Elephant Tourism in Nepal

Historical Perspectives, Current Health and Welfare Challenges, and Future Directions



Michelle Szydlowski

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Michelle Szydlowski, PhD
University of Exeter, St. Luke's Campus, Exeter EX1 2LU, UK
info@internationalelephants.org



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CABI
Nosworthy Way
Wallingford
Oxfordshire OX10 8DE
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1491 832111
E-mail: info@cabi.org
Website: www.cabi.org

CABI
200 Portland Street
Boston
MA 02114
USA

T: +1 (617)682-9015
E-mail: cabi-nao@cabi.org

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Dedication

For my family, thank you for supporting and loving me through all our adventures.

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Introduction

The nature guide, positioned in the lead jeep, surveyed the landscape as we drove through Chitwan National Park in Nepal. Suddenly, he turned and shouted to the rest of our convoy. His voice was muffled by wind and engine noise, and we asked our jeep's guide to translate. 'He yelled "Porcupine"', explained our guide. The jeeps stopped and our group of researchers, zoo personnel, and tourists from the USA and Canada happily jumped out to investigate. 'Stay close', whispered one, and I looked at her quizzically. 'Why?' I asked. 'Are the porcupines dangerous?' 'Porcupine? It's a cobra!' she exclaimed. I glanced down to realize the ground was full of snake holes. I turned to the tourists surrounding me, and in silent unison we slowly backed up and climbed aboard the jeep. We soon learned that the nature guide had shouted in Nepali, but our Nepalese guide 'heard' in English. He explained that the Nepali word 'sounded like porcupine' and he simply assumed he had heard correctly. It became our habit to shout 'porcupine' in any potentially fraught situation, even after we returned home.

I share this vignette as an introduction to this work for several reasons. First, language is often not reliable when spoken across cultural boundaries. As Annemarie Mol (2014, p. 107) poetically stated, words are 'not spoken in language but in daily life practices', taking on a life of their own dependent upon 'the unique combination of sites and situations' in which they are used. The words themselves become 'participants' in each situation, but do not 'form a coherent system' with

which to define cultural differences in understanding (Mol, 2014, p. 110). Words failed us on our jeep safari, not only through the miscommunications between people who use and understand more than one language, but also when we were struck wordless upon sensing danger.

Throughout this book, various stakeholders use Nepali and English words to discuss topics such as conservation, ethics, and care in Nepal, but these words often transform dependent upon both the situation and the listener. When a Nepalese veterinarian describes a 'good stable' or 'quality food' for animals,[1] his definition of the word may not be what external welfare workers would describe as even mildly acceptable. Finding a common language and a common ground for conservation groups – including those from other countries – is not an easy task given the fluidity of spoken words, but it is a worthwhile one when trying to study groups focused on 'saving' animals.

Despite creating communication issues, such variability of word meanings allows for an exploration into what Marilyn Strathern (1992, pp. 72–73) calls merography – bringing in seemingly disparate entities which in fact share connections once followed down exploratory trails. While Strathern coined her neologism to describe biological and societal roles in English kinship, it has since been applied to everything from the 'social meaning of DNA' to fungal spores (Strathern, 1992; Franklin, 2003, p. 65; Tsing, 2014, p. 223). In this case, the porcupine in the above story is not simply a cobra suffering from a case of mistaken identity, nor is it in fact a porcupine at all. It is, instead, two animals linked together through the words and actions of those present during the sighting and those to whom the story gets repeated again and again. This non-porcupine also serves to demonstrate how the connections between very diverse people – in this case drivers, guides, Americans, Europeans, Nepalese, tourists, researchers, veterinarians, conservationists, and businessmen – create similarities through shared experiences which are greatly influenced by the choice of words used to describe them.

This book will examine these connections as they weave throughout practices of conservation and care enacted by people of many ethnicities,

nationalities, and beliefs. For example, writing merographically allows an exploration of the meaning of 'marginalized groups' or 'best' practices by bringing in the stories of individuals and organizations, analysing the connections between conservation and captive animals and the ties between American women (*Homo sapiens*) and female Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*). These explorations allow me to approach elephants not only as members of 'vast evolutionary lineages stretched across millions of years' but also as 'fleeting and fragile individual' beings involved in meaning-making with humans (van Dooren, 2014, p. 23).

Secondly, the porcupine narrative above demonstrates how what one group of people sees as an appropriate activity – such as pursuing a potentially deadly snake – is not acceptable to others, even others with the same nationality, interest in wildlife, or cultural background. Vitally important to this volume is the idea that what is appropriate care of or behaviour towards humans, captive animals, or wildlife is not easily definable nor universally practised. For example, basic animal welfare guidelines such as the 'five freedoms' (Brambell *et al.*, 1965; FAWC, 1979, p. 2) have been adopted by many organizations, including the government of Nepal (GoN, 2016). However, these freedoms are often ignored in everyday practice. This may be because the idea of 'appropriateness', like 'care', is fluid, location specific, and value laden. Therefore, while these freedoms can provide a starting point for discussions surrounding the ethical treatment of animals, studying the practices of caregiving and interacting with animals in international settings should be done with a great deal of reflexivity (Mead and Morris, 1934). Differences in methodology, belief systems, and cultural background all inform what each person might deem appropriate interaction, good welfare, or adequate care.[2]

Analysing interactions between human and non-human animals is a complex and daunting task, made more difficult by the variety of international interests involved in a small country like Nepal, and the even smaller village of Sauraha, which serves as a field site for the study described in this book. As this volume proceeds, the ribbons of ethics, care, conservation, and the language which surrounds Sauraha and its

elephant residents will intertwine and unwind, much like the paths of humans and animals through the jungles of Nepal.

Why Elephants?

Vinciane Despret describes being drawn to ethology because of problems with language much like those mentioned in the anecdote above (Buchanan *et al.*, 2015). But rather than an issue with the translation of words from one language to another, Despret describes the challenge of translating non-human languages into stories with which humans can identify and understand (Buchanan *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, Despret warns ethologists against trying too hard to see behaviours and languages as fitting into existing theoretical frameworks, instead encouraging them to embrace the story itself – and allow themselves to be surprised by what they find (Buchanan *et al.*, 2015). Like Strathern, Despret suggests following the stories along whatever path they take, instead of attempting to arrive at a predefined destination.

Many of the stories in this volume will twist and turn in unexpected directions. To tell the stories of humans and elephants, I will often adopt a biographical approach. Not only does this meandering style fit more with my own biography – that of a high-school literature teacher turned veterinary technician turned college professor and elephant researcher – but it also allows me to examine what is happening in Nepal with an eye towards individual beings. As Krebber and Roscher (2018, p. 2) explain, writing animal biographies is one way to experience animals as individuals without the need to 'read their minds'.

Elephant individuals in Nepal are members of one species which could benefit from this type of biographical approach. Due to their long, shared history with humans, their status as an endangered species, and their identification as a charismatic animal throughout Asia (both religiously and culturally), captive elephants are an ideal cynosure for a study of ethics and care. Captive elephants in Nepal find themselves in situations vastly different from those of their wild counterparts (Kharel, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Desai, 2008) and are often viewed by stakeholders as an

entirely different species. The issues surrounding these owned, captive endangered individuals will be examined from the viewpoints of various stakeholders interested in the future of these pachyderms. It is vital that the laws and ethics surrounding the ownership of these individuals be examined from the perspectives of community members, the owners themselves, and individual elephants.

It is also important that such work documents the health and welfare of captive elephants in Nepal. Except for a few small studies of specific populations of elephants (Shrestha and Gairhe, 2006; Gairhe, 2012; Locke, 2017b), these topics have been overlooked within Nepal (Kharel, 2002; Varma *et al.*, 2008; Varma and Ganguly, 2011). Therefore, in this volume, information regarding individual health, welfare, and husbandry practices will be carefully examined regarding current global veterinary views on welfare, nutrition, care, and safety in captivity.

The elephants within this work find themselves the focus of many smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Sauraha which list as their goals 'saving' elephants or finding alternatives to 'traditional' use. Hoping to end elephant-backed safari, these organizations are often at odds with private elephant owners and one another. A thorough examination of these and other organizations' websites, promotional materials, and mission statements form the initial groundwork for discovering their stated, public motivations. For example, do these websites sell the idea of 'Western enlightenment' over traditional practices? Is participation in certain programmes going to 'change the world' or simply 'save elephants'? Participant observations, attendance at events, examination of social media posts, and interviews with staff will provide insight into these organizations' hidden motivations. By examining both overt and covert motivations behind these organizations' efforts, as well as the ways in which their messages are interpreted by local community members and other stakeholders, we may find the key to a more unified approach to captive elephant welfare.

Situating Nepal's Elephants

Due to space constraints within the main body of this work, an extensive comparison of management styles, legislation, environmental politics, historical use, and elephant–human relationships between Nepal and other countries (both range and non-range states) can instead be found in Appendix I and Appendix II (this volume). In brief, captive elephants in Nepal represent a much smaller population and reside in vastly different conditions from those in other range states. For example, while India and Thailand are home to approximately 3500 and 3700 captive elephants, respectively, Nepal has only 120–150 (Government of India, 2010; Sarma *et al.*, 2012; AERSM, 2017; Menon and Tiwari, 2019).

Rather than being housed in villages or grouped in camps as they might in India or Thailand, Nepal's privately owned elephants are kept in small stables behind human residences or hotels, and live singly or in pairs (Tipprasert, 2002; see Chapters 7 and 10, this volume). With few exceptions these individuals are kept chained when not working and are not allowed physical contact with each other when stabled. Other differences include the use within Nepal of unhulled rice as a food staple, a lack of provisioned forest product, and a lack of stabling within/near forested areas or free-choice foraging in natural settings (see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010; also Chapters 5 and 10, this volume). Another major difference arises from the types of elephant usage found in range countries. Elephants in Nepal are not currently employed as street-beggars or used for farming, nor do they face lives as 'living statues' outside temples as they might in other range states (such as the Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana states of southern India) (Varma, 2008; Varma *et al.*, 2009; Vijayakrishnan and Sinha, 2019; see Appendix II, this volume). In addition, there are no mahout-owned elephants (*mahout* is the common term for both elephant drivers or caregivers within Nepal; see Chapter 2, this volume) in Nepal, nor are there village-dwelling elephants of the type described by Lainé (2020) in his discussion of Laos.

The origins of elephant usage also vary by country. Thai elephant camps traditionally began amidst larger-scale logging practices and transitioned to tourism following the logging ban of the 1980s (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). In contrast, use in Nepal began with elephants first as instruments of war, then as mounts for hunting,

logging, and farming practices, and later in forestry work and conservation activities (Kharel, 2002; Locke, 2008; Mishra, 2008). The use of elephants in Nepalese tourism practices, however, only arose in the 1960s (see Chapter 4, this volume). Current similarities between Nepal and other range states include employment gaps among forestry personnel and elephant staff, a lack of registration or CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) enforcement, the use of a breaking ritual, a lack of experienced mahouts, a lack of adequate husbandry, and a lack of legislative oversight codifying care practices or training methods (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018, p. 13; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). In addition, Nepal is among the approximately half of range states which do not have any form of management guidelines (AERSM, 2017). As in other range states, elephant care in Nepal is intimately tied to tourism dollars (see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020; also Chapter 4, this volume). These similarities and differences, and the ways in which they create unique issues and opportunities within Nepal, will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Overarching Research Questions, Aims, and Objectives

This book attempts to identify the similarities and differences in ethical approaches to elephant welfare used by NGOs active in Nepal and determine how these approaches impact the welfare of humans and non-humans in the area. It also attempts to identify key areas of overlap between governmental, non-governmental, local communities, and national/international volunteer organizations interested in conservation and animal care. The overarching questions ask: can the health and welfare of captive elephants and their caregivers be improved through an examination of the similarities and differences in ethical approaches used by elephant owners and NGOs active in Sauraha, Nepal? Are the ethical norms of each group so different that they are getting in each other's way? Is it possible to identify norms that are consistent

across cultures and reframe them in a way that will aid organizations in finding a common language for conservation and care efforts? This information is vital to determining how to link organizational goals and practices to create more successful outcomes for both wild and captive animals. The knowledge gained from such a study will ideally contribute to improving the welfare of non-human animals in areas of conservation focus.

The first objective of the research was to examine the motivations of local, national, and international conservation programmes active in Nepal, through the lens that everyone is doing what they feel is 'ethical' or 'best' for animals and communities, but everyone's best is different. Michael Lambek (2010) calls this 'ordinary ethics'. Lambek (2010) explains that many people not only feel a strong *desire* to do the right thing, but also believe that they are *behaving* ethically as well (see Chapter 2, this volume). Personnel from organizations active in conservation may not only profess a desire to do the right thing but may also deeply believe that their methods are ethical – or even *more* ethical – than someone else's. This volume will explore whether the common refrain of 'doing the best for the animals' means the same thing to each organization. Or more likely, does the cultural background and baggage of each group inform their definition of the best, and do they try to apply this definition to workers from other cultures? Sometimes even when organizations do their best, they are unable to succeed. Perhaps finding a common language with which to discuss conservation and ethical behaviour can aid these organizations in helping animals.

Each of these organizations has its own mission statement or promotional motto, style of messaging, and organizational ethics. While each of the organizations contacted for the current study lists some type of conservation activity as its focus, they differ in methods, resource use, funding, and relationship with the local peoples. This volume will discuss the perceived efficacy and examples of best practices of each type of welfare or conservation organization through an examination of community attitudes towards the group, the successes and failures of meeting their stated goals, and their ability to work with or around the larger community.

This volume also attempts to identify key areas of overlap between government, NGOs, local communities, and national/international volunteer organizations. I would like to identify norms that are consistent across cultures and reframe them in a way that will aid organizations in finding a common language for these animal-related efforts. This information is vital to determining how to link organizational goals and practices to create more successful outcomes not only in Nepal, but also in other areas of conservation focus.

Captive Asian elephants serve as the focus around which to examine the above aims. This volume discusses the complex situation surrounding the ownership and care of captive endangered elephants used in both tourism and park management, and the similarly complex situation facing organizations that wish to help these animals. It also examines the motivations and aims of such groups, the ways in which they practise conservation, and the ways in which they complement or counteract each other's efforts. It is my hope that through this examination, a common language or common ground for conservation can be identified, leading to more appropriate living conditions for captive elephants and their caregivers through improved communication between stakeholders.

Research Impacts

Ralf Buckley (2011) describes the desperate need for integration between academic fields such as biology, tourism studies, and psychology in the research of ecotourism, conservation, and environmental impact. Fennell (2013) calls for an immediate, interdisciplinary approach to animals used in tourism. He cites a need for more diverse information regarding the biological, behavioural, and emotional needs of animals used for human entertainment (Fennell, 2013). The lack of scholarship on the unique and complex needs of these animals is directly impacting their welfare (Garrison, 2008; Mason and Veasey, 2010; Fennell, 2013), and the field is ripe for the current study and its use of the unique biology-based, anthrozoologically filtered lens described below.

While ecotourism, NGOs, and conservation are all separate topics of much academic debate, this book uniquely combines these issues in a way that will contribute to conservation efforts by identifying key motivations, beliefs, and words used by organizations interested in conserving nature and environment. Finding commonalities in the motivations and practices of parties active in Nepal will hopefully allow for a better understanding of each group's ordinary ethics and bolster these organizations' abilities to work together more efficiently. In turn, any improvement in the efficacy and cooperation of these organizations may lead to better living conditions for both captive elephants and their caregivers in Nepal.

Impacts on the lives of captive elephants

The use of captive endangered species for tourism activities is also a complex and problematic concept, the examination of which has been a focus of research in other Asian countries but has been rarely studied in Nepal. Earlier studies concerned themselves with discovering methods to track potential disturbance to wildlife by tourists in Chitwan National Park (Curry *et al.*, 2001), providing insight into the management of stables (Kharel, 2002; Gairhe, 2012), or tracking disease transmission (Mikota *et al.*, 2015). Other studies merely acknowledge the draw of elephants in bringing tourism into the park (Bhusal, 2007). According to Dr Vidanta at the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), one reason for the lack of studies on animal health and welfare within Nepal is due to the relatively small number of elephants held there. In comparison to the over 2000 captive elephants working in Thailand's tourism industry (on top of another 2000 domestic elephants working in other parts of Thailand), the 200 captive elephants living in Nepal are of less concern for activists and conservationists alike (Vidanta interviews, 2019).[3]

This is not to say that Nepalese elephants themselves have not been represented in anthrozoological research. Since 2001, Piers Locke has been studying the history of the elephant stable and the relationship

between mahouts and elephants in Nepal. His work on 'ethnoelephantology' has been the primary source of data regarding these pachyderm pairings for many years (Locke, 2008, 2011, 2017a,b), and his other academic works involving multispecies ethnography (Mackenzie and Locke, 2012; Locke and Buckingham, 2016) have provided a wider base for the study of non-human informants. In addition, Dr Lynette Hart has completed several ethnographic papers on the history of mahout–elephant relationships in Nepal and the effects of the tourist gaze on the human side of the relationship (Hart, 1994, 2005).

As recently as 2009, elephant husbandry had not yet been established as an 'integrated field of academic enquiry' (Locke, 2009, n.p.), but this is no longer the case. Husbandry in both Western and Eastern facilities has been the topic of a variety of papers over the last two decades (Carlstead and Shepherdson, 2000; Clubb and Mason, 2002; Desai, 2008; Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; de Vries, 2014; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018, 2019, 2020; Brown *et al.*, 2020), and has resulted in national and international conferences (such as the International Elephant Foundation Conference, or the Elephant Managers' Association conference). However, little progress has been made in defining the specific health and welfare needs of elephants held in captivity, especially within range states (Desai, 2008; Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018, 2019, 2020; Brown *et al.*, 2020). Efforts are being made to establish both proper husbandry methods and positive welfare impacts for elephants, and finding metrics which can be applied in a variety of elephant management positions has become the goal of several researchers (see Varma, 2008; Veasey, 2017; Szydlowski, 2022; Chapter 5, this volume).

Optimizing population-level information is necessary, but what is still lacking from earlier studies is an examination of the care and ethics surrounding elephant *individuals* regarding their unique health, welfare, and husbandry. Secondly, examination is needed of local and international groups wishing to influence the daily lives and livelihoods of elephants, owners, and mahouts. The current book adds to the overall body of work in both ethics and anthrozoology through an examination of the potential for elephant husbandry improvement, the potential

benefits and pitfalls of sanctuaries, the ability of organizations active with elephant tourism to consider the bigger picture of mahout livelihoods, and the ethical concerns which arise when outside organizations attempt to change things within marginalized communities. This research may lead to more appropriate living conditions for captive elephants and their carers through improved communication between stakeholders.

This book also contributes to the public and academic debates surrounding the ethics of using captive wild animals to draw both funding, organizations, and volunteer workers into areas of conservation focus (Bhusal, 2007; Buckley, 2011; Newsome and Hughes, 2016). The interactions between tourists, NGOs, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and how these interactions benefit or harm captive elephants, will add to discourses surrounding NGO work as a neoliberal pursuit which may further commodify animals. I will also examine the benefits and pitfalls of the cosmopolitanism of villages which follows an increase in tourism and conservation efforts.

Positioning Myself Within This Research

Because of my familiarity with travel in the Chitwan National Park area, I am well positioned to undertake this research. Over the last decade, I have developed relationships within the local communities and with conservation groups active there.

I have training and experience in human/non-human medical relationships, veterinary care, experience with companion and wild animal health and welfare, and the ability to see the agency of animals from various perspectives. I have also spent more than 27 years as an animal care volunteer at a major metropolitan zoo, working with river hippos (*Hippopotamus amphibious*), Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*), and two species of rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis* and *Diceros bicornis*). Long hours of observing, training, feeding, working and 'becoming-with' (Despret, 2008; Haraway, 2008, p. 27) these animals have allowed me to develop personal relationships with individual pachyderm persons, who I

see as simply Bert, Mahali, Samantha, and my good friend Rudy. I have embodied knowledge of these persons from our hours spent in physical contact. My time in Nepal has allowed me to establish relationships with elephant persons such as Idha, Feba, Sibi, and Pariti. While my personal feelings on the ownership (especially private ownership) of endangered species remain consistent, because of my familiarity with the culture in Nepal and my relationships with owners, caregivers, and activists, I can consider the perspectives of various stakeholders. For example, my first trip to Nepal involved meeting several businessmen with whom I developed a professional relationship – and who later turned out to own safari elephants. I did not understand the complexities of what I call the 'elephant situation' in Nepal at that point. I made friends with mahouts, veterinary staff, and tourism workers before I had any knowledge of what exactly their jobs, lives, and belief systems entailed. Because I met these people first as individuals and not as potential research subjects, I got to know them without any associated baggage.

I feel that meeting these human and non-human individuals before they became the focus of my research allowed me to better understand and relate to their world view. It kept me from viewing the elephant situation from an exclusively outsider, Western, or activist view. I empathized with the elephant owners' views of good business practices while still understanding the anger of the animal activists fighting to free these captive animals. I empathized with the sadness of the veterinary staff when they lost an elephant after fighting to save her for weeks, while still understanding how Westerners viewed veterinary care in Nepal as inadequate and resulting in needless death. Of course, it would be impossible for me to be completely unaffected (consciously or subconsciously) by my own pre-existing notions. Likewise, I expect that my Nepalese participants (both elephant and human) are affected by their prior experiences with the visitors who preceded me.

Lastly, as an instructor of future anthrozoologists, I understand and maintain a commitment to reflexivity and metacognition regarding my research. I have a stake in the outcome, as someone who plans to return to Nepal time and time again to visit old friends of numerous species. However, this desire to remain in the lives of my friends in Nepal, both human and elephant, means that I must now write myself into their

story. I cannot feign innocence of the events which unfold in many stables throughout Nepal and can't simply walk away at the end of my fieldwork. My fieldwork has always taken place within the boundaries of acceptable Nepalese behaviour and has been limited by the Nepalese tendency to tell people what they want to hear (Brown and Vidanta interviews, 2019; Gwala PC, 2020). Because I am now part of their story, I must practice what Scheper-Hughes (1995, p. 415) calls a 'militant anthropology' and become 'politically committed and morally engaged' with the human and non-human beings living in Sauraha. I therefore must think about the social practices in Nepal both as an academic and as one who stands with those of many species who suffer. Halfway through the writing of my initial dissertation, simply reporting findings ceased to be my main goal. Shining a light on the lives of elephants and mahouts was no longer enough; the story requires critical reflection on what was experienced, with an eye towards taking part in changes that have long been needed. How to accomplish this without resorting to neocolonialism? I turn again to Scheper-Hughes (1995), who asks that we *do* take sides, as non-involvement is not truly a neutral or objective position, but rather a way to avoid becoming involved, setting the researcher 'above and outside' human events (p. 415). This position outside of humanity is of course completely impossible for a human to inhabit, and an observer's presence changes the observed (Martin and Bateson, 1993). Becoming involved means that after critical reflection, the researcher offers a conclusion based on their experience. A 'field of knowledge' joins a 'field of action' (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 419). I will continue to study mahouts and elephants co-working in Nepal to gain perspective on these unique interspecies relationships, especially how they differ from the same practices in other range states. However, while I will also continue relationships with elephant owners and support them as they face a changing world, I am honest with them that my interests now lie in ending the use of elephants for private tourist safari. Transitioning elephants and mahouts off tourist safari is, however, far from simple or quick, as readers will discover as this volume progresses.

Notes

[1] The author is keenly aware of and involved in ongoing debates surrounding how to identify members of animal species. Using terms such as 'non-human' is problematic, giving that they appear to place humanity on a pedestal while creating 'others'. The author prefers 'otherthanhuman animal', as it acknowledges that humans occupy the same taxonomic kingdom as all animal species, and offers equal ethical significance to all (EASE, 2021). However, due to space constraints and the need to create an easier reading experience for those not in the field of anthrozoology or human–animal studies, I will use 'animal' throughout. See Hill *et al*. (2022), Szydlowski *et al*. (2022), and Chapter 2 (this volume).

[2] See Borges de Lima and Green's (2017) work on wildlife tourism for an excellent discussion of current issues in the field, many of which will be examined in detail in the following chapters.

[3] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

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1 Elephants in Nepalese History

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Abstract

This chapter examines the physical characteristics which make Nepal an area of biodiversity concern and conservation focus. In addition, this chapter discusses how Nepal's history has influenced its relationship with the environment and multiple animal species. It then addresses the natural history of elephants and their shared work with humans, including their use in tourism practice.

Examining Nepal's physical and political history is necessary to understand the conservation efforts currently underway within the country. Nepal has grown from a series of kingdoms to a federalist democracy, but not without internal and external pressures. British, Chinese, and Indian governments have all played roles in Nepal's development, yet it has never been formally colonized; of course, there are definitions of colonization beyond occupation and rule by an outside political entity. The following sections include more on the influences of Britain and India on Nepalese politics.

With British influence pushing hard northward from India and the Chinese government moving south through Tibet, Prithvi Narayan Shah, the 'creator of modern Nepal', referred to his landlocked country as 'a yam between two rocks' (Fig. 1.1) (Stiller, 1968, p. 42; Whelpton, 2005, p. 36). This pressure from foreign powers helped forge the modern political and social structure of Nepal, and continues to influence the government today (Whelpton, 2005).

Brief Physical History

Nepal is a small country, just over 143,000 km^2, sandwiched between India and the Chinese region of Tibet. Nepal's unique physical location, stretching south from the Himalayas down to the grasslands on the border of India, has resulted in a massive variety of altitudes, climates, and habitats (Kharal and Dhungana, 2018, p. 23). These, in turn, foster an ideal environment for extreme biodiversity (Jnawali *et al.*, 2011; Kharal and Dhungana, 2018). Nepal's climates range from subtropical to arctic; its elevation transitions from just 60 metres above sea level to the highest point in the world – Mount Everest – 8848 metres above sea level. This small country features biomes as diverse as tundra, broadleaf and mixed evergreen forest, rivers, and savannah. In fact, there are 118 official ecosystems in Nepal, and 45% of its land is forested (Kharal and Dhungana, 2018, p. 23). Despite inhabiting only a tiny part of the total global land area, about one-tenth of 1% of the world's land, Nepal is home to more than 3% of the world's plants and just over 1% of the world's animals (Kharal and Dhungana, 2018, p. 23).

With a history of wildlife-related regulations since at least the 6th century CE – in large part due to the ruling classes' desire for a guaranteed supply of animals for hunting – Nepal has long focused on conservation (Locke, 2011). Since at least 1846, when rhinos were declared royal game and a crackdown on poaching began, some species of wildlife have been officially protected in Nepal (GoN, 2015a). The Terai Arc Landscape (TAL), where many of these protected species are found, is 51,000 km^2 of savannah, grassland, and forest (GoN, 2015b, p. 1), and is considered a biodiversity hot spot (Bhuju *et al.*, 2007; Wikramanayake *et al.*, 2010; Kharal and Dhungana, 2018). Until the 20th century, the Terai (which is Sanskrit for 'lowlands') was viewed more as a 'colonial possession' or a leftover part of India than a true cultural part of Nepal (Brown, 1996, p. 9). The Terai was a no man's land – it was long, flat, and hard to defend – separating the British East India Company and the ruling class of Nepal, and this status as a buffer zone helped keep the area socially and developmentally separate from the hill areas and from India (Brown, 1996).



Fig. 1.1. Map of Nepal showing national parks (NPs). (By Globe Trotter. Used under Creative Commons licence.)

In the mid-1950s, Nepal's King Mahendra issued an invitation to the American Peace Corps requesting their assistance in eradicating malaria in the Terai region (Mishra, 2008; USAID, 2018). Mahendra's plan was to relocate many of the poverty-stricken hill-dwellers to the TAL (Mishra, 2008; USAID, 2018). Before this time, only indigenous Tharu people, with their alleged immunity to malaria, could form settlements here (Mishra, 2008, p. 55; Miehe and Pendry, 2015). The United States Operation Mission (now renamed the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)) brought antimalarial medications, laid the first roads, and was in exchange granted a sawmill operation (Mishra, 2008; USAID, 2018). With the elimination of malaria, along with other factors, the population in the TAL grew exponentially (Mishra, 2008). Flooding in the hill country resulted in crop failure and the urgent migration of high numbers of hill-dwellers to the TAL. In addition, thousands of Nepalese families – including former military personnel – returned home from India and Myanmar (formerly Burma), and land reforms created opportunities for Indian nationals to operate as migrant labour and eventually settle permanently in the area (Kansakar, 1979 in GoN, 2009). This massive human migration led to the rapid

deforestation of almost 65% of the forest in some sectors (Mishra, 2008, p. 55; GoN, 2015a).

As prime habitats were cleared for agriculture, animal populations plummeted (Kharel, 2002; Mishra, 2008; Sharma, 2012). Heavily hit were the areas surrounding Royal Chitwan National Park (CNP or simply Chitwan), where barasingha deer (*Rucervus duvaucelii*) and wild water buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*) disappeared completely, and wild elephant populations dwindled to less than 200 (GoN, 2015a; Yadav *et al.*, 2015). Current elephant populations are now estimated at between 109 and 170 individuals but are hard to assess accurately, due to the passage of elephants across the India–Nepal border and the difficulty accessing the more remote habitats in far-western Nepal (GoN, 2009).

Today, Nepal is home to 208 species of mammal, over a quarter of which are threatened (Jnawali *et al.*, 2011; Kharal and Dhungana, 2018, p. 23). Charismatic species found in Nepal include the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), the greater one-horned rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), the Royal Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), and two species of the most-trafficked animal in the world, the pangolin (*Manis pentdactyla* and *Manis crassicaudata*) (WWF, 2017). Pangolin are hunted not only for their meat – which some believe increases human health and vigour – but also for their scales, which are used in traditional Chinese medicine (Liou, 2008). A consideration of disease transmission is especially important in the national park areas of Nepal, where wildlife, livestock, and human landscapes overlap, and interactions are inevitable. In addition, the impact of the zoonotic disease commonly called COVID-19 on elephant tourism proved dramatic and continues to change the face of Sauraha. This disease, along with others of concern, will be discussed in Chapter 4 (this volume).

Over the last 50 years, Nepal has evolved from a philosophy of individual species-focused management to a landscape-scale approach to conservation which includes consideration of human health and livelihoods (Sharma, 2012; GoN, 2015b). The TAL, the Sacred Himalayan Landscape, and the Chitwan–Annapurna Landscape, among others, have been designated for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and local community asset-building (Dhakal, 2018). In addition, Nepal has changed focus from centralized, national control of

forestry and wildlife programmes to a system of community-based conservation efforts. The amount of conservation land in Nepal is still on the rise. As of 2017, 23.23% of Nepal's total land area was protected, with 1.65 million hectares of national forest managed by community forest user groups (GoN, 2017). While this sounds like good news, one must remember that of this total land area, less than 2% represents a continuous expanse of natural areas (Wikramanayake *et al.*, 2010, p. 164). Fragmented habitat, narrowing migration routes, and the presence of human habitations continue to impact conservation efforts in Nepal.

Field sites

Located within the south-central portion of the TAL conservation zone lies Chitwan (Fig. 1.2). With its name derived from the Sanskrit *Chitta Vana,* roughly meaning 'heart of the forest' (Puri, 2019, p. 70), this protected area serves as the primary field site for the research reported in this book. The main entry point for this national park is in the small town of Sauraha (GoN, 2015a), where most of the elephants participating in this study reside. With a permanent population of only 2600 but boasting over 80 hotels and lodges, Sauraha is the small but bustling hub of CNP (GoN, 2015a). Sauraha provides an ideal site for this research as it combines protected forest, community-use lands, the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) offices, and the most tourists of any national park in Nepal – up to 180,000 people per year (GoN, 2022b). Across the park, on the far north-east edge of the park, lies the small town of Kawasoti, the second research site.



Fig. 1.2. Nepal outline showing the location of CNP. (Public domain file, used under Creative Commons agreement. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LocMap_Chitwan.png, accessed 22 August 2023.)

The animals found in and around CNP make up a large proportion of the total biodiversity of Nepal, including 37% of Nepal's total mammals, 65% of all birds, 34% of all amphibians/reptiles, and 65% of all fish (GoN, 2015a, pp. 2–8; IUCN, 2020). Why does Chitwan host this large variety of animal life? Along with both seasonal and stable water sources, Chitwan encompasses alluvial flood pains, hills, riverine forest, grasslands, and wetlands – all of which create a wide variety of habitat zones that are alluring to a host of wildlife as well as tourists (GoN, 2015a). Because it is the 'last surviving example of the natural ecosystems of the Terai region' (GoN, 2015a, p. 2), this area is vitally important to biodiversity efforts.

Like many areas of conservation focus, Nepal is a hot spot for both biodiversity preservation efforts and nature-based tourism (Bhuju *et al.*, 2007; Kharal and Dhungana, 2018). Numerous well-known conservation projects around CNP in Nepal – such as the Smithsonian Tiger Ecology Project or the rhino conservation project of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – began with the help of international conservation groups and continue today due to funding largely linked to

both tourism and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (GoN, 2015a; WWF, 2019).

The introduction of these tourist and conservation groups to areas of biodiversity focus can be fraught with potential pitfalls which affect both human and non-human animals alike. Increased foot traffic in protected areas, the impact of global flights on the environment, increased demand for resources to feed and house visiting groups, and the introduction of non-traditional ways of living are just a few of the potential problems that surround areas of conservation interest (Carrier and Macleod, 2005; Buckley, 2011). Non-human animals may be poached, relocated, or unable to survive predation thanks to habituation to humans (Geffroy *et al.*, 2015). At times, conservation efforts may even take place against the express wishes of local communities (Liu and Leung, 2019, p. 125).

In addition to a vast array of free-roaming wildlife, Chitwan is home to 150 of the estimated 170 captive elephants in Nepal. This number includes the more than 60 captive government and NTNC elephants and the approximately 50–60 elephants owned privately by members of the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC) (Rao, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019;[1] see Chapter 7, this volume). Due to a previous lack of registration requirements for captive elephants, prior to 2021 no one was entirely sure how many captive elephants existed in Nepal, and estimates relied solely upon (unreliable) information provided by staff at the NTNC and members of the UEOC (Rao, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019). However, thanks to a 2021 rededication of Nepal's Supreme Court to registering captive elephants in the hope of limiting ongoing transboundary trade, there are now 67 elephants seeking registration as privately owned individuals (Supreme Court of Nepal, 2021; GoN, 2022a). These individuals will be tracked to prevent illegal trade.

An Introduction to Elephant History in Nepal

According to a study of religious literature by Ramanathapillai (2009), animals have long held important roles in Buddhism, in part due to their connection with wild spaces and natural elements. The elephant became

a dominant figure in iconography due to its connection to Buddha himself. Elephants found in Buddhist documents are represented as intelligent, caring, loyal individuals who work together to support the herd, but who can be deadly when provoked (Ramanathapillai, 2009, p. 31). Buddhists seeking enlightenment in forest shared with elephants soon learned that an angry elephant was a dangerous thing, and soon began to train and 'tame' them. However, male elephants go through a period of hormonal surge, called *musth*, when they become unpredictable, driven to mate, and often dangerous (Ramanathapillai, 2009; Chave *et al.*, 2019). Because of this lack of control over their sexual drive, the elephant became a symbol of one's passions, the taming of which is an important tenet of Buddhist training (Ramanathapillai, 2009). The white elephant, seen as the opposite of the elephant in musth, is depicted as the earthy embodiment of Gautama Buddha. Elephants are further represented in Buddhist literature as divine creatures capable of reaching the ultimate Buddhist goal of enlightenment (Ramanathapillai, 2009).

Elephants are also sacred beings associated with Hinduism, in the form of the elephant-headed god Ganesha – the remover of obstacles and the god of learning (Kharel, 2002; Sukumar, 2003, 2016). One of the more recent gods, originating during the 4th century CE and missing from any mention in the epic texts of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the benevolent Ganesha is held in high esteem throughout Asia and Indonesia (Sukumar, 2016, p. 4 and 6). Sukumar posits that the figure of Ganesha evolved from the dominant presence of elephants in shared landscapes, and is the embodied combination of ecological, political, and economic life (Sukumar, 2016, p. 8). As the modern form of Ganesha evolved, he underwent a transformation from a troubling, evil creator of obstacles to a benevolent deity (Sukumar, 2016, p. 6). Further evolution of elephants from a symbol of high status and prized gift to a source of revenue, research topic, and tourist entertainment is recent (Kharel, 2002, n.p.). A discussion about these changing roles must begin with a short introduction to the historical role of elephants and humanity's desire to control them.

Captive elephants and the domestication debate

While many excellent histories of elephants in Asia are available, from Edgerton's (1931) *The Elephant-Lore of the Hindus* to Sukumar's (2012) *The Story of Asia's Elephants*, works which specifically deal with Nepalese elephant-keeping are significantly rarer. In work documenting the history of elephant stables and captive elephants in Nepal, authors rely in part on a 1985 report produced by the Jaanch Bujh Kendra (the palace task force). This report cites evidence of elephant-keeping practices dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries CE (Kharel, 2002; Locke, 2008).[2] Elephants have served for centuries as symbols of Nepalese royalty, power, and wealth (Kharel, 2002; Sukumar, 2003, 2016; Locke, 2008); only members of the royal family and their guests could hunt them (Sukumar, 2003). While all elephants in Nepal officially belonged to the king from the 6th century CE to the 1990s, their use was allowed by indigenous people for logging and farming, sometimes as a reward for acts of service to the crown (Krauskopff and Meyer, 2000 in Locke, 2008; Locke, 2011). In addition, the right to capture wild elephants (who would still belong to the king but offered good financial incentives to their captors) was given as a reward to private citizens (Krauskopff and Meyer 2000 in Locke, 2008). By 1903, 328 of these captive elephants were living in 31 lowland stables (Kharel, 2002, n.p.). These elephants had been captured and trained using various breaking techniques, and this removal of elephants from the wild continued until the 1970s (Bibhag and Durbar, 1986 in Kharel, 2002). Occasionally, once too old or weak to work, these elephants were released back into the forest (Varma and Ganguly, 2011).

Elephants living with humans are referred to as habituated, captive, enslaved, or domesticated depending on the situation (Lair, 1999; Cohen, 2015; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). The choice of words one uses is powerful – as words like 'enslaved' illicit feelings of torture, 'tame' seems to indicate friendliness towards humans, and 'domesticated' indicates that an animal is now completely reliant upon human care (see Szydlowski *et al.*, 2022). These words are important when discussing elephants in captivity, as they seem to define what rights humans have over non-

human animals. If elephants are domesticated, then they should be treated as livestock or draught animals – as indeed they are in India and parts of Nepal (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). However, if they are *not* domesticated but rather captive or enslaved, then their treatment by humans requires further reflection. The debate over the true meaning of domestication, from an anthropological standpoint, has been raging for 'well over a century' (Ingold, 1994, p. 3).

Ingold (1994) describes domestication as a state of being under human control, deliberately manufactured and modified for human use. This modification creates a sense of ownership, as the evolution of these animals is determined by humans (Ingold, 1994, p. 5). Palmer (1997, p. 412 and 416) describes domestication as a 'special contract relationship' entered when animals transition from the 'wild' into human 'culture'. This ownership and control seem to bestow the human with power over every aspect of the domesticated animal's life. If elephants can be convincingly described as domesticated, then any arguments for their freedom disappear in a puff of semantics.

Unlike domesticated animals, wildlife remains 'out of control' (Ingold, 1994, p. 3). The wild nature of the undomesticated wolf serves as a foil for the domesticated dog; the majestic wild bull elephant a world apart from the female forced to sit on a ball at the circus. The use of 'domesticated' as a foil to 'wild' becomes increasingly important to those interested in seeing welfare improvements in the lives of captive elephants. This importance becomes obvious when reviewing the literature regarding elephants in Nepal. Elephants have never undergone selective breeding to change their wild temperament, and can therefore only be considered captive, not domestic (Lair, 1999). But there remains a problem with the language of elephant care, when biological and legal definitions do not mesh with commonly used phrases. Many of the papers presented at the 2001 International Workshop on the Domesticated Asian Elephant were invaluable in the production of this volume. However, the term 'domesticated' was often used during the proceedings as a 'power word', a neologism I coined while discussing domestication and wildness (Hill *et al.*, 2022; Szydlowski *et al.*, 2022). These power words are wielded in attempts to control animal bodies. By employing the word domestication in this way, speakers attempted to

convert wildlife into human-owned 'valuable capital' via cultural politics (Suzuki, 2020, p. 242).

Using 'domesticated' to control the narrative

While elephants have been living around humans for over 4000 years, most of them have been wild-captured or sired by wild males (Poole and Granli, 2009; Cohen, 2015). There has been no attempt to create elephant breeds and there have not been significant generations of captive-bred elephants for the physical or behavioural changes required to indicate domestication to occur (see below; also Price, 2003; Poole and Granli, 2009; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019). They have instead retained their wild biology, behaviours, social needs, and emotions (Lair, 1999; Poole and Granli, 2009; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2018, p. 114) believe that humans have been 'culturally conditioned' to see these captive elephants as domesticated, and that many have tried to legitimize their use through normalization of the term. Further muddying the waters is the fact that Asian elephants are rarely legally defined in Nepalese governmental documents, but African elephants are listed as a domestic livestock species (Wilson, 1997; Kharel, 2002).

Locke (2014, p. 12) describes the lives of these wild and non-wild elephants as 'interwoven' in what he calls the 'incalcitrant domestication debate'. Locke's (2014) take is that due to the overlap between existential states, the captive elephant has not been completely separated from the wild. Rather, elephants have submitted to humans without 'having been fundamentally transformed' (Locke, 2014, p. 12). Mackenzie and Locke (2012, p. 4) call for anthropologists to lay aside the need to define the status of elephants and ask instead that they focus on the interconnections between humans and elephants, embracing our 'ethical obligation' to see both species thrive. Locke (2014) suggests we view elephants as a companion species and examine them with a more integrative approach. From a European or American standpoint, Locke's (2014) argument to cease the debate might make sense, but for those of us working in Asia it must continue. By ignoring the use of 'domestication' as a power word, we may allow governments the option of lumping this endangered species in with livestock or transportation

(Tipprasert, 2002; GoN, 2019; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). Neither of these options is suited to addressing the unique needs of captive elephants.

For example, Lair (2002, n.p.) explains that 'ethically and intellectually' he recognizes elephants as wild animals but feels that 'practically' they are better taken care of as domestic animals because livestock departments typically have better resources. I disagree that elephants benefit from being considered livestock; this definition may keep them from receiving species-specific appropriate care. These animals suffer when grouped in with other traditionally 'owned' animals instead of with their wild counterparts. Lair (1999) acknowledges that there are differences between cultural and legal definitions, which was often the case during my fieldwork. In conversations with Nepali elephant owners, elephants were often referred to as a domesticated animal, with some claiming that the domestication process happened 7000 years ago (Rao interviews, 2019). The Governmental Nepalese Elephant Conservation Plan of 2009 defines 'captive' as those individuals who are wild-caught, and 'domestic' as those bred and raised by humans (GoN, 2009, p. 11). In contrast, organizations such as INGO6[1] focus on elephants as undomesticated, using this power word as proof that elephants should not be in captivity (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017). These conflicting beliefs make discussions regarding care difficult, with stakeholders disagreeing upon the foundational elements of the common language necessary to discuss the future of these individuals.

Price (2003, p. 22) points out that humans have truly domesticated few species and describes a set of characteristics that makes some animals 'unfavourable' candidates for domestication. Many of these characteristics describe elephants, such as the importance of female family groups, the need for prolonged parental care, shelter-seeking behaviour, and a large home range (Price, 2003, p. 23). Additionally, elephants show an aggressiveness toward humans when encountered in the wild and certainly qualify as difficult to control or contain (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). In fact, the only 'favourable characteristic' for domestication which applies to Asian elephants is the domination of females by bulls during mating, and the promiscuous nature of these interactions (Price, 2003, p. 23).

Breeding

Because the future of Nepal's captive elephant population relies on insemination by wild males, the lives of wild and captive individuals remain entwined. Approximately the same number of captive elephants reside in Nepal as their wild counterparts, with around 112 individuals living in the CNP area (GoN, 2009; Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Female captive elephants in Nepal are not typically bred to captive males (see Kharel, 2002; GoN, 2009; also Chapters 7 and 8, this volume); instead, these females are hobble-chained (both front feet chained together, Fig. 1.3) near the edges of the jungle to be mounted and inseminated by wild bulls. Hobble-chaining serves to ensure that even if the bull breaks the female free, she cannot get far (Vidanta interviews, 2019). This practice conflicts with the peaceful environment that former Nepalese government veterinarian Gairhe (2012) says mating requires. Instead, it sounds rather like rape to interlocutors, as the females are unable to choose whether to be mounted (Varma and Ganguly, 2011; Szydlowski, 2017; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018; Crane and Zed interviews, 2017 and 2019). It seems unethical to breed females in this way, as it may create lasting physical and psychological trauma (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018), but the government of Nepal has had some success with this method, and so it continues (Varma and Ganguly, 2011). While this might be perceived as humans having some control over the reproduction of elephants, in fact it drives home the point that these elephants are not bred for desired characteristics or modified in any physical way through this parentage (Price, 2003; Locke, 2014; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017). Instead, they rely on wild individuals to choose where, when, and with whom reproduction happens. Humans must further consider the fact that captivity is a state in which elephants used in tourism activities are likely to remain (Veasey, 2017, p. 422), as it is no longer realistic to simply release safari elephants into the wild when they are no longer useful (Varma and Ganguly, 2011). For one reason, this would be placing the small remaining population of wild individuals at greater risk of communicable disease, as Nepal is not currently treating its tuberculosis-positive elephants, and captive elephants share space with livestock who carry a variety of other diseases (GoN, 2009; Mikota

et al., 2015; Szydlowski, 2022; Gairhe and Vidanta interviews, 2019). In addition, there is no currently available plan in which to provide mahouts, the traditional elephant handlers, with alternative employment or owners with alternative income were they to find themselves suddenly without elephants. With reintroduction therefore beyond reach, the focus must be on providing the maximum reasonable welfare standards for captive elephants which consider the needs of all stakeholders (Veasey, 2017; see Chapter 10, this volume).



Fig. 1.3. An NTNC-employed female elephant wearing hobble-chains on her front feet, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author, 3 April 2019.)

Conclusions

Thanks to its extreme biodiversity, Nepal is the focus of global conservation and land preservation efforts. Nepal's political and biological climates have impacted the development of human relationships with other species and have influenced how humans treat individual animals, such as captive elephants. While captive elephants in Nepal have been broken, tamed, or have become subservient to humans, they are 'not yet domesticated' biologically (Sukumar, 2006, p. 7). For the purposes of this volume, I will refer to elephants kept in stables throughout Nepal as 'captive'. These individuals have not chosen to affiliate with humans willingly; they are wild-caught then sold, or wild-sired then confined. Therefore, 'captive' most accurately describes their situation while avoiding the emotional context of 'enslaved' or the inaccuracy of 'tamed'. It is my hope that the elephants in this volume can be seen instead as a 'powerful symbol for achieving broader conservation objectives in a biologically rich tropical region' (Sukumar, 2006, p. 7).

The next chapter (Chapter 2) contains the theoretical framework for this volume. Throughout my research I have heard people describe their work with and treatment of animals as 'the right thing' and their behaviour ethical. This attitude implies that those who are not doing the same work (or in the same way) are doing the wrong thing. This attitude will be explored through the lens of what Lambek (2010) calls ordinary ethics. This concept of ordinary ethics is broadly based upon Austin's (1975) and Wittgenstein's (1922) ordinary language philosophy. The chapter will also draw on Durkheim's (1982) work on social facts, whereby living in communities creates pressure to believe or behave in a certain way. The social facts and spread of misinformation surrounding captive elephants in Nepal may influence the way in which they are cared for.

This care is itself a culturally and situationally dependent concept. Our care of animals is dependent upon the ways in which we view them, as co-creators of meaning, cosmopolitan beings, or as others whom we have no hope of understanding. The following chapter will discuss these concepts of care, along with how animal biographies can be used to paint a picture of animal lives. Lastly it will explore how the various elements

of this theoretical framework influence the methodology used to complete research for this book.

Notes

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[2] This work is only available in Nepali, and so I will have to rely upon the above researchers' information for this portion of my history.

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2 Theories of Language, Words, and Ethics: Frameworks and Methods

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Abstract

Concepts surrounding the care and ethics of elephant husbandry and conservation in Nepal will be viewed in this chapter through the lens of 'ordinary ethics' (Lambek, 2010). Drawing from Wittgenstein's (1922, 1958) ordinary language philosophy, Lambek describes how people desire to do the right thing and believe that they behave ethically. Interlocuters described their work with animals as the right or best thing, and their animal treatment as ethical, which in turn sets up those who are not doing the same work as behaving wrongly or even unethically.

This chapter will examine how social facts, social truth, and situated knowledges inform the treatment and care of animals. Living in communities creates pressure to believe or behave in a certain way, and this chapter examines how society influences the ways in which animals are treated. This chapter introduces the concepts of animal biography and autoethnography as tools for examining lives. A discussion of the methodology and the implication of this theoretical framework follows.

'We want what is best for the animals.' During research among a wide variety of species over the last three decades I have heard innumerable individuals and organizations repeat this mantra, even as they found themselves in dispute with other organizations also claiming to want 'the best'. Animal rights activists experience conflict with zoo management interested in *ex situ* conservation (Keulartz, 2015; Maynard, 2018, pp. 185–188), overwhelmed animal shelters with advocates of no kill

systems (Kass *et al.*, 2001; Arluke, 2003), and advocates for the 'good death' of euthanasia versus those harbouring hope for adoption or recovery from illness (Hurn and Badman-King, 2019; also see Arluke, 2003; Morris, 2012). Individuals on both sides of these conflicts are, through their viewpoints, doing the best for animals.

Even in discourses with similarly focused individuals, irreparable rifts may occur between organizational staff that could best serve animals by pooling their resources and working together. Occasionally, despite one's best efforts, harm or loss of life may still befall the animals in one's care (see Chapter 3, this volume). As I spent time with people and communities dedicated to treating their animals with care, respect, and even love, it occurred to me that the problem was not only an issue with translation, but rather with the language of animal care itself.

This is not exclusively a problem with the linguistic system, wherein people from vastly different backgrounds and primary tongues attempt to converse in a common oral language – in many cases during the present study, English. Instead, the words we use to discuss care, welfare, and conservation have a life of their own. Care, for example, is a word which is culturally and situationally specific. Care work, according to Coulter (2016b, p. 199), involves the daily tasks involved to support physically, mentally, and emotionally another individual. Gruen (2009, p. 25 and 31) suggests that care is one way to 'attend to nature' and requires 'empathetic engagement' to achieve. This empathy is, according to Gruen (2009), an 'ethical response to the natural world' (p. 33). What we care about, according to Schrader (2015, p. 685), may depend on either 'random encounters' or situations imposed upon us.

Schrader (2015) highlights discourse surrounding how humans can 'begin to care' about non-human beings, especially those who are geographically or taxonomically far separate from humans (p. 669). She suggests 'dissociating embodiment' from the activity might improve human capacity for compassion (p. 670). This dissociation involves letting go of the need to act or to speak for another being (p. 684). Instead, we should conduct science with 'humility and care' (p. 684). Schrader (2015, p. 668) further explains that 'caring for' another is possible without actually 'caring about' them, and this is an important distinction when considering the care offered captive elephants in Nepal.

In some cases, not caring might be better understood as not knowing how to care in appropriate ways (Schrader, 2015, p. 684). Those who care for elephants in parts of India, for example, understand that they are in a committed relationship (Lainé, 2019, p. 88). This relationship includes the understanding that abuse or neglect which negatively impacts elephants also negatively affects the condition of humans (Lainé, 2019, p. 88). In Nepal, however, this relationship appears broken or misunderstood (see following chapters, this volume), and the connection between healthy elephants and healthy humans remains unseen.

Applying care to species conservation, van Dooren (2015, p. 6) describes the physical requirements of keeping captive, rare crows alive – the day-to-day duties surrounding feeding, cleaning, and support of biological functions such as reproduction. The care of these crows requires the 'violent-care' of other species, often in the form of mass-produced mice who serve as food (van Dooren, 2015, p. 9). This type of violent care is also required for landscape-level conservation efforts, in which certain species are killed or removed to maintain ecosystems (van Dooren, 2015). The right of an individual or species to receive protection in global biodiversity preservation efforts largely depends on both its rarity and its ability to draw in political, economic, or scientific interest (van Dooren, 2015). Species which can convincingly be called rare or native stand a better chance of receiving care or protection over common, feral, or invasive species (Soulé, 1985; van Dooren, 2015; Hill *et al.*, 2022). These situationally specific concepts of care are central to discussions in the following chapters regarding the care offered to elephants in Nepal, and further discussion on care can be found in Chapters 3 and 5 of this volume.

The current chapter will explore the concepts of ordinary language and ordinary ethics, and the ways in which these ideas interplay with conservation and care. It will then proceed into a discussion of the reasons this book uses biographies to tell the stories of elephants in Nepal. Finding a language to describe a species so vastly different from our own is challenging, and biographical writing allows for better representation without relying upon anthropomorphism (Harel, 2012). Anthropomorphism has been the topic of much academic debate, thanks to its relationship to anthropocentrism, creating the feeling that by

applying human characteristics to non-humans we are promoting ourselves as the centre of everything; seeing humanity reflected in all creation (de Waal, 1999; Wynne, 2004; Daston and Mitman, 2005, pp. 3–4). While Daston and Mitman (2005) feel that anthropomorphism can be an effective tool, for example when it draws focus to the fact that humans are, themselves, animals (de Waal, 1999, p. 261), it is still not considered a 'constructive' or 'well-developed scientific system' by others (Wynne, 2004, n.p.; Milton, 2005, pp. 259–260). The biographies included in this volume (see Chapter 9.2) will attempt to avoid anthropomorphism, while accepting that the elephants represented within them are capable of thinking-with, feeling-with, and relating to humans (Daston and Mitman, 2005). This chapter also includes a detailed description of the methodologies used within this book, including autoethnography. The final section also revisits the need for a merographic style of research (Strathern, 1992), and details the steps taken to collect and analyse data.

Theories of Language and Words

An examination of care and conservation practices in Nepal would benefit from the application of an ordinary ethics lens (Lambek, 2010), along with a discussion of the ways in which language usage influences human perceptions. This chapter is predominantly interested in communications between people who use the same words in similar situations but mean very different things. To explain how language use is key to understanding the complex 'elephant situation' outlined in this volume, a brief history of ordinary language philosophy (Austin, 1975; Wittgenstein, 1922, 1958) and language as practice is needed.

Ordinary language philosophy

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) was a seminal work on symbolism, language, and philosophical meaning (Hanfling, 2000;

Addis, 2006). Through it, Wittgenstein hoped to 'fix' philosophical problems which he felt stemmed from the failure to understand essential grammatical characteristics of language (Wittgenstein, 1922; Addis, 2006). Words, he believed, could not adequately identify an object, because words were too primitive to reflect reality (Wittgenstein, 1922, 2009, p. 53). Wittgenstein later postulated that words lacked *any* innate definition, and instead were only understandable through an examination of the circumstances in which they were uttered (Addis, 2006).

Words and linguistic rules should instead serve only as signposts, directing listeners towards an end point which is dependent upon one's relative physical orientation (Wittgenstein, 1958). Hanfling (2000, p. 37) suggests using a map as a metaphor for language philosophy; the quality of a map is judged by how closely it resembles reality, and by looking at the map we can guess what our 'corresponding reality' is like. The same is true of language; words help us explain the 'reality' of our perceptions (Hanfling, 2000). However, like a map, language contains a multitude of paths which may be confusing as you attempt to translate them; from one direction you know exactly where you are, but from another, you are hopelessly lost (Wittgenstein, 1958).

Like Wittgenstein, Foucault (2005) believed that language holds meaning only in relation to one's circumstances, temporality, and experience. All knowledge is 'rooted in a life, a society, and a language' which comes with personal and cultural baggage (Foucault, 2005, p. 406). Language is practice; it is a tool for thought, a representation of an idea, and a way to link human knowledge across time (Foucault, 2005; Gutting and Oksala, 2019).

The language discussed in the current volume is not 'language as knowledge' (Halliday, 2017, p. 81) or the personal language that takes place within one's head. Nor is it the speaking of the letters to make words and sounds. The language considered within goes beyond signs, grammar, and syntax, and considers what the speaker does and means in real life (Hanfling, 2000; Ingold, 2000; Halliday, 2017). Ordinary language usage begins 'not with the dictionary but with the details of social interaction' (Sidnell, 2010, p. 124). It is inseverable from social systems (Halliday, 2017), inseparable from the physical performance of

speaking and the 'situational context' in which the speech occurs (Ingold, 2000, p. 399). Speech is a 'dynamic phenomenon' (Ingold, 2000, p. 405). As such, communication requires commonalities of experience and relies upon societal rules for interpretation (Winch, 2003; Halliday, 2017).

Language and society

Instead of the world existing somewhere beyond us fully formed, Ingold (2000) suggests that we are constantly creating meaning through our interactions with other beings as we move through it. In this 'dwelling perspective', the meanings we derive from our surroundings depend upon our day-to-day actions, interactions, and observations (Ingold, 2000, p. 5; Kohn, 2015). Like language, social institutions and relationships can only be understood via the context of some sort of social rule or agreement (Winch, 2003). Otherwise, the social scientist has no way to measure whether what she is studying is like something she has seen before and thereby classify it (Winch, 2003). The act of observation by its nature not only influences the event, but also presupposes a common language which provides a way to understand the event (Winch, 2003; Halliday, 2017). Those who purposely observe an event are participating in something about which they have some sort of prior knowledge and have learned about the event's characteristics in a way that enables them to communicate about it (Winch, 2003, p. 86). Jakobson and Halle (1956, p. 58) explain that users do not have free agency in their words but must instead choose their words from the storehouse that they share with their addressee. If the listener doesn't have the same symbols in their storehouse, then the message is meaningless (Jakobson and Halle, 1956; Halliday, 2017). In addition, words must be formed into phrases, which themselves are more than the 'sum of their parts'; they can't be broken down into separate words and still carry the same meaning (Jakobson and Halle, 1956, p. 59).

Mol (2008, p. 34) suggests that rather than spending time worrying about words and their meanings, we should 'cultivate' and allow them to move around within situations where we can get a new view of them.

There is the need to experience words in different contexts and numerous locations to determine their true meaning (Mol, 2008). It is this pragmatic view of language, that a word takes on new meaning depending upon who is speaking and the circumstances surrounding the utterance, that applies to the following chapters. Throughout this volume, the word elephant is one that tends to move around, much like the 'real' elephants of Nepal. For example, wild elephants are fiercely protected by anti-poaching patrols, nature guide networks, and governmental agencies (see Chapter 6, this volume). But captive elephants of the same biological makeup as their wild conspecifics have no such protections in place and find themselves completely at the mercy of humans (see following chapters). This volume will move around words such as elephant, care, and welfare to examine how their employment alters the perception of their meanings. These words and those who use them do so through a lens of doing what is right for elephants. The next section examines how this language intersects with the practice of elephant care and keeping in Nepal.

Ordinary Ethics

> Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good. Yet anthropological theory tends to overlook all this in favour of analyses that emphasize structure, power, and interest.
>
> (Lambek, 2010, p. 1)

Like ordinary language, ordinary ethics rely both on our broad prior knowledge of societal behaviours as well as the specific context in which we find ourselves. Our personal morals gained through exposure to our families, media, educational system, friends, and experiences influence the ways in which we respond to ethical questions in our lives (Durkheim, 1975; Bergan and Davis, 2020; Hart, 2020; Krcmar and Cingel, 2020; Padilla-Walker and Memmott-Elison, 2020). These morals are participatory actions, like words, and are tools to understand our surroundings. Morals and ethics are grounded in the ordinary events and actions of human lives, and rather than being a set of enforceable rules

are more of a social agreement (Lambek, 2010, p. 2). This agreement doesn't need to draw attention to itself to function and happens regularly without intent or advance planning (Lambek, 2010, p. 2). Much like ordinary language, which is used daily by people as they describe the world around them effectively, ordinary ethics are used daily to create liveable situations within families and communities.

Because of the often-inconsistent distinctions between the words 'ethics' and 'morality' within the fields of anthropology and philosophy, like Lambek, I have chosen to use ethics when speaking of a person's or organization's belief system and actions (Lambek, 2010, p. 9). Lambek (2010) explains that the word ethical has more real-world, ordinary language usage. Ethics implies more of a focus on the human actions of doing good and using practical judgement, whereas morality might imply a universal right or wrong (Lambek, 2010). He suggests an examination between what is ethical or good in any given situation while being aware of the potential for falling into the trap of cultural relativism.[1] Lambek (2010) compares our use of ethics to that of language, and the ways in which 'we don't speak language in general, but one particular version of it at a time' (p. 13). To properly study ordinary ethics, one needs to approach ethnography from both a philosophical and a sociocultural perspective. Lambek (2010, p. 5) argues that the study of ethics also needs to include linguistic anthropology because ethics are as fundamentally tied to speaking as they are to actions. In fact, viewing speech *as* action is needed to adequately understand how ordinary ethics function (Lambek, 2010, p. 5). But rather than view ethics in isolation, as a specific area of study, social scientists should examine how including the ethical in our studies might 'deepen our understanding of social life' (Lambek, 2010, p. 7).

Ordinary ethics, put simply, is the belief that one wants to do the right thing. This *desire* to do right is often followed by the *belief* that one is, in fact, behaving in an ethical manner (Lambek, 2010, p. 40 and 42). These beliefs may lead individuals and organizations to believe that their own methods are more ethical than someone else's. This volume will explore whether the idea of doing the best for the animals means the same thing to each organization. Or more likely, does the background and baggage of

each group inform their definition of the best, and do they try to forcibly apply their definition to those who care for or work with animals in other cultures? The following chapters in this volume will examine the disparity between organizational or individual discourse and practice surrounding welfare, care, and behaviour through the dual lenses of ordinary language and ordinary ethics.

Social Facts and Invented Traditions

There are numerous 'social facts' which affect the treatment of elephants in Nepal (Durkheim, 1982). These social facts are the beliefs, tendencies, and practices of a collective group which are accepted due to a belief that they represent authoritative knowledge from our ancestors, which in some cases they do (Durkheim, 1982). Some of the social facts in Nepal do have their origins in traditional knowledge passed down from experienced mahouts to younger generations, but much information is now lost or confused due to high mahout turnover and the loss of familial continuity in elephant care (see Chapters 3 and 6, this volume). For example, there is a widespread belief that dominance training, bull hook use,[2] or beatings are the only appropriate methods to train elephants within Nepal, despite evidence to the contrary (see Chapter 6 and Appendix I, this volume).

The impacts of these social beliefs and traditions are especially apparent in a small town like Sauraha, Nepal. For example, despite the reality that mass-scale elephant-backed tourism only started in the 1960s (see Chapter 4, this volume), elephant owners regularly repeat the 'fact' that elephant tourism is so engrained in their society that removing it would irreparably harm their culture (Rao and Sama interviews, 2019). This social fact may also arise from what Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012, p. 1) call an 'invented tradition'. These traditions are intended to create a sense of belonging or cultural identity and are found in societies around the world (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012). For example, the clan tartan, a symbol of identity recognized globally as a sign of Scottish pride, was invented by an Englishman (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012, p.

19). Social pressure and the desire for conformity within one's social group, or in support of national pride, can lead to the persistence of these false beliefs or invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012; O'Connor and Weatherall, 2019). Durkheim referred to these types of social pressures as currents which arise and 'sweep us along in spite of ourselves' (Durkheim, 1982, pp. 51–52).

Alternatively, professing that elephant tourism is a centuries-old tradition may be an example of what Barua (2017, p. 281) describes as 'spectacular accumulation'. This practice uses representations of animals, often larger (or healthier) than life, to generate a desire for real-world encounters. In the 1960s, Nepal's King Mahendra suggested that conservationists link saving the rhino to poverty reduction efforts, and images of the greater one-horned rhinoceros soon became synonymous with Nepal (Mishra, 2008). Nepal's use of the massive, armoured rhino for its national identity, however, may instead increase commodification of 'real' rhinos by driving tourists' desires to seek out these solitary beings. Likewise, creating a positive narrative around lively capital (Haraway, 2008) and living labour (Barua, 2017), such as elephants, may offer owners a convenient way to justify their use. By focusing on promoting Sauraha as a destination where elephant labour serves as the literal vehicle for conservation practice and close encounters with rhino, owners may hope to ensure that visitors believe working elephants are happy, devoted, and serving the greater good of conservation. By controlling the narrative in this way, owners are using public perception to fuel the further commodification of elephants.

In addition, owners regularly bemoan the high cost of their responsibility to sustain elephant-backed tourism. Purchasing an elephant is extremely costly – up to 10.5 million Nepalese rupees (Nrs) or US$90,000 in a country where the average annual income hovers around 116,000 Nrs or US$1000 (GoN, 2019, p. 15; Online Khabar, 2020; Rao, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019)[3]. However, the ability of hoteliers to pay cash for these elephant purchases serves to highlight the socio-economic divide between business owners and the poor or landless people of Nepal. When asked about the potential for stopping elephant-backed tourism, these owners complain about the cost of

keeping elephants and the need to continue rides to finance their purchase and care, long after the elephants have repaid their initial debt (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019; Bames PC, 2020). The widespread message spread by elephant owners, that they are losing money on elephant-back safari, does not appear to hold up to scrutiny (see Chapter 7, this volume). According to interlocutors in the present study, one explanation may lie in the Nepalese belief that investments should constantly create dividends. These owners do not see elephants as a commodity which is paid off after a certain amount of income is generated (Vidanta interviews, 2019), but rather see any stable or stagnant investment as money lost. Lastly, these owners cite social pressures, such as the need to meet tourist expectations, to continue elephant-backed safari practices (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019).

It is important to note that belief in a set of social facts is not limited to elephant owners. The inability of outsiders to grasp the 'truth' of the social facts surrounding elephant use and care in Nepal creates conflict between elephant owners and self-described elephant rescuers. These rescuers come with their own facts and beliefs, perhaps that elephants are sentient as well as intelligent (Plotnik *et al.*, 2006, 2011; Regan, 2006, pp. 83–86; Boyle, 2009; Lorimer, 2010; Pearce, 2015) or even that Western knowledge is superior to traditional practices (Lévy-Bruhl and Clare, 1923, p. 96; Lossky, 1926, p. 145; Adas, 1989; Street, 2016)[4]. How the differing facts and beliefs held by each group inform the way they interact with elephants, owners, and each other is a key topic of this book.

Avenues of Research: Using Animal Biographies

To discuss elephants in Nepal and the unique ways that social facts, language, and ethics intersect in their lives, I need a technique which enables me to frame organizational and individual stories. By using biography as a tool, I can paint a more complete picture of the organizations as well as the individual elephants I encountered in Nepal. Representations of animals in human literature can be useful tools for

examining the possibility of conscious thought in animals (Hamington, 2008; Mar *et al.*, 2010; Hediger, 2012; Szydlowski, 2018). These accounts help readers understand animal minds, allowing them to experiment with experiences shared across species, such as death and family (Hediger, 2012; Szydlowski, 2018). Exploring the similarities between the emotions of humans and the emotions of animals can lead readers to examine their own feelings through a new lens (Hediger, 2012). Of course, over-sentimentality may also lead readers to focus on the fictional characteristics of the representation, and forget the physical being completely (Hediger, 2012).

Biography allows us to 'account for the individuality' of an animal without needing to 'reconstruct their feelings or infer their intentions' (Krebber and Roscher, 2018, p. 2). This method has the potential to interrupt humans' tendency to place all animals together under one, albeit large, umbrella. Krebber and Roscher (2018, p. 5) call upon the animal biographer to create meaning from 'fragments and sources' across the disciplines of natural and social science to build individual animal identities. These identities should demonstrate the agency of these individual animals and make the role of each animal visible in society (Krebber and Roscher, 2018). When constructing animal biographies, subjects must be allowed to 'actively respond' to what is asked of them and be able to 'co-produce' their identity and change or grow as their life progresses (Chrulew, 2018, p. 26). Recording the ways in which this happens is key to building a larger body of knowledge on natural group and individual behaviour which can then be accessed by those working in research settings or biological facilities such as zoos (Chrulew, 2018). Having access to these biographies allows carers of captive animals to better assess not only the husbandry needs of animals, but also their psychological needs (Chrulew, 2018). For example, knowledge of a past trauma might change the way carers introduce new stimuli or approach a change in housing. Biographical writing requires the interaction of biographer and subject but is more than just a series of life events (Chrulew, 2018). The interactions between the subject and his/her peers, the larger community, the environment, and the biographer herself become important in the discovery of who the individual animal is (Ingold, 2000, 2014; Leach, 2012; Chrulew, 2018).

There are, of course, difficulties in writing truly representative animal biographies, not only due to the obvious differences in spoken language vs other non-verbal forms of communication, but also because we are still not entirely sure how non-humans think. One can study animal behaviour but understanding animal thought processes is fraught with potential misunderstanding. But does it matter? Kean (2012) offers the examples of social historians writing about workhouses, the poor, and inmates, even though these authors have never experienced the situations which they describe (p. s62). Indeed, many historians write narratives drawn from scant primary materials, using their own experiences to imagine what earlier humans might have felt (Kean, 2012). Understanding other humans' thought processes is not without the risk of potential misunderstandings, but these works still contribute to the overall knowledge of the field (Nagel, 1974; de Waal, 2011).

While writing about the psychological aspects of animal cognition is not a new concept, the emotional lives of animals were largely ignored until recently (Masson and McCarthy, 2009; de Waal, 2011). Understanding that animals have complex mental lives, as do humans, allows an author to find similarities in responses without resorting to anthropomorphism (de Waal, 2011, p. 199). de Waal (2011) suggests that we can begin to understand the emotions of animals by watching how they make decisions and respond to their environment based on their personal wants and needs (see also Veasey, 2006). For example, watching elephants control their emotional state when placed in stressful situations gives one insight into their cognitive ability (de Waal, 2011). Learning elephant body language along with their responses to stimuli and social situations offers insight into their emotional states, which allows one to postulate their feelings accordingly (de Waal, 2009, 2011). These methods are especially useful when dealing with highly social animals, like elephants, who share extended family bonds in much the same way as humans (de Waal, 2009, 2011).

But is it possible to *understand* animal minds? Some comprehension of animal thinking must, of course, be available to humans, or co-evolution and domestication of species might never have happened. Swart (2010, p. 202) explains that humans domesticating horses must have learned to 'think like a horse' or else domestication and training would have been

impossible. However, the need for whips and saddles demonstrates the horses' continued attempts at rebellion (Swart, 2010). Swart (2010, p. 202) points out that acts of defiance such as bucking, biting, and kicking must be included in biographical writing as important examples of an animal's agency, instead of as 'throwaway and incidental' facts, as they often were in historical documents. Authors should use animal behaviours as the basis for biographical writing, and if one wants to paint an accurate picture, one must be sure to include behaviour that might be labelled 'naughty' by the animal's caregiver (Swart, 2010, p. 202). This behaviour is an indicator that we are dealing with a complex living being who joins our story complete with their own unique history (Buchanan *et al.*, 2015). The *everyday* lives of animals need to be recorded in as accurate a form as possible. Therefore, recording elephants' living situations, rebellions, food preferences, and interactions with others is needed. The lives of what – in the larger picture – amounts to a very small group of elephants in a very small country may not have the global-scale impacts of, say, the current extinction event involving the loss of a million of the planet's estimated eight million species (IPBES, 2019). However, these 112 elephants are a major contributor to the livelihood of numerous marginalized populations throughout the Sauraha area.

Returning to my original question of language and contextuality, it is important to realize that the ethnographer herself becomes 'both translator and author of that which is being translated' (DeMello, 2013, p. 5). This translation is therefore 'enmeshed in conditions of power, with the anthropologist inevitably holding the power in the relationship' (DeMello, 2013, p. 5). This power differential is even greater when the subject being interviewed or observed belongs to marginalized communities such as mahouts – or, one could argue, captive elephants. Captive elephants had little choice in their employment status, and similarly, mahouts often took the job due to a lack of other options (deVries, 2014; Coulter, 2016a, p. 78; Szydlowski, 2017; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). Writing these stories forces us to re-examine the narratives upon which we base our understanding of marginalized groups throughout history, for example homosexuals, women, and non-human animals (Fudge, 2002a, p. 6; Kean, 2012, p. s62). The nuances

of our attitudes towards these groups might not be as accurately recorded as first thought (Fudge, 2002a). As the histories of these groups are debated, we must take a hard look at the ways in which we create others in society, and how this otherness impacts historical writing (Fudge, 2002a, p. 16). To that end, Fudge (2002a, p. 14) argues that to end anthropocentrism, we need to work *within* anthropocentrism. This sounds like a paradoxical concept but makes sense when one accepts that humans can only see through a human lens. Many historical records simply record animals by virtue of the way in which they were used by humans – as religious symbols, food, recipients of cruel treatment, bodies for vivisection (Fudge, 2002a, p. 7). We must instead abandon the belief in our own superiority over other beings (Fudge, 2002a, p. 16). We must realize that it is through our interactions with other animals that we gain perspective and can thus understand our own history (Fudge, 2002a). In this way, we can relocate ourselves *with* animals instead of *above* them. We can tilt our understanding of what being human is and lead ourselves to a better understanding of our shared history from a more critical viewpoint – one which views the connectivity of human and non-human animals instead of their separation (Fudge, 2002a).

Viewing anthropomorphism as a tool is not without issue. Milton (2005) argues that using anthropomorphism is problematic, as it uses humanness as the main method for understanding non-humans. It also suggests that humans can better understand animals by '*attributing* characteristics *to* them', when we should instead be '*perceiving* characteristics *in* them' (Milton, 2005, p. 255, emphasis in original). This attributional approach may create difficulties when the real animal one encounters fails to act as expected (Savvides, 2012).

There are also issues inherent in being a Western, white woman studying Asian cow elephants which complicate attempts to write adequately. Writing animals is made more difficult by the fact that the words used to describe their lives are inadequate in any human language. Because the elephants also live in a culture which uses different words than I do, this language is translated and retranslated. I will try to honestly represent these elephants ... but I am putting their life-worlds in the language of my own. Finding contextual common ground in these situations relies heavily on the ability of humans to imagine how others

feel, such as Kean (2012) described above about historical writing. While this type of writing will not be perfect, it will still contribute to the larger body of research into elephant–human relationships (Nagel, 1974).

Similar issues arise in multispecies ethnography, where the human attempts to understand the non-human experience. The researcher can misuse this power, as she may 'ignore what animals are saying, making them silent', or can try to 'interpret for them', creating data which inevitably reflect a human viewpoint (DeMello, 2013, p. 5). The argument that we can't speak each other's language leads to the argument that we then cannot understand each other, and that indeed understanding semantic meaning is not enough. Wittgenstein (1958, p. 223[e]) famously stated that 'If a lion could speak, we could not understand him.' Wittgenstein is making the point that understanding someone goes beyond simply decoding a language. It requires an understanding of its meaning in the context of cultural background, body language, and referencing schema (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 228[e]). Fudge responds by asking if we would really *want* to understand the lion, because he might 'upset all kinds of assumptions by saying something we don't want to hear' (Fudge, 2002b, p. 89). Anthropomorphism, says (Fudge, 2002b), has ethical implications (p. 89).

To balance this potential anthropomorphism while painting a more complete picture of elephant lives, autoethnography (see below) will be combined with biography for this volume. It is here that a merographic approach should again prove helpful. For example, the biographer and the subject can be 'at once similar and dissimilar', related only by their efforts to find connections and by their 'recognition of difference' (Strathern, 1992, p. 72). The writer can be acknowledged as both 'scientist and social being' and the biography an 'intersubjective construction' (Strathern, 1992, p. 72; Leach, 2012, p. 257). This style of biographical research is reminiscent of Ingold's (2000, p. 5) 'dwelling perspective', mentioned previously (see 'Language and society' section above). Kohn (2015) uses this world-building or meaning-making process as his version of ontology, while acknowledging that others prefer the 'becoming' of Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 238 and 248) or Haraway's (2008, p. 3) 'becoming-with' and 'response-ability' (Kenney,

2013, p. 230 and 231). These methods allow me to 'attend' to my participants as part of the dynamic observations which will be described below (Ingold, 2014, p. 389).

Implications for methodology

The area surrounding Nepal's Chitwan National Park (CNP or Chitwan) was the logical choice for the study described in this book because its environmental and social diversity creates a unique nexus of national and privately owned animal tourism activities, community-based conservation activities, and international conservation group involvement. My research took on a participatory action research (PAR) style, where humans, organizations, and elephants all became both objects and subjects in my research. These subjects then had the option to become partners in the co-research of issues and solutions surrounding captive elephant health and welfare.

Ingold (2014, p. 387) calls for us to 'attend' to what others are doing – to go along with them as they proceed with whatever it is they are doing; to practise paying attention and ask questions. One must let others keep 'humaning', or in this case, elephanting (Ingold, 2014, p. 389). Ingold (2014) also calls for dynamic participant observation, which for my purposes I will term 'participatory observation'. My participatory approach means that local people and elephants influence my questions and guide where I go next, both mentally and physically.

Although initially planned out in detail, I allowed my research, and my subjects, to proceed organically – that is, to follow exploratory trails searching for connections and commonalities of practice. This approach nicely incorporated both the responsive interviewing practice mentioned in the Introduction to this volume and the PAR style mentioned above. These trails allowed me to explore the 'best' of each individual or organization, analyse the connections between conservation and captive animals, and address how elephants fit into their complex role as both endangered species and captive animal.

Proceeding in the above ways also enabled me to employ autoethnography as a tool to incorporate my own knowledge, history,

and personal experiences. Chang (2013, p. 108) describes autoethnography as a way to 'expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher's personal experiences'. These experiences create opportunities for social critique and offer a chance to explore the 'social forces' acting upon the autoethnographer as she explores her data (Chang, 2013, p. 109). This is especially important in this volume, which draws upon multiple prior trips to Nepal, relationships with elephants and humans over a period of 10 years, and my prior experience with exotic species' health and welfare. Autoethnography also allowed me to incorporate a variety of writing styles which reflect my background and experience in both natural and social sciences (Chang, 2013).

Autoethnography uses existing literature, theory, and research as the basis for rigorous study, while allowing one's understanding and experience to inform one's scholarship (Hughes *et al.*, 2012; Bochner, 2013). It is also an acknowledgment of the hope that one's work might be meaningful and perhaps make life a little better for participants (Bochner, 2013; Kohn, 2015). This style of writing also allows the researcher to 'keep the conversation going' (Bochner, 2013, p. 53) as encounters with others continue beyond fieldwork and lives remain entwined. In the current study, *in situ* fieldwork ended in spring of 2019, but emails, video calls, updates, and other communication continued for years. Autoethnography began with reflexive journaling and field notes while in Nepal. Upon returning home, I undertook a holistic revisitation of my data in the forms of field notes, transcripts of interviews, photos, and emails (see Chang, 2013, p. 116). Being reflexive about my changing perceptions of what I call the 'elephant situation' both in the USA and Nepal allowed me greater depth of understanding as I read existing literature and later wrote about Sauraha's stables and elephants.

Research Methodology in Brief

Interview questions were piloted via e-mail with 11 individuals already familiar with the researcher from prior projects, to establish whether the

style of question was easily understood and could elicit the type of information sought for this project. Individuals were then asked to offer suggestions or insight into other potential contacts, the workings of organizations, or potential cultural issues with this style of research. The 11 individuals participating in this phase of the study included elephant drivers, non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, hoteliers, retailers, nature guides, and Nepalese students. Following these emails, questions were altered or clarified before use with others.

Prior to fieldwork, seven people were contacted via e-mail to discuss the process for applying for governmental permission to conduct research in the areas surrounding CNP. Contacts included National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) staff members and leadership from three locations in Nepal, research students, and faculty from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu. After this round of discussion, a consensus was reached that since research was taking place entirely outside the boundaries of the national park, governmental permission was not required. All the field sites for this project were places which tourists could access, and therefore I was not required to submit an official application with the government. As a safety measure, an application was completed and sent to the above-mentioned NTNC staff members, and a copy carried with me while in Nepal. Additional permission was sought and granted by the project manager at the Central Zoo and the NTNC in Chitwan for research to proceed as planned.

Emailed requests for information regarding the mission statements, availability for and willingness to participate in interviews were sent to former volunteers, current administrators, and staff from various organizations. Non-governmental organizational names have been pseudonymized numerically (INGO1, INGO2, etc.), unless otherwise noted. Questionnaires were then sent to ascertain their plans, goals, and motivations. Organizational websites were reviewed using discourse analysis to examine the motivations and reach of each organization. This method of analysis considers that language is more than a way to convey information; it helps create participants' reality (Potter and Edwards, 1996; Ingold, 2000; Fairclough, 2012). Discourse analysis allows for the consideration of language and stories as part of a social system and allows the researcher to incorporate social perspectives and practices into

her analyses (Potter and Edwards, 1996; Ingold, 2000; Fairclough, 2012; Halliday, 2017).

Next, arrangements were made for face-to-face interviews via phone, e-mail, or in person (personal requests are traditional practice in Nepal). Others were contacted, with their permission, via WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. Emails, Facebook, and WhatsApp messages are noted in the text as 'PC' to indicate personal communication. Human-to-human interviews consisted of semi-structured, open-ended, in-person questions. Interlocutors were chosen using a purposive sampling method, and these interlocutors directed the author to other key individuals involved in conservation efforts or elephant welfare. Interviews were undertaken with 63 members of NTNC staff and leadership, community members, Chepang leaders, elephant drivers, college students, Central Zoo veterinary staff and keepers, nature guides, hoteliers, and employees and volunteers from elephant, dog, and tiger welfare organizations in Nepal. These interviews focused on conservation motivations and methods, rescue, and rehabilitation efforts currently in place for wildlife, and their hopes for future facilities, support, partnerships with international conservation groups, and expansion goals. These interviews also asked questions regarding the personal motivations of each in pursuing work in conservation or with animals. Interviews took place after permission was sought from personnel oversight committees or senior staff.

All human participants in this research were adults with the capacity to give informed consent, and both consent forms and participant information sheets were offered to each. For participants who read only languages other than English or Nepali, or were illiterate, the project was described in detail and informed oral consent obtained. As expected, some human informants were wary of signing official-looking documents and oral informed consent was sought in these cases.

Pseudonymization for some individuals or organizations was difficult given their identifiable positions or status within the community (such as the single veterinarian employed by the NTNC and the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC); see Chapters 4 and 7, this volume). In these cases, the potential implications of participation (such as retribution by elephant owners, loss of job or livelihood, and potential for changes in

community perceptions of the individual) were discussed in detail with each interlocutor. In some cases, interlocutors requested that their names and/or positions be used to provide public access to information about their programme or role in elephant care within Nepal. However, the decision was made to pseudonymize personnel to protect them and the researcher. For one retired government employee, Dr Gairhe (see Chapter 4, this volume, for further details), permission was given to use his name and title, as he is an authority on elephants in Nepal and the author of several academic articles.

Negotiating consent from pachyderm persons (a neologism I developed which had interesting consequences during the sharing of my research outcomes; see Szydlowski, 2022) was one area not covered in required ethics approval processes. I attempted to reflexively engage with the potential problems arising from this lack of ethics board oversight of non-human participants via co-development of workshops, papers, and podcasts which problematized the ethics process (Anthrozoology Podcast, 2021; Hooper *et al.*, 2021a, b; Szydlowski *et al.*, 2023). Gaining consent from pachyderm participants will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Stable visits

I also toured 25 out of the 40 private elephant stables in the Sauraha area. Considerations included, but were not limited to, access to adequate shelter, substrate, food, access to water, distance to safari/amount of walking in needed crowded areas, mahout staffing, and mahout shelter. Notes, recordings, and photographs were collected with permission. The biographical data of 25 individual elephants were collected from social media, owner or carer interviews, and via participant observations of human and elephant individuals. An in-depth analysis of available data on Asian elephant health and welfare served as the basis for a comparison of the conditions found in Sauraha stables (see Chapter 10, this volume).

The names of elephants have been pseudonymized; however, it should be noted that due to the presence of identifiable physical characteristics,

it may be possible for those familiar with the area to identify them. Many of these elephants are in situations which, according to their caregivers and other experts, do not place them in danger of retribution or increased abuse, but stating their names might result in their human caregivers or former or current owners being identified.

Analysis of data

Interviews were transcribed then analysed using a combination of narrative analysis and an intuitive qualitative approach, which allows the researcher to use her subjective understanding of the situation as a source of data (Firestone and Dawson, 1982). In an intuitive approach, data are analysed after the researcher becomes familiar with the field site, communities, and subjects. Data are then scrutinized without bias, inasmuch as that is possible. Data are then compared to prior studies in the subject area, looking for patterns (Firestone and Dawson, 1982). Immersion is followed by deep reflexivity, making this style of analysis perfect for use in anthrozoological studies.

Narrative analysis approaches allow the participants' stories, and the way in which they tell these stories, to become part of the data (Bleakley, 2005; Thornborrow, 2012). This is a natural approach when undertaking large numbers of interviews, as more analytical methods 'lose the concrete story and its emotional impact' (Bleakley, 2005, p. 534). These methods are not relegated to the social sciences; they are used in medicine and medical education due to the usefulness of narrative analysis as a tool to encourage empathic engagement and reflect upon the human mind (Bleakley, 2005; Hiles *et al.*, 2017). Rather than a basic set of rules, narrative approaches follow the research question through biographical and informational interviews. These interviews are transcribed, and the researcher listens, reads, and rereads several times to infer explanations and visualize themes (Hiles *et al.*, 2017).

Recorded interviews and transcripts were analysed using the above methods to obtain historical data on each organization and individual human or animal. These data were used to construct biographies of

each. In particular, the motivations for organizations and individuals becoming involved in conservation activities and the words used to describe these motivations were noted to discover commonalities across different types of organizations and cultural backgrounds. Included in these biographies are data regarding the stated goals of each organization, descriptions of how participants feel they are meeting these goals, and information regarding how participants feel that other organizations support/counteract these goals.

Next, information regarding the way in which these individuals/organizations practise conservation was compared to their stated goals. The stated goals of these individual organizations and individuals from both their promotional materials (i.e. websites, social media, advertising) and their interviews were compared to their perceived success in meeting these goals. The way in which these individuals and organizations perceive their own success or failure was compared to the perceptions of them by external organizations.

Descriptive data of government, NTNC, and privately owned elephant stables were compiled, along with available health and nutrition information, to gain a more complete picture of the care offered to animals in Nepal. Next, interlocuters described how they felt facilities fulfilled the needs of each animal, how they perceived the mental status of each animal, and what they felt were the successes and failures of their own organizations.

Terminology

Travellers quickly experience the people of Nepal alternately referring to themselves and their products as both Nepali and Nepalese. According to informants, this is a common practice which is also applied to food, language, customs, and products. I will continue their practice within this volume. Furthermore, to streamline this work, non-human animals will be referred to as 'animals' and human animals as 'humans'. In addition, only one species of elephant (*Elephas maximus*), one species of tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), and one species of rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) are found in the wild in Nepal. For this reason, they will be

referred to simply as elephant, tiger, and rhino for the remainder of this volume. While horseback riding and horse festivals are common in some areas of Nepal, there are no wild equids found in the Sauraha area of Nepal – nor any stables catering to equestrian activities. Therefore, any mention of horses within refers to those domestic horses (*Equus ferus caballus*) being used to pull carts for tourist activities.

Mahouts

Elephants in Nepal were historically assigned three 'elephant-men'. These men included the driver (*phanti*), the game-spotter/walker (*pachhuwa*), and the stable cleaner (mahout) (Bhusal, 2007, p. 73). Additional men worked at the stables, such as the supervisor (*subba*). Traditionally, calling a driver a mahout was seen as an insult, as the mahout was the lowest-ranking staff member, but this has changed (Mishra, 2008). Now, many NTNC personnel, government workers, local community members, foreigners, and mahouts themselves refer to all elephant caregivers as mahouts. Therefore, I will follow the current fashion and use the three names – driver, elephant-man, and mahout – interchangeably.

Conclusions

Finding a common language with which to discuss doing 'the best' for animals is complex and situationally dependent. This is not a problem with the linguistic system itself, but rather with our ability to find shared context in which to communicate. In addition, we are beings constantly creating meaning through our interactions with others. Ethnographers must be attentive to the ways in which their observations and interactions become a part of their study. Reflexivity, autoethnography, and animal biography are tools one can use to tell a research story which involves beings from very different backgrounds.

Like language, personal ethics rely heavily on influences from one's past, and therefore require an approach from both a philosophical and sociocultural perspective. Most people believe they are ethical beings, and

that they behave in ethical ways. These beliefs may lead individuals (or organizations) to see their actions as more ethical than someone else's. This volume will explore the way in which these individuals, and the organizations they represent, feel they are doing the best for elephants, and how these perceptions might get in the way of cooperation towards a common goal.

The next chapter (Chapter 3) introduces relevant literature and current debates in anthropology, anthrozoology, and philosophy which apply to elephant care in Nepal. It includes a discussion of conservation efforts in biodiverse areas, and how these efforts are intimately tied to ecotourism. Whether these efforts are perceived as effective will be discussed through the lens of neoliberal theory.

NGOs and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) active in the CNP area serve as focal points throughout this volume, and the next chapter includes a discussion of these organizations' perceived impact and efficacy, especially in areas where participatory development and government intersect. These intersections are where discussions of environmental justice occur and lend themselves to further examination.

Lastly, the next chapter introduces several lenses through which to view the captive elephants in the current study. Are they simply conveyances to be traded? Or are they cosmopolitan beings involved in meaning-making with humans? Whether humans view these beings as co-workers, commodities, or endangered species is highly dependent upon one's personal history, societal pressures, and the experience of living in shared landscapes.

Notes

[1] For an excellent (and humorous) take on the pros and cons of relativism, indigenous voices, and questionable histories, see Hacking's (1999) *The Social Construction of What?*

[2] A bull hook, also known as an *ankus* or *ankush*, is a metal or wooden handle with a curved metal tip used for elephant control in a wide variety of countries.

[3] For ease of reading, I have used commas in monetary amounts in the style of the USA or UK. This was done to prevent reader confusion. In Nepal, the comma is typically replaced by a period.

[4] For a fascinating review of indigenous versus Western knowledge, see Agrawal's (1995) paper, 'Dismantling the divide between indigenous and scientific knowledge in development and change'.

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3 Ethics, Care, and Commodification

© Michelle Szydlowski 2024. *Elephant Tourism in Nepal* (M. Szydlowski)
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Abstract

This chapter includes a review of relevant literature, an examination of related current debates, and the identification of gaps within the areas of ethics, care, commodification, tourism practice, and elephant–human relationships. Topics include the impacts of ecotourism on Chitwan National Park and surrounding villages, the commodification of animals, and neocolonial attitudes towards communities.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have historically played a large part in the lives of humans and endangered species within Nepal, and this chapter examines their role in creating and altering landscapes, the preservation of species, and their effects on communities of animals. This chapter examines the perceived efficacy of NGOs towards conservation, along with how NGOs are associated with neoliberal thought. Lastly, this chapter offers discourse surrounding the variety of lenses through which elephants can be viewed. These elephants may be seen as cosmopolitans with whom humans share landscapes, as co-workers, or as individuals with whom humans life-share.

To thoroughly examine the topic of animal care and ethics in Nepal one must draw upon several diverse areas of inquiry. This chapter presents a literature review which engages with the broader fields of conservation, care, and ethics as well as the more specific issues surrounding elephant–human relationships in Nepal. Included is an examination of the current push towards community-based conservation and local sustainability, and how this push has led to the description of tourism as a neoliberal pursuit. The ways in which animals are commodified in the name of both

tourism and conservation, and the concept of environmental justice and its application to elephants will be explored. Discourse surrounding environmental justice, work, and care round out the chapter.

While there appears to be no lack of knowledge regarding these *individual* areas of interest,[1] further study into the way these fields work – or fail to work – together is needed. This volume will attempt to fill gaps in knowledge and present a more unified view of the current situation in Nepal, in the hope of finding a more effective way to 'do' conservation. Ultimately, the purpose of this volume is to provide data which will result in higher welfare outcomes for captive elephants and those who care for them. These data will then be shared with interested stakeholders, especially those within Nepal.

Conservation and Biodiversity Maintenance: Neoliberal Commodification or a Path to Environmental Justice?

Used originally to describe a political economy theory, neoliberal thought touted ownership of private property and access to competitive markets as the foundations of a strong economy (Castree, 2008a; Ganti, 2014). Foucault (2005) saw neoliberalism as another way for governments to use power to problematize governing practices and achieve objectives aimed at ensuring their success (Foucault, 2008, p. 131; Gutting and Oksala, 2019). This type of government is focused on very specific objectives, including the creation of an 'economic subject' (Foucault, 2008, p. 175), an enterprise which both encourages and produces self-interest and competition (Harvey, 2007, p. 65; Foucault, 2008, p. 147).

Early neoliberal thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek (Hayek, 2008) claimed to be concerned with what he saw as a loss of moral standards surrounding one's rights to think for oneself and felt that maintaining private industry was the only way to ensure innovation and thereby raise the living standards of the entire population (Harvey, 2007; Ganti, 2014). A fear of political bias as inherent in governmental decisions created a desire among these economic elites to maintain private control of markets (Harvey, 2007; Castree, 2008a). Neoliberalism described a

new type of class warfare, wherein economic elites attempted to wrest control of state-owned resources by claiming that the average, ordinary individual – i.e. anyone but themselves – would not be able to handle these resources properly (Harvey, 2007, p. 65; Ganti, 2014, p. 93). Competition between these economic elites was allegedly key to creating quality products in efficient ways, while maintaining the usefulness of formerly public resources such as land or water (Harvey, 2007). Naturally, the working class quickly became fed up seeing their efforts lining the pockets of economic elites instead of their own, and freedom of choice became key (Ganti, 2014). Neoliberalism became a predominantly negative term, associated with economic collapse and class inequality (Ganti, 2014).

The term found its way into anthropological literature in the mid-2000s following societal changes such as sweeping economic reforms and financial crises, and continues to gain momentum (Ganti, 2014). According to Ganti (2014), 80% of the uses of 'neoliberalism' can be found in scholarly works from the last 15 years (p. 90). According to Castree (2008a), confusion arises from the term's application to a wide variety of unrelated and incomparable conditions. It is therefore important to understand the history of this term and demonstrate reflexivity when applying it to societal studies (Ganti, 2014). Anthropological studies define neoliberalism as the marginalization of groups which has occurred as public resources became privatized, welfare programmes were discontinued, and poorer groups were swept up in market economies (Ganti, 2014). Neoliberalism can be used as a framework to examine how policies affect people, as well as the ways in which people respond to these changes (Ganti, 2014). For example, the marginalization of people due to neoliberal restructuring may result in activism surrounding social justice or development which forces neoliberal organizations and state bodies to make 'remedial action' which improves living conditions (Castree, 2008b, p. 162; Ganti, 2014, p. 95). Care must be taken not to assume that specific case studies are universally applicable, due to the unique set of intersections of governmental policy, human response, and the 'biophysical influence of nature' on the process (Castree, 2008a, p. 137). Discussions of neoliberalism and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this

chapter's literature review, for example, rely in part on data from outside Nepal thanks to the country's small size and lack of large-scale research. Nepal's unique biophysical location and political structure will naturally influence the interactions between its government and communities. Because the term neoliberalism began as an economic one, neoliberal scholarship often focuses on those areas where government is involved in the management of nature – such as at the interface between governmental conservation or natural resource departments and NGOs (Castree, 2008a, p. 140 and 142; Ganti, 2014, p. 96) as seen in the current study.

Neoliberalism as a path to 'saving' nature?

Neoliberalism is often tied to the development of ecotourism and conservation practices (Campbell, 2007; Castree, 2008a). Allowing the privatization and marketization of nature to preserve it seems paradoxical – it simultaneously results in both the protection and destruction of the 'biophysical world' (Castree, 2008a, p. 133; 2008b). Rather than serving to raise the living standards of entire societies as intended (Harvey, 2007; Ganti, 2014), neoliberal conservation practices may further expand the gap between socio-economic classes or limit access of poorer communities to natural resources (Mehta and Heinen, 2001; Campbell, 2007; Castree, 2008b).

Community-based conservation (CBC) efforts are an area where neoliberalism and top-down guided development create conflicts in areas of high conservation focus (Castree, 2008b). For example, park management in Nepal was traditionally run by the federal government, and denied local people access to forest provisioning, management positions, or input on park usage (Mehta and Heinen, 2001; Campbell, 2007). Community attitudes towards this type of traditional park management have historically been overwhelmingly negative (Heinen, 1993; Mehta and Heinen, 2001). CBC programmes, which have gained popularity in Nepal since the 1990s (Campbell, 2007, p. 99), were part of an ongoing effort in Nepal to allegedly decentralize governmental power, defend property rights and local resources, and link socio-

economic development to biodiversity preservation (Kellert *et al.*, 2000). However, these CBC efforts have also been met with negative feelings from locals due to their failure to provide promised outcomes (Heinen, 1993; Kellert *et al.*, 2000).

For example, initial studies of the Annapurna Conservation and Makalu-Barun Conservation areas found that on average 85% of local people supported these community-based projects, in part due to the perceived impact of infrastructure development and tourism in the areas surrounding these national parks (Mehta and Heinen, 2001). However, despite this widespread support, both programmes failed to achieve their goals (Kellert *et al.*, 2000). Both resulted in an inequal distribution of benefits, with areas closest to the management offices receiving the most profit (Kellert *et al.*, 2000). Instead of community interests being served, power was used to promote personal interests, and local elites were given the highest positions. Local people reliant on grazing were not consulted as promised, and farmers were given production quotas that could not be sustainable in the long term (Kellert *et al.*, 2000). Educational programmes on the environmental and the socio-economic impacts of community-based resource management were offered to local communities, but the focus in some areas quickly switched from biodiversity preservation to a jockeying for power positions and financial gain (Kellert *et al.*, 2000).

Local programmes were not given clear goals by the federal government, and there appeared to be more focus on procedure than practice and strategies (Kellert *et al.*, 2000), a common problem during other studies as well (Roka, 2012). Participants felt that any positive effects of NGOs were slight, or limited to 'small geographic areas' (Roka, 2012, p. iii, 188 and 192). Projects started by non-locals often resulted in abandonment, and their efficiency never assessed (Roka, 2012). Marginalized communities in Kellert *et al.*'s (2000) study, especially women and members of lower castes, were excluded from the administration of community-based programmes and did not benefit from the switch from national to local oversight. Furthermore, the forest and its wildlife remained possessions of the national government, meaning that federal bodies could step in at any time they were unsatisfied with local progress, creating the feeling that communities

were not truly empowered but rather again victims of neoliberal policy (Kellert *et al.*, 2000).

Over the last 16 years, both globally and in the small villages of Nepal, the terms development, conservation, and biodiversity have become entangled with neoliberal discourse and have become synonymous with big business and the selling of environmental experiences and conservation as consumable goods (Sullivan, 2006; Ganti, 2014). Furthermore, neoliberalism has become so intertwined with conservation, according to Sullivan (2006), that most researchers no longer notice it as they study the 'global environment' (p. 109). Projects combining tourism and conservation have become so commodified that the scientific pursuits of these projects are themselves considered suspect (Cousins *et al.*, 2009). These combinations create an atmosphere where the science may be driven by consumer desires, rather than gaps in the field of knowledge (Cousins *et al.*, 2009).

NGOs and neoliberalism

National and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs) working within Nepal find themselves embroiled in the above debates, as they are often involved in conservation activities and voluntourism experiences which combine leisure travel with non-profit efforts (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011; Fletcher, 2015; UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Association), 2016). For example, office workers can take a sabbatical for travel to the Himalayas for a 'self-actualization' experience building homes, preparing animal food, or volunteering in elementary schools (Ace the Himalaya, 2023; International Volunteer HQ, 2023).

Neoliberalism is commonly associated with these types of environmental and conservation experiences, which often find themselves in areas where political liberalization has led to a push towards civil action (World Bank, 1998). NGOs and INGOs are often connected with participatory development, which may benefit vulnerable populations (World Bank, 1998), but are also linked to global financial powerhouses like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World

Bank. The IMF is an organization made up of 190 countries hoping to 'ensure the stability of the international monetary system' (IMF, 2020, n.p.). The IMF purports to maintain economic oversight through surveillance of the financial policies of member nations, loans to member countries, capacity development, and as the largest official holder of global gold reserves (IMF, 2020, n.p.). The World Bank, which is controlled by developed nations and touts itself as a knowledge manager (World Bank, 2020), faces criticism for its top-down control over development processes (Plehwe, 2007, pp. 514–515). Money from organizations like the World Bank and the IMF is distributed to developing nations via INGOs on a massive scale, including through partnerships with large global organizations like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (World Bank, 1998; Ganti, 2014). Surprisingly, more development aid is sent to the Global South[2] via NGOs than through the World Bank and the IMF combined (Agrawal, 1995, p. 416).

Regardless of where the aid originates, funding from INGOs is considered vital to conservation and development practices in Nepal (Spotlight Nepal, 2012b; GoN, 2020). However, researchers studying INGOs over the last decade have wrestled with the changing ways in which these groups portray themselves, and how they are perceived by the public (Elyachar, 2005; Walton *et al.*, 2016). Instead of icons of community empowerment, NGOs may be painted as co-contributors to neoliberalism rather than as alternatives to state oversight (Walton *et al.*, 2016). In some cases, by establishing microeconomic boosts, pushing for a free-market culture, offering better jobs which create further class distinctions, and appropriating cultural practices into profitable offerings, NGOs may benefit people other than their originally intended social group (Schuller, 2009). Schuller (2009) questions the current elite status of NGOs active in the Global South, and sees them as agents who may reproduce inequalities and create barriers against participation by local community members, or weaken the social contract between state and individual by situating themselves to provide services that should be provided by the government.[3] In both Haiti and Nepal, turf wars between NGOs have created tension and an unwillingness to collaborate for the good of the community which these NGOs purport to serve (Schuller,

2009; Gautam, 2020). NGOs who focus on charismatic issues like schools and clinics may inadvertently draw support *away* from much needed infrastructure and clean-up organizations (Schuller, 2009; Gautam, 2020).

In addition, some NGOs now use paying volunteers to complete projects in under-developed countries under the guise of creating global citizens, tasked with studying and managing global resources for the good of all (Lorimer, 2010b). These pay-to-save nature programmes appear neoliberal in nature, seemingly insinuating that private, typically white, consumers are somehow more adept at managing resources than local governments (Lorimer, 2010b). These programmes often rely on charismatic animals or appealing causes to direct the flow of funding and may serve to cut already marginalized populations of humans and non-humans out of the new order (Lorimer, 2009, 2010b). These types of NGOs are also criticized for their practice of dropping predominantly Western, young volunteers into areas where they have little experience with the language or culture they purport to serve (Illich, 1968; Lorimer, 2010b; Guttentag, 2011). Instead of solving issues in their areas of interest, these NGOs may instead inadvertently contribute to the expansion of neoliberalism (Mostafanezhad, 2016).

Thanks in part to social media platforms, there are now more opportunities for people around the world to contribute to human and non-human welfare advocacy on a global scale (Stronza, 2004, p. 492; Di Lauro *et al.*, 2019; Rodak, 2020). Animal-focused NGOs may find themselves at odds with the public and each other throughout Asia (Salwala, 2002; Gautam, 2020). But because elephants in different types of captivity (i.e. timber-camp elephants vs beggar elephants) require vastly different types of help, there is more than enough work for NGOs to share, and greater communication between and recognition of similarly focused NGOs and their roles in improving the lives of captive elephants are desperately needed (Salwala, 2002). NGOs could fill gaps in advocacy as well as physical support if they could learn to work with the government and each other, a rarity in both Thailand and Nepal (Salwala, 2002; Gautam, 2020; Brown, Minsky, Rao, Sama, INGO5 and Thomas interviews, 2019).[4]

Animal NGOs are not the only organizations struggling with public perception. Some humanitarian NGOs in Nepal have been accused of supporting or increasing ethnic strife (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a) and often do not seek required permission from concerned municipalities before operating (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a). Nepalese ministry representatives acknowledge that it is often not practical for INGOs to request this permission and admit that maintaining oversight of the various organizations working in Nepal is difficult (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a). B. Paudel, secretary of Nepal's Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, feels there is a lack of understanding among some governmental agencies as to the role of NGOs in different sectors, as well as confusion about which governmental arm should oversee regulating them (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a).

Current scholarship also questions the legitimacy of these NGOs and INGOs due to the perception of power imbalances resulting from the connection of these groups to both Western interests and local governments (Walton *et al.*, 2016). There is concern regarding NGOs' ability to influence governmental change by exploiting their sense of legitimacy as international organizations and financial powers (Walton *et al.*, 2016). NGOs may stimulate and expand neoliberal messaging through the promotion of consumerism and self-interest, and there are concerns that these groups benefit their donors more than their intended recipients (Ganti, 2014; Walton *et al.*, 2016). Likewise, conservation-based NGOs may be promoting conservation against the express wishes of local communities or imposing their own conservation ideals through a sense of 'cultural superiority' (Liu and Leung, 2019, p. 125).

There are three main concerns that call into question the effectiveness of INGOs. First, these agencies may simply be too close to state institutions to be truly focused on civil rights issues (Walton *et al.*, 2016). Secondly, INGOs may be becoming irrelevant as local grassroots organizations take up the mantle of exposing corruption and inequality (Walton *et al.*, 2016). Lastly, and in contrast to the first issue, those INGOs which rely on international funding may find themselves out of luck as local governments clamp down on foreign finances (Walton *et al.*, 2016).

Despite these potential pitfalls, NGOs have an important role to play in sustainable development, conservation, and animal welfare in Nepal. The number of NGOs in Nepal has increased over the last 30 years, with over 51,000 now registered, along with an additional 229 INGOs (GoN, 2020, n.p.). Active in sectors as diverse as sustainable development, education, peace, security, energy, and trafficking, these organizations bring needed human labour, materials, and resources to Nepal (Karkee and Comfort, 2016; GoN, 2020). INGOs supply first responders in emergent situations such as floods, and often supply the necessary relief packages which allow governments to support citizens following natural disasters (Spotlight Nepal, 2012b). In addition, NGOs can operate in remote areas where governments have little reach (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a). What is lacking, according to Ministry secretary Paudel, is oversight and monitoring of the various organizations operating within NepaI (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a). Oversight of NGOs/INGOs falls to the Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN) and the governmental Social Welfare Council (SWC), and the boundaries of the two organizations are not clearly defined (Spotlight Nepal, 2012b). These organizations suffer from a lack of communication, a lack of organization, and a lack of understanding of each other's mission (Spotlight Nepal, 2012b). Further troubled by an unsteady government (see Chapter 1, this volume), the AIN/SWC faces struggles to monitor and evaluate the multitude of NGOs registered in Nepal (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a). Paudel sees the role of NGOs as to 'carry out the mandate of the government', and to reach the people the government cannot (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a, n.p.). To this end, Paudel recommends that the government provide a framework to better oversee the operations of NGOs (Spotlight Nepal, 2012a).

The lens of neoliberalism may offer social scientists a common language with which to discuss cultures, practices, and organizations (Castree, 2008a; Ganti, 2014). The word can sound judgemental, however, and researchers must be careful not to assume that anything labelled as neoliberal is negative, because this might cause them to reframe their studies too narrowly (Ganti, 2014). Using Marcus's suggestion to 'follow the people, the thing, the metaphor' (Marcus, 1995, pp. 106–110), as described in Chapter 2 of this volume, social scientists

can examine neoliberal issues from a critical perspective through the various agents involved at the base level, while not simply studying the economic elites themselves. Of course, the first step is to be aware of neoliberalism's existence and the fluidity of the term's definition (Castree, 2008a). One must then acknowledge that it is inextricable from conservation discourse (Sullivan, 2006). In this volume the term will be used as a tool to discuss how NGOs/INGOs are perceived by local communities, governmental agencies, and each other. While many INGOs have come under fire due to their transformation from small volunteer-driven groups to large, well-funded agencies, the INGOs in the current study are predominantly smaller organizations funded by crowdsourcing, smaller grants, or family foundations. How these smaller groups compare to governmentally funded agencies is a key aspect that will be covered in Chapter 8 (this volume).

The NGO 'dogfight' in Nepal

Offering perspective on the NGO situation in Nepal comes from the Nepalese executive director of the Jane Goodall Institute-Nepal, Manoj Gautam (2020).[5] Gautam has strong views about NGOs active in Nepal and has had a variety of negative interactions with them in his attempts to coordinate street-dog care programmes via his own NGO, ManuMitra. Gautam also plays a part in the discussion of captive elephant sanctuaries in the following chapters. According to Gautam, the role of NGOs, especially INGOs, should be one of technical assistance, fundraising, acting as a watchdog or a catalyst for change. He feels that NGOs need to claim both their good and bad outcomes, plan initiatives, research options, and relate their work to a One Health/One Welfare platform. Furthermore, Gautam feels that foreign NGOs need to keep their hands off the day-to-day operations of local projects, a feeling shared by some scholars (i.e. Karkee and Comfort, 2016).

Instead, NGOs active in street-dog care in Kathmandu are thought to actively hide their limitations and bloat themselves to attract attention and appreciation from the public and their donors. These donors provide

the ‘bones’ that NGOs fight over, says Gautam, and donors soak up the loyalty shown to them by their NGOs. But the donors themselves do not enter the community to assess the problem or verify that their finances are helping create solutions.

Gautam says that once these NGOs reach capacity, they stop taking calls or refuse to help, creating hard feelings within the community. Instead of a solution, the NGO now looks like a problem. Out of frustration, other people then form NGOs thinking they can solve the problem. These NGOs multiply, create competition, and simply mask the symptoms of a deeper problem. What these NGOs should be doing, according to Gautam, is telling the community that these problems are not the responsibility of the NGO or government, but instead belong firmly to community members. He feels the NGOs lack the moral courage to speak openly about the community’s responsibility to fix the problems it created.

Gautam feels that many NGOs function solely for the benefit of their social media followings. Instead of showing positive images of dogs (such as the 98% of the dogs in Kathmandu who have no physical issues, according to Gautam), these NGOs engage in ‘misery pimping’, sharing and re-sharing posts of miserable animals and collecting ‘likes’ (or funding) on social media.

These problems are intensified by a general distrust of the Nepalese government. The government has culled street-dogs for years (two million in the last decade, according to Gautam) and yet the number of dogs is still rising. The key, says Gautam, is changing the interactions between the government, the NGOs, and the community. Identifying what is an ‘animal problem’ vs a ‘human problem’ is the first step. Next, research is needed to identify the issues and solutions to create a plan that deals with the underlying problem.

Nepal is not the only country to see these conflicts between NGOs impacting their stated goals. Kontogeorgopoulos (2009) reports that there are numerous groups in Thailand who purport to serve elephants. These groups have faced personal disputes and claim that divergent beliefs make them unable to work together. Much like Nepal, Thai society frowns upon direct confrontation, and NGOs who wish to help within Thailand should perhaps focus on supporting research into the

preferences of tourists or working within camps where they are welcomed (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). Flexibility and cooperation among NGOs are key to truly 'advance the interests' of captive elephants (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020, p. 61), and rivalry between individuals and methodologies must end. This volume attempts to solve similar problems in Nepal, by finding common ground among organizations operating in the Sauraha area, and thus improve welfare for captive elephants and mahouts.

Ecotourism in Nepal

Ecotourism is discussed here due to its intimate ties with conservation practices, NGOs, and elephants in Nepal. Ecotourism is an area that has not escaped the label of neoliberalism and is a key field which could benefit from further study (Castree, 2008a, b; Buckley, 2011; Wondirad, 2019). The United Nations (UN) has called ecotourism the 'key to eradicating poverty and protecting environment' and 'a vital force for world peace' (UNWTO, 1980, p. 1; 2012, p. 1), and tourism itself is listed as a 'principal export' for 83% of developing countries and represents more than a tenth of the global economy (TIES, 2006, p. 1; Buckley, 2011). Many developing nations rely on the US$6 trillion international tourism market for survival, yet little hard data exist on the true impacts of this travel, and the industry remains largely unregulated (Buckley, 2011; UNTWO, 2017, p. 15).

Tourism researchers have long-standing concerns surrounding the power differentials between locals and tourists (Stronza, 2001). Local people are thought to lack agency in these relationships and are represented as unduly influenced by visitors, almost as if they could not escape the 'tourist gaze' (Stronza, 2001, p. 272). There is concern that locals may change their thoughts or behaviour in response to interactions with tourists (Stronza, 2001; Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010). However, recent studies may present a more balanced view of the tourist–local relationship. For example, Stronza and Gordillo (2008) found that community members saw both positive and negative

outcomes from their interactions with tourists. Exposure to tourists and touristic experiences reportedly empowered local women to try new roles outside the household, and other community members appreciated the opportunity to 'develop professional relations' and gain experience with outsiders (Stronza and Gordillo, 2008, pp. 457–458).

Conservation outcomes, cultural identity, and poverty reduction are other contested elements of ecotourism (Wondirad, 2019). Some studies showed an improvement in local conservation attitudes and outcomes (Waylen *et al.*, 2009; Oglethorpe and Crandall, 2010; Newsome and Hughes, 2016; Sedhain and Adhikary, 2016), poverty reduction (UNWTO, 2016, p. 2), and the reinforcement of cultural identity (Smith, 2015). Others cite only 'environmental exploitation' (West and Carrier, 2004, p. 484; Carrier and Macleod, 2005, p. 319), the loss of land (Kharel, 1997; Carrier and Macleod, 2005), and the siphoning of income from local communities (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998; Puri, 2019). This lack of consensus surrounding the impacts of ecotourism on local communities would benefit from more rigorous research through an interdisciplinary lens (Castree, 2008a, b; Buckley, 2011; Wondirad, 2019).

For example, Raif Buckley's (2011) in-depth review of relevant tourism literature found more than 1500 articles on tourism and the environment, yet few offered the necessary 'rigor, insight, and significance' needed to identify trends in the field (p. 409). Stronza *et al.* (2019) argue that data on ecotourism's benefits may be skewed, perhaps due to a lack of rigor or confusion with other outdoor travel, and a systematic review by Wondirad (2019, p. 1059) found that ecotourism is more a 'marketing tactic' than an effective way to encourage sustainable development. However, despite 25 years of data suggesting that ecotourism is 'ineffective' at helping local communities of humans, Stronza *et al.* (2019, p. 236 and 245) continue to claim that ecotourism can 'protect landscapes and entire wildlife populations' thanks to its support of endangered species' conservation in protected areas.

Perhaps the disagreement regarding the true effects of ecotourism may stem from what Buckley (2011, p. 409) describes as the practice of 'biologists, geographers, psychologists, and economists' interested in tourism tending to publish only in their own journals, and tourism

researchers seeing environmental impacts as secondary to tourism practices. Buckley (2011, p. 409) feels this separation of tourism studies into separate fields 'limits the penetration of broader academic knowledge into tourism'. An examination of ecotourism through an interdisciplinary lens is desperately needed, as these practices add to already overtaxed infrastructures in developing countries, creating stress on sewage treatment (if available at all) and increases in refuse, greenhouse gases, energy consumption, and water usage, along with displacing wildlife for resorts and damaging flora and fauna in the name of ecotourism (Carrier and Macleod, 2005; Subedi, 2010). Ecotourists fail to take the environmental costs of their travel into account or consider how travel-related climate change impacts the biodiversity of the fragile areas they desire to visit (Lorimer, 2010b; Buckley, 2011).

Buckley (2011) also argues that the ecotourism industry is actively encouraging the placement of private facilities inside protected areas, as with the government of Nepal's initial support of private hotels within its national parks (see Chapter 4, this volume). Some private operators also buy land under the guise of protecting it from development, which instead results in said land being taken out of the hands of locals or used for money-making activities, thereby continuing the neoliberal cycle (West and Carrier, 2004; Castree, 2008a; Fletcher, 2015). Others have done the opposite: taking private or communal land and earmarking it for conservation (Buckley, 2011). Whether this conversion from communal property to conservation land has positive or negative effects remains to be seen, but ecotourism has been successful in protecting biodiversity in some areas by outcompeting industries with greater environmental impact, such as oil-drilling, farming, mining, or fisheries (Buckley, 2011).

Some critics, such as Castree (2008b) and West and Carrier (2004), do not see the expansion of neoliberalism as an accidental outcome of ecotourism, but instead see the tourist industry purposefully trying to create the sense that local communities benefit greatly from the practice. West and Carrier (2004) argue that tourists are encouraged to embrace this sense of supporting local people and are sold the narrative that they are working around ineffective governments. Instead, ecotourism may result in fragmentation of families and communities as local people move

away from busy areas or seek less traditional ways of life (Carrier and Macleod, 2005). Areas of conservation and ecotourism focus may end up redefined through a neoliberal lens, seen as commodifiable resources (West and Carrier, 2004; Castree, 2008a).

Conservation education and awareness

The larger body of work on outdoor and environmental *education* has also largely ignored ecotourism's role in nature conservation. Ecotourism is often promoted as a means to encourage nature conservation via education, both of tourists and locals, especially in fragile areas (Fletcher, 2015; Wondirad, 2019, p. 1054; see also UNWTO, 1980). According to Fletcher (2009), most ecotourism is undertaken by white, upper-middle class people from developed countries who have a very specific ecotourist gaze. These ecotourists have been told that by visiting conservation areas and supporting local communities, they will become a part of sustainable development and community awareness in the area (Fletcher, 2009; Stronza *et al.*, 2019). This type of ecotourism is often sold as an educational experience, wherein the traveller and the local community benefit. The traveller gets to learn about conservation and nature *in situ*, and in turn the influx of money from tourism will allegedly encourage the local community to protect said conservation areas – continuing a cycle of visitation and conservation (Sullivan, 2006; Fletcher, 2009, 2015; Stronza *et al.*, 2019). Sadly, the amount of money that makes it into the pockets of most local families is very low, while a few members of the community get rich (Sullivan, 2006; Puri, 2019, p. 78).[6] Under the guise of convincing rural poor to conserve internationally valuable resources, these activities often promote competition, along with encouraging the privatization of utilities and trade (Sullivan, 2006).

Fletcher (2009) explains that participants in these environmental education vacations often desire very specific experiences – wishing to give up their comfortable lives to seek struggle and discomfort in untamed areas, albeit for a short period of time. Many of these excursions sell experiences instead of products, and often involve a great

many outdoor activities which serve as a contrast to their guests' everyday lives back at home (Fletcher, 2009). The participants in these activities want to observe human/non-human relationships in the wild, as it were, as a foil to the stressful and 'alienating' Western world from whence they arrived (Fletcher, 2015, p. 339). In addition, ecotourism vendors tout their activities as ways to convert tourists into conservationists, but there has been no evidence that exposing tourists to conservation areas will turn them into advocates (Brookes, 2003; Buckley, 2011; Wondirad, 2019). Reisinger and Turner (2003) explain that the psychological needs of these travellers are not often considered in studies but play an important part in tourist satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction leads to repeat visits and relies heavily upon the perceptions of culture experienced on holiday (Reisinger and Turner, 2003). People often wish to experience cultural differences at their destinations, and the increasing homogenization of cultures may impact their experiences (Reisinger and Turner, 2003).

Ecotourism promoters and guests, in discourse with local communities, emphasize the local economic benefits of their touristic activities (Fletcher, 2009). Their actions, however, reflect their desire to perpetuate a 'culturally specific perspective' which encourages support of ecotourism itself (Fletcher, 2009, p. 279; see also Wondirad, 2019). This attempt to influence cultural beliefs and perceptions of self is subtle and seems to contradict another discursive aim of ecotourism outfitters – that ecotourism is key to saving nature (Fletcher, 2009). Rather, by encouraging local young people to enter the tourism field via environmental education programmes or ecotourism-based job training, ecotourism operators may be simply serving to ensure that 'nature' continues to be commodified (Fletcher, 2009). It is in this way that environmental education changes from its perceived goal of escaping one's first-world reality to learn about nature and simply becomes another neoliberal facet of conservation and environmental travel (Fletcher, 2015).

Tourism may be seen as a way for lesser-developed countries to tout their importance to the global community (Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010), and has been promoted as the best way in which conservation funding can be achieved, but Fletcher (2015) argues that this is circular

logic. Certainly, we can't expect to fix conservation issues which have been caused by over-consumptive practices by selling these very same over-consumptive practices (Fletcher, 2015). This thinking, according to Fletcher (2015), is exactly what makes ecotourism a neoliberal, capitalistic practice. This cycle of consumption and conservation is key to the following discussions of biodiversity in Nepal.

Ecotourism's role in biodiversity preservation within Nepal

Although Nepal has spent years reducing its poverty rates and attempting to raise the standard of living for its population, it remains one of the 20 poorest countries in the world (USAID, 2018, n.p.). The good news is that Nepal is reducing its poverty at a much faster rate than other developing countries and has cut the poverty rate in half over the last 7 years. However, poverty is still widespread, with just under 19% below the absolute poverty line (GoN, 2018, 2019). The average annual income in Nepal remains around 116,000 Nepalese rupees (Nrs) or US$1000 but is rising, up nearly 12% since 2016 (GoN, 2018, p. 7; 2019, p. 7 and 15; Online Khabar, 2020).

While more than 69% of Nepalese are involved in agricultural production, agriculture is responsible for only about a third of Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (CIA, 2018, n.p.). The rest is mainly made up of service-based industries, including tourism (CIA, 2018). Tourism represents about 7.5% of Nepal's GDP, and about 6% of Nepal's total employment (nearly a million people) is tourism related (World Bank, 2018, p. 4). In 2017, nearly a million international tourists visited Nepal, and that number is expected to continue climbing (Bajracharya and Dhakal, 2018, pp. 31–35). The government of Nepal poured money into infrastructure – including airports – in support of the 'Visit Nepal 2020' campaign, which aimed to bring two million tourists into the country in the year 2020 (GoN, 2019, n.p.).[7]

Nepal's vast biodiversity is a primary selling point for ecotourism operators (Bhuju *et al.*, 2007; Fitzgerald and Stronza, 2016; Kharal and Dhungana, 2018). Forty-five per cent of all visitors to Nepal, and 60% of

international tourists, visit protected areas, so the need to balance environmental concerns with the need for tourist dollars has become a major concern for the government of Nepal and its numerous entities (Bajracharya and Dhakal, 2018; Dhakal, 2018). Promoting conservation and biodiversity in Nepal therefore means understanding and supporting sustainable development and ethical tourism practices. The government of Nepal has developed a national biodiversity strategy which includes mitigation of habitat loss and pollution, and invasive species control (GoN, 2014).

As one of the continually most popular tourist activities in the area, elephant safaris bring in the second highest revenue from tourists following only park entry fees (Subedi, 1999, p. 15). As tourist demand rose steadily from 840 visitors in 1973 to over 100,000 by 1999, so did the number of safari elephants entering the park (Subedi, 1999, p. 16). These park entry fees annually contribute over 81.1 million Nrs (~US$698,000) to the Nepalese government and forest users' groups (GoN, 2015, p. 108), and are purportedly reinvested into the park and surrounding community forests (NTNC, 2015, p. 51).

The true impacts of these types of tourism practices on wildlife within Chitwan National Park (CNP or Chitwan) have not been well documented over the last decades (Bhandari, 2012). Older studies by Subedi (1999) and Subedi and Devlin (1998) warned of disturbances caused by elephant-backed safaris, while also acknowledging that they are an important means of income for the park. One study recommended zoning elephant paths and rotating paths over 20 years ago, and these recommendations have been largely ignored (Subedi, 1999), as have more current calls for an examination of mahout health and welfare (Subedi, 1999; Bames and Brown PCs, 2019).

Safaris must now encroach further into protected areas due to declining numbers of desirable animal sightings, as several species have moved further afield to avoid oft-used tourist tracks (Subedi and Devlin, 1998; Subedi, 1999; Baral, 2013). Some species have become habituated to the constant traffic, allowing for safaris to approach at closer than recommended distance (Subedi, 1999; Baral, 2013; Kishab interview, 2019; personal observations, 2014–2019). This habituation to human disturbances eventually reaches a level of intolerance for wildlife such as

rhino and sloth bear, who eventually abandon areas frequented by tourists (Curry *et al.*, 2001). Species in areas of high conservation interest are 'greatly affected' by wildlife-viewing tourism, and the normal behaviours of species are affected by the very presence of tourists in their habitats (Orams, 2000, p. 561; Buckley, 2011, p. 404).

Another concern with elephant-backed safari is communicable disease. At least 23% of captive elephants in the Sauraha area carry tuberculosis (TB), elephant endotheliotropic herpesvirus (EEHV), and a variety of other bacteria and viruses (Gairhe, 2012; Mikota *et al.*, 2015; Sainsbury, 2015; Paudel and Sreevatsan, 2020; Vidanta interviews, 2019). The constant incursions of captive individuals into wild pachyderm habitats may be increasing disease prevalence in wildlife (Gairhe, 2012; Mikota *et al.*, 2015; Vidanta interviews, 2019; see Chapter 5, this volume). Endangered rhinos in isolated populations of Nepal are of special concern. One has tested positive for TB upon necropsy, while others have shown signs of disease, but were not tested for a variety of reasons (Thapa *et al.*, 2016; Vidanta interviews, 2019; see Chapter 5, this volume).

Ecotourism's financial impact in Nepal

Despite the lofty goals of the UN to alleviate poverty via ecotourism, the true economic benefit of this practice continues to be limited in the Chitwan area (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998; Puri, 2019). Prior to 1996, none of the income from park entry fees went to local communities, and little was reinvested in the park (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998). In addition, employment opportunities from ecotourism were limited to about 1% of the workforce and had little impact on local household finances (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998). Most of the potential income from ecotourism instead goes to agencies in other countries, continuing the cycle of neoliberalism (see Plehwe, 2007; Ganti, 2014). Bookbinder *et al.* (1998) found that 54% of hotel bookings were paid in advance, to agencies outside the Sauraha area. In 1996, new bylaws required that 50% of all park entry fees go to local communities (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998). However, the benefits to community members have still not reached local people (Puri, 2019).

While an earlier paper touted a positive link between tourism and financial support for conservation projects and community empowerment around CNP (Nyaupane and Poudel, 2011), more recent studies on the socio-economic impacts of wildlife tourism in area instead found that the expectations of local communities did not match actual outcomes (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Puri, 2019). CNP is the main 'natural asset' (Puri, 2019, p. 75) for promoting tourism in the area, and the expectation of local community members was that increased wildlife tourism in the area would lead to greater opportunities for financial stability, an increase in infrastructure development, increased demand for a local workforce and local products, and a reinforcement of cultural identity (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Puri, 2019). Instead, local produce and animal products were declined as hotels sought 'higher quality' goods from outside the area (Puri, 2019, p. 75). Rather than an increase in overall employment opportunities, local people were only hired for low-level positions, while upper-level staff were brought in from outside (Puri, 2019). Larger hotels are typically owned and managed by investors from outside the community, meaning the income from these activities tended to benefit a few select people, with most of the income being siphoned away from local villages (Puri, 2019). Access to the national park and its potential for income is strictly controlled by governing bodies, limiting the income potential for many families, and decreasing local satisfaction with the park (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Puri, 2019). The location of retail establishments in relation to the park also greatly impacted income, as those businesses outside the regular flow of tourist traffic did not realize the same profits as those with access to tourist entry and travel points (Puri, 2019).

Puri (2019) found several positive benefits of ecotourism, which included an increase in demand for local products, a change in mindset which included putting money in savings, and minor increases in infrastructure development, especially roads. However, other areas of infrastructure, such as sanitation, saw negligible improvement (Puri, 2019). Local community members felt that improvements to transportation infrastructure would not help to increase tourism until facilities like information centres, ecological parks, or trails were created (Puri, 2019). Other benefits included the perception of increased

exchange of cultural information and an increased interest in rebuilding historical sites (Puri, 2019).

Participants in Puri's (2019) study indicated that local community members felt the influx of foreign people with differing religious and cultural beliefs or practices threatened traditional belief systems. The Tharu are the oldest Nepalese ethnic culture, and one of the marginalized communities in Chitwan (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). The Tharu expressed concern that the use of their language is now declining and worry it may be lost (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). Cultural styles of dress are changing in response to Western influence, and while some of the Tharu respondents felt that Western clothes were comfortable, others felt that they could no longer continue wearing traditional clothing as they would be seen as strange (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014).

