

Project Update: March 2014

March is the harvesting season in the villages and most of the villagers were busy with harvesting their paddy crops (plate 1). The incidences of breaking the electric fence of the park and crop damages also escalate during the harvesting season. We continued collecting data on crop raiding elephants and raided lands.



Plate 1: Farmers are harvesting paddy.

For the first time in Sri Lanka, we could set some night vision camera traps to capture crop raiding elephants in our study site with the support of Rufford small grant. We set night vision camera traps at popular elephant footpaths and at sites of the park electric fence where elephants trespass frequently. We set camera traps at different locations during our field work. We could capture five crop raiding elephants including [m155] – the one we identified during our last field work as a crop raider. The other four males were new (plate 2), even to my “ID catalogue of elephants in the Udawalawe National Park” which contains 340 males. We believe that night vision camera traps will help a lot in identifying crop raiding elephants and hope to continue and expand use of night vision camera traps in the future.





Plate 2: Crop raiders captured from night vision cameras.

We observed [m155] in a village, who got late to get back inside the corridor and was being chased by some villagers with some fire crackers (plate 3). The elephant was running towards the Dayaiyagala corridor and dropped some dung balls on the run. Then we checked the dung to check whether it contains any crops. We found parts of several crops such as paddy, banana leaves, manioc and mango fruits (plate 4).



Plate 3: [m155] was running towards the corridor while was being chased by a farmer.



Plate 4: Some crops in [m155]'s dung.