



Protect the Elephant

Amongst Sri Lanka's animals the most majestic is the elephant. Its size, shape, walk and demeanour have become the theme of many a poetical composition. The Kandyan dancer conceived the 'Gajaba Wannama' based on the elephant's movements.

Yet, today the Sri Lankan elephant is faced with numerous threats. Development activities have displaced the elephants from their natural habitats in some regions. In such circumstances, they move into human settlements, where, they are shot and killed or severely wounded.

Terrorism, too, has taken toll of the elephants. Recently, 17 elephants had been shot and killed in the Lahugala jungle of the Ampara District. This was heartrending for animal lovers.

At the turn of the century, there were about 10,000 wild elephants in Sri Lanka's jungles. During the last decades, the numbers had seriously dwindled. The number of elephants that roam about in scattered areas in herds is estimated as between 2,500 and 3,000

The elephant being a valuable element of Sri Lanka's environment, its protection in the protected areas of the country is receiving the attention of the authorities. The Department of Wildlife is taking action to re-open the 'elephants' paths' or 'alimang kadas' which had been closed.

The elephant paths known as 'alimankadas', 'alimanaly' or 'alimandawa' which pass through jungles are terms used by people who know the jungles and their elephants. The individual elephant and the herd, both as a practice tread these paths. Before human settlements came up in Bintenne Pattuwe, Werugam Pattuwe and Panama Pattuwe, the elephants of Ruhuna were accustomed to traverse through the jungles along these paths in complete freedom. Even now, the elephants of Ruhuna National Park come to Mahaweve in Lahugala to graze on a variety of grass called "Beru" along these paths. It was some of the Lahugala elephants that were killed by the eastern terrorists.