The growth of crime was cited as a concern for locals in tourism-heavy areas, including the solicitation of Tharu girls for sexual tourism in the areas surrounding CNP (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014; Puri, 2019). Residents also expressed concern that tourists and guides alike were treating indigenous Tharu rudely (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). Poverty was rampant, with 88% of the Tharu in Lipton and Bhattarai's (2014, p. 18) study stating that they could no longer afford gas and had to rely on firewood for fuel, the gathering of which is now controlled by park management. Prior to the opening of the park, these villagers felt that they had plenty of forest provisions, but since the advent of Chitwan as a tourist destination, they could no longer access the parts of the forest they needed for medicinal herbs, fishing, wild fruit gathering, and firewood collection (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). They also reported feeling that the park had taken away their earning potential. Further concern arises from the knowledge that indigenous groups like the Tharu are inequitably represented in tourism operation ownership (Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). At the time of their survey, Lipton and Bhattarai (2014) found that only six out of 61 hotels in Sauraha were Tharu owned, while 80% of the nature guides (half of whom are day labourers and half salaried) were Tharu (p. 19). More attention to equitable distribution of income from tourist activities, and the use of local products at tourist venues, is needed. An increase in locally owned and

operated retail and tourism venues should be the focus of future development schemes in the area (Puri, 2019).

Social Science and Environmental Justice Discourses

Environmental justice refers, broadly, to the fact that poor communities or communities of colour are disproportionately affected by pollution and other health risks and are under-represented in organizations purporting to solve these problems via policies, laws, or regulations (Mohai *et al.*, 2009). Marginalized communities in Nepal face greater risks from climate change impacts and natural disasters, as well as from human–wildlife conflict created by anthropogenic changes to the availability of rangeland and the associated narrowing of wildlife corridors (Acharya *et al.*, 2016; Lamichhane *et al.*, 2018; see following sections, this chapter). However, addressing the problem is far more challenging than simply creating greater access for marginalized communities to the decision-making process.

Kopnina (2019, p. 7) argues that there is a dangerous perception among social scientists that the current push towards conservation and biodiversity preservation is driven exclusively by 'western elites'. Claiming a need to protect indigenous cultures and their human rights against the desires of these so-called elites to save environments becomes problematic when one considers that the assumptions that these groups need protecting, or that these groups are not concerned with the environment, are themselves neocolonial in nature (Kopnina, 2019). Another potential neocolonial aspect of the environment justice movement is the attempt to provide what Chaudhary *et al.* (2018, p. 99) call 'aggregate benefits', those which offer a homogenized sense of justice for poor or marginalized communities, without considering the sociopolitical differences between castes and cultures within each community. These aggregate benefits may instead serve to create greater inequalities (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2018, p. 109), which was indeed the case within Nepal (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998; Puri, 2019). Kopnina (2019, p. 7) suggests that because environmentalism is truly a 'universal

phenomenon', not a Western concept, we should focus instead on issues such as the 'neoliberal industrial economy' and preventing the 'commodification of nature'.

Kopnina (2017, p. 344) further argues that anthropologists fall into a paradoxical trap when they claim to defend 'vulnerable, poor communities' while at the same time excluding vulnerable non-human animals from these communities. This moral double standard creates an environment where critics are bound to fuse environmentalism and colonialism together when proclaiming the need to maintain traditional practices while simultaneously promoting the neoliberal 'salvation' of natural resources (Kopnina, 2017, p. 344). Anthropology, claims Kopnina (2017), has taken a firm stance against injustices such as colonialism, racism, and the oppression of marginalized communities. It has not, however, boldly embraced advocacy for non-human animals even though humans are causing extinction rates somewhere between 1000 and 10,000 times the natural rate (Kopnina, 2017; WWF, n.d.).

Schrader (2012), however, argues that the need to fix the environment to meet our own narratives of nature is itself an inherently anthropocentric idea. If we hope to break the cycle of human exceptionalism, Schrader (2012, p. 76) suggests we must go further than simply acknowledging non-human agency or seeking environmental justice 'now'. There is a need to acknowledge that other species have long histories and experience unique temporalities. These 'other species' must be given equal consideration as agents of environmental change and recipients of environmental justice (Schrader, 2012, p. 79). Examining marginalized communities of multiple species through the lens of environmental justice therefore means acknowledging their intrinsic value as co-creators of the environment and their place in discussions regarding conservation.

Elephants in need of environmental justice

Why then, have anthropologists not made a moral commitment to change the oppression of non-human animals, especially elephants? Perhaps it is because elephants are, as Lorimer (2010a, p. 492) argues,

'too social and sagacious to be objects; too strange to be human; too captive to be wild, but too wild to be domesticated'. Modern elephants find themselves common subjects of biological study but are cast to the peripheries of academic discourse regarding their welfare, captivity, and the moral implications of their use. Their long-shared history with humans, which will be described in the following chapters of this volume, focuses nearly exclusively on human ownership and use (Kharel, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Locke, 2008b). The conversation needs to be reframed to include elephant interests which include their need for agency, lifetime social bonds of their choosing, and access to large swathes of connected habitat (see Chapter 5, this volume).

Captive elephants are central to debates on ecological justice and species interdependencies, yet some scholars seem 'actively opposed to discourses regarding their suffering' (Kopnina, 2016, p. 222). In fact, some anthropologists have argued that studies, especially conservation-based studies, are too elephant-centric and should include more consideration of humans and human–elephant pairings (Locke, 2016; Lainé, 2018; 2019, p. 82). In some ways, these studies appear to have given up on the concept of environmental justice for elephants, instead seeming to imply that human reach is now so extensive that the term 'wild elephant' is obsolete (Locke, 2016, p. 5).

Lainé (2020) begins to address the issue by reminding researchers that elephant and mahout relationships are far from homologous. Relationships between pairs living in tourist facilities, for example, differ greatly from those living in villages (Lainé, 2020). He suggests that each of these types of relationship needs to be considered separately to account for its unique characteristics. Lainé (2020) further suggests there is a need to consider problems with the language like those discussed earlier in Chapter 2 (this volume). The Western concept of animal health and needs in terms of welfare and well-being may not equate to indigenous perceptions of elephants and elephant care (Lainé, 2020).

Above, Lainé (2020) is referring to elephants living in Indian or Laotian villages. These elephants do not spend their days restrained, as do elephants in Nepal, nor are they necessarily relegated to chains in their stables at night. Instead, they are allowed to choose to return to the forest

in the evenings (Lainé, 2020). While it is true that one cannot study captive elephants without studying the dynamic elephant–mahout relationship, some anthropologists may fail to consider that perhaps elephants might prefer not to live with humans at all. Instead of a companion species, some might consider elephants indentured servants or kidnapped members of another culture (Spiegel, 1996; Robbins, 2002; Garrison, 2008; Carey, 2020). Interdisciplinary studies, such as those found in anthrozoology, may help bring in captive elephants to the larger discourse on conservation and allow recognition of these individuals as their own unique communities (Satoo and Changchui, 2002).

Captive elephants in Nepal exist in a liminal space – half wild, half captive, largely unprotected by law (see Szydlowski, 2023a; Chapter 4, this volume). Seeking justice for these individuals is fraught, as criticizing traditional cultural practices – even illegal practices like poaching, torture, or hunting of animals by indigenous peoples – may result in threats of violence or accusations of neocolonialism (Kopnina, 2017). Both poachers and elephant owners represent organized and determined (and in the case of poachers, armed) advocates for maintaining elephants as useful commodities (Kopnina, 2017; Rao, Vachan and Vidanta, interviews, 2019). Narratives of increasing human–elephant conflict in these areas typically show human victims suffering crop loss, injury, or death at the feet of elephants (Sapkota *et al.*, 2014; Yadav *et al.*, 2015; Acharya *et al.*, 2016), and leave out the narrative of elephants as community members who are themselves threatened.

A final reason for the seeming avoidance of discourse about elephants may be the fear of criticizing societal issues, such as rapid human population growth in areas of high conservation focus (i.e. areas where large populations of marginalized people live) (Kopnina, 2016). However, no real change can occur without addressing the increasing human populations in elephant habitats which result in the deaths of both species due to human–elephant conflict and the competition for resources which are often denied to one species to protect the other (Kharel, 1997; Choudhury, 2004). Saving elephants is meaningless if they have, as Kopnina (2016, p. 227) fears, 'nowhere to go'. As this volume argues, there are no easy answers to these problems.

Marginalized communities

Researchers may also refrain from placing elephants in the mainstream of welfare discourse due to the perceived reliance of marginalized human communities on tourism (see Chapter 2, this volume). Tourism activities create livelihoods for over a million Nepalese, so criticizing any activity which provides income for marginalized communities, such as mahouts, must be done reflexively (World Bank, 2018; Chapter 2, this volume).

When considering environment and conservation, is important to acknowledge that the 'poorest and least powerful' (Cassidy, 2012, p. 30) communities are likely to be the hardest hit by climate change and suffer the greatest number of casualties (Elliott, 2013, p. 96). Developing countries tend to be found in geographical locations which already face a great deal of climate variability and rely more heavily on agriculture (such as Nepal, where nearly 70% of the population is involved in agricultural production), making them more likely to suffer from ongoing climate change (Elliott, 2013, p. 94 and 107). Countries with high poverty levels are likely least able to adapt and change causes of climate change, and the Global North owes a debt to the Global South due to over-consumptive practices (Elliott, 2013, p. 43 and 112). Critics of conservation have not wanted to blame the drive for energy and industrialism for the resulting inequalities in local economies (Kopnina, 2016). Critics tout the struggle between environmental NGOs' 'conservation elites' and poor communities, thus reframing the narrative as one where humans are the only victims, and the only solutions are those which serve exclusively human interests (Kopnina, 2016). But in the case of Nepal, the opposite is also true: the protection of animal species over that of humans has created feelings of injustice (Kharel, 1997; Campbell, 2007). Marginalized groups of humans are forced out of protected areas, and as animal populations grow thanks to these same protective measures, these displaced people are faced with crop loss or injury due to animal incursions (Campbell, 2007; Szydlowski, 2022, 2023b). The narrative needs to be changed to include both human and non-human animals, especially marginalized groups of individuals impacted by both the neoliberalization of conservation and anthropogenic pressures such as climate change (Cassidy, 2012).

There is also a need to acknowledge that practices such as deforestation and poaching are more than just local people's consumptive use of nature. With expanding populations and widespread poverty in areas of high conservation focus, one must consider that these consumptive uses are necessary to the survival of many families (Campbell, 2007; Elliott, 2013; GoN, 2015; WWF-Nepal, 2017). Due to high levels of indebtedness, countries put pressure on communities to overexploit their natural resources as a short-term measure (Elliott, 2013). In addition, the globalization of agriculture leads to further pressure to convert forested areas to cropland (Elliott, 2013). These communities may have been accused of over-consumption of resources, but may be instead trapped, having been expelled from certain areas as they were earmarked for conservation (such as was the case in Nepal: in CNP, McLean, 1999, p. 40; and in Langtang National Park, see Campbell, 2007). Seventy per cent of the world's poor are 'highly dependent' upon 'provisioning services of ecosystems', such as wood for fires, food production, water, etc. (Elliott, 2013, p. 97). A combination of national pressure and the need for marginalized families to survive on forestry products leads to a decrease in the potential for sustainable development (Elliott, 2013). Biodiversity preservation efforts which occur at the cost of poverty mitigation and livelihoods are ethically problematic (Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2006).

It is hard to find a balance between involving local communities in forest protection while keeping people out of protected areas (Campbell, 2007; Chaudhary *et al.*, 2018). Habitat restoration and reforestation should serve not only to provide non-human animal habitat and biodiversity preservation, but also allow greater access to forestry products, land, and other natural resources by local communities (Coria and Calfucura, 2012; Elliott, 2013). Promoting local community involvement in sustainable development and conservation is problematic, however, when one considers that many of these communities did not willingly choose to be involved in these projects, but rather had the decision thrust upon them by tourism salespeople or national governments looking to promote conservation and conservation travel (Sullivan, 2006; Gellner, 2007; Fletcher, 2009, 2015). This 'top-down, profit-motivated conservation' (Kopnina, 2016, p. 233) style of

sustainable development leads to the marginalization of local peoples, and Kopnina (2016) instead calls for something which offers more environmental justice for human and non-human animals; she suggests the inclusion of both deep ecology (Naess, 1973) and animal liberation philosophy (Singer, 2009) in environmental and conservation discourse.

Colonial attitudes towards communities of humans and other animals

Tourist interactions with local populations may be fraught with conflict arising from the differing backgrounds of each (Szydlowski, 2017; Puri, 2019; Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020). Humans consider the cultural customs which they learned from family members to be good or helpful to their society (Lambek, 2010; Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020), but consider the views of others to be less valuable – the very definition of ethnocentrism (Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020), but an interesting view of the ordinary ethics practised by humans in daily life. Some take a culturally relativistic view of this process, claiming that tourists must not see the treatment of animals in these cultures as 'barbaric', but rather as an offshoot of cultural views that animals are a commodity to be used by humans (Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020, p. 27).

These types of animal use for human entertainment take place globally, and therefore indicate that several factors are likely responsible for their attraction (Garrison, 2008; Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020). One reason this commodification continues is likely due to the lack of visitor knowledge regarding the history, living or working conditions of animals used in tourism (Garrison, 2008; Szydlowski, 2017; Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020). In other cases, controversial forms of tourism may become a draw for those who wish to stand out from the crowd in terms of their travel adventures (Lorimer, 2010b; Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020). These tourists want to experience creative and potentially exploitive types of tourism, such as sexual tourism, drug tourism, or animal abuse, to fulfil their 'cultural omnivorousness' (Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020, p. 26; also see Peterson, 1992). This hunger for exploitive types of tourism, especially those that cause harm

to animal bodies, should create an urgency among scholars to gain a deeper understanding of why these types of venues attract tourists and how visitors perceive the use of animals for entertainment (Fennell, 2013). Interdisciplinary research focusing on the biological and behavioural needs of animals in these venues (such as the study reported in this volume) is desperately needed (Fennell, 2013).

Even those ecotourism activities which do not encourage direct harm to animals, such as jeep or on-foot photo safaris, may be detrimental to animal health. The sight, sound, and smell of humans can be quite disturbing to the very wildlife being observed and may interfere with normal behaviours or induce stress (Subedi, 1999; Curry *et al.*, 2001; Buckley, 2011; Fennell, 2012). This type of animal commodification may be less invasive, but still needs to be critically considered by ecotourists and researchers alike (Fennell, 2012). Fennell suggests that all ecotourists start their travels by accepting that all tourism is a business, and will inevitably lead to animal commodification (Fennell, 2012).

While one does need to consider that animal use may stem from the survival needs of very poor local communities, it is important to realize that it is the continuing supply of income from tourists that maintains the activity (Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020). Practising ethical tourism by avoiding animal-related venues is one way to use tourist dollars to create change (Intrepid Group, 2020; Malchrowicz-Mosko *et al.*, 2020); however, one must realize that an immediate stop to some activities may result in humans and animals finding themselves is worse situations (Pabin, Paudel and Taraswin interviews, 2019; Bames, Brown and Gautam PCs, 2020).

Elephants, work, and exploitation of marginalized communities

Most humans, Coulter (2016, p. 78) argues, are not 'free' to choose their labour. Instead, they find a position due to a need for income, and one which they are allowed by society to perform. This position may be limited by discrimination due to ethnicity, forced migration, cultural influences, etc. (Coulter, 2016, p. 79). In Nepal this discrimination is seen in mahout society, where a lack of education, a low-caste birth, and few

job options lead young men to careers in elephant-handling (Hart, 2005; Hart and Locke, 2007; Locke, 2008a, 2011; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020).

This lack of freedom in job choice extends to animals (Coulter, 2016) such as elephants, who did not choose to work for humans but instead were removed from their natural habitat and instructed in appropriate behaviour and lifestyle. These elephants continue to attempt to express their agency (Coulter, 2016), by eating while on safari, attacking or killing their human handlers (Yadav, 2003), or destroying shelters built by humans (personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019). These elephants must often be forced to perform their work and punished when their behaviour doesn't meet human expectations (Coulter, 2016). Continued defiance may result in pain or even death (Coulter, 2016, p. 80). Elephants working for humans must perform 'emotional labour' as well (Coulter, 2016, p. 73 and 76; see Chapter 6, this volume), repressing their instincts, such as foraging or asserting dominance, while on duty. Some may see this forced labour as animal exploitation (Coulter, 2016). Malamud (2013, p. 39) describes human use of animals as an example of 'our sense of entitlement to these services' and argues it is the epitome of Singer's 'speciesism' (Singer, 2009, pp. 8–9). This speciesist view is important when considering human–elephant co-work in following chapters.

Balancing neoliberalism and environmental justice with cosmopolitan thinking

Perhaps one method of reconciling humans with the animals they wish to 'save' is to view their interactions through the lens of cosmopolitanism. From the Greek word for 'citizens of the world', these cosmopolitan actors find themselves experiencing an increasingly globalized life (Kleingeld and Brown, 2019, n.p.). While there are a few differing schools of thought on the definition of philosophical cosmopolitanism and its relationship to globalization, I am particularly focused on the belief that all (albeit human, in the case of traditional cosmopolitan thought) beings are citizens in a single community

(Kleingeld and Brown, 2019) and how these beings connect via 'moral norms or relationships' (Kleingeld and Brown, 2019, n.p.). Haraway (2008) described this cosmopolitanism as a 'knot of species' (p. 42) whom we 'become-with' (p. 4) by practising 'becoming worldly' (p. 3). In *Cosmopolitan Animals* (2015), Nagai suggests that animal welfare and the climate crisis have led humanity into a shared 'cosmopolitan agenda' (Nagai, 2015, p. 2). This type of cosmopolitanism leaves behind city or national citizenship (Haslanger, 2015, p. 32; Rooney, 2015, p. 58) for 'travel and cultural exchange' (Sleigh, 2015, p. 44), but is not without issue.

Perhaps sadly, the inclusion of animals in cosmopolitan life may result in the loss of their identity as individual living beings. One example of globalization and cosmopolitanism stripping identity is seen with charismatic species who end up as stuffed animals, home décor, and symbols of international movements, perhaps none so recognizable as the panda in the WWF's logo (Jalais, 2008; see WWF-Nepal, n.d.). These animals may cease to exist as individuals and instead become global ambassadors for environmental justice or pawns in political agendas (Jalais, 2008). For example, the WWF 'panda' is no longer a member of *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* but has been de-animalized to become instead a social construct. The meaning of the word panda in this case has become fluid and culturally specific and discovering its 'fundamental truth' made more difficult (Foucault, 2005, p. 38, 39 and 372). Like the porcupine in the Introduction to this volume, the word panda has moved around and now we must look at it from another angle (see Mol, 2008). Sadly, in the case of the WWF panda, the living, breathing animal is no longer involved in the construction of its identity (Mol, 2014).

In the Sundarban region of India and Bangladesh, tigers were embroiled in similar debates over their identity (Jalais, 2008). These tigers existed simultaneously