.

Aaranyak organized a street play at the 13th Indo-Bhutan Friendship Mela in Subankhata, Baksa district on January 25 in coordination with Subankhata Bi-weekly Market Management Committee and with support from the SBI Foundation. The play, titled "Koka Nati Aru Hati", was performed by a group of students from Sripanchami Himalee High School, Bhutankhuti, who were earlier trained by the Aaranyak team.

The play highlighted the raging issue of human-elephant conflict (HEC) and its drivers such as deforestation and habitat loss. It explored how the relationship between humans and elephants has changed over time, and how environmental degradation has disrupted this harmony, creating conflicts that harm both the species.

“The skit highlighted certain practical strategies for peaceful coexistence, emphasizing that elephants are vital to maintaining a balanced ecosystem. It captivated over 300 audiences, sparking meaningful conversations about wildlife conservation and sustainable living. The storytelling resonated with the local community, inspiring them—especially the youth—to view elephants as allies rather than adversaries,” said Dr Alolika Sinha, a Senior Conservation Biologist in Aaranyak.

Underlining the importance of adopting alternative crop practices in HEC affected areas for achieving coexistence with wild elephants, Aaranyak as part of the multi-pronged strategy sensitises the affected communities on merits of such crops that are hardly foraged by wild elephants. These, alternative crops have emerged as a sustainable solution to mitigate conflicts and promote coexistence with elephants.

These communities who have to share space with the wild elephants, often come across negative interaction as crop losses that disrupt their livelihoods.

Aaranyak organised a training session on alternative crop practices at Bongurum village of Udalguri district of Assam on January 23 led under the supervision of Aaranyak official Dipankar Haloi.

The session focused on the organic cultivation of alternative crops such as Assam lemon, ginger, turmeric, and rapeseed-mustard, along with discussions on crops already cultivated in the locality.

These crops, being less attractive to elephants, present a viable option for reducing crop foraging. Farmers were also informed about various government schemes and initiatives they could benefit from to enhance their agricultural practices and income.

The training emphasised sustainable agricultural practices, such as integrated nutrient, pest, and disease management, complemented by practical tips for pest and disease identification.

Participants were introduced to the concept of organic farming and natural farming inputs like Panchagavya, Neemastra, and Beejamrit, which improve soil health and ensure sustainable crop production. The importance of environment-friendly practices that enhance yields besides preserving soil health and ecosystems.

Aaranyak aims to strike a balance between human needs and wildlife conservation, paving the way for harmony and resilience in these vulnerable areas.

Aaranyak's team comprising Abhijit Saikia, Mondeep Basumatari, Dipankar Haloi, Abhilasha Boruah, Dibakar Nayak, Jiban Chetry, Jaugashar Basumatary, Bikash Tossa and Pradip Barman facilitated the events with support from SBI Foundation.

(For more information, please contact Dr. Alolika Sinha (8011784272/alolika@aaranyak.org), Sr. Manager, Elephant Research and Conservation Division, Aaranyak)

***Press statement issued by Bijay Sankar Bora, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
Contact No. 9476692003, Email ID: pr@aaranyak.org***