

Sri Lankan veterinarians strike for better treatment of elephants, 2010

- ([mainly or initiated by](#)) [people of color](#) [1]

Timing

August 16,
2010
to:
August 21,
2010

Location and Goals

Country:
Sri Lanka

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

1. To speak to the Minister of Wildlife about the condition of elephants in Sri Lanka.
2. Better treatment facilities for veterinarians working with elephants.
3. For the Sri Lankan government to hire more veterinarians.
4. "A cabinet-approved plan to resettle elephants in nature reserves."
5. The hiring of veterinarians to fill 8 vacancies within the wildlife department.
6. The establishment of a hierarchy within the veterinary service, to allow for career and wage advances without leaving their department.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 097. Protest strike>By Civil Servants

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 097. Protest strike>By Civil Servants

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 097. Protest strike>By Civil Servants
Methods in 4th segment:

- 097. Protest strike>By Civil Servants
Methods in 5th segment:

- 097. Protest strike>By Civil Servants
Methods in 6th segment:

- 097. Protest strike>By Civil Servants
Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 013. Deputations
Segment Length:
20 hours

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Environment

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Wildlife Veterinarians of Sri Lanka

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Dr. Tharaka Prasad, Dr. Vijitha Perera, Dr. Chandanna Jayasinghe and the Wildlife Vet Association.

Partners:

None known

External allies:

None known

Involvement of social elites:

None known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Additional notes on joining/exiting order:
No known joining order
Segment Length:
20 hours

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
Sri Lankan Government
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Not known
Campaigner violence:
None known
Repressive Violence:
None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

0 points out of 3 points

Total points:

1 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Limited information available about outcome. The only documentation about outcome notes that strikers met with the Deputy Economic Development Minister.

In Sri Lanka, elephants are both a valued part of traditional culture and an increasing risk to the populace. A spike in population on the Sri Lankan island has led the government to open lands traditionally reserved for the elephants to settlement by people. Narrowing habitats mean that encounters between elephants and people are more and more common, posing a threat to both elephants and humans. Since 1990, the number of elephants residing in Sri Lanka has fallen from about 12,000 to approximately 4,000, the result of hunting and dwindling food sources. When farmers take over land traditionally used by the elephants, they often improvise electrified fences in an effort to protect their subsistence crops. However, contact with these fences enrages the elephants, causing them to crush people and/or property.

Economic depression in Sri Lanka has caused a reduction in funding for the wildlife veterinary program that provides services to enraged or injured elephants. Sri Lanka's Federal Wildlife Department generally employs nineteen wildlife veterinarians for this purpose, but eight of the positions have been vacant since 2009 and there is no effort to fill them. In 2010 the Sri Lankan government introduced a new elephant conservation plan in an attempt to address increasing conflict between Sri Lankan villagers and elephants. However, the Wildlife Vet

Association (WVA), a union that represents the veterinarians felt that the plan was drastically inadequate for the magnitude of conflict and casualty currently experienced by both sides of the conflict. The veterinarians began meeting with government officials in an attempt to facilitate more drastic policy change. Specifically, they were concerned with the lack of resource for elephants pushed off their habitat by cattle or subsistence farming. They were told by the Wildlife Department Director General, Ananda Wijesooriya, that there simply wasn't enough land, and therefore nothing could be done.

On August 15, 2010, the WVA announced that the veterinarians for the entire country would hold a weeklong strike to protest the inadequacy of the new elephant conservation plan, as well as the disregard for professional development of the veterinarians. Between August 16 and August 21, 2010, the eleven national wildlife veterinarians held a strike, refusing to attend work or serve the government in any capacity. During this time, they continued to serve injured elephants. The strikers presented a series of demands. Firstly, they wanted a respectful meeting with the minister in charge of wildlife. They also demanded better working conditions for wildlife veterinarians, as well as the hiring of eight more, to fill the department's capacity. They requested that the government establish new nature reserves, and resettle displaced elephants into them. Finally, they demanded a hierarchy within the Wildlife department, so that WVA members could ascend in seniority and compensation without leaving the veterinary profession. During the week, representatives of the WVA met with the Deputy Economic Development Minister, though his connection to their department was limited at best. Beyond this, there isn't documentation to suggest that any of their demands were met.

Population continues to increase in Sri Lanka as the economy continues to suffer. Elephants will continue to be evicted from their natural homes, and respond to displacement with confusion and rage. This experience isn't unique to Sri Lankan elephants, but mirrored in the experiences of communities and states across the world. Conflict in the relationship between the natural world and human will increase as urbanization continues.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Haviland, Charles. "Sri Lanka wildlife vets go on strike." *BBC News* 17 Aug 2010.

Pearse, Damien. "Sri Lanka's Human-Elephant War Escalates." *Sky News Online* 18 Aug 2010.

"Sri Lankan vets on strike to protest elephant mistreatment." *The Telegraph* 17 Aug 2010.

"Vets left in the wilds." *The Sunday Times* 22 Aug 2010.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Hanna King, 13/02/2010

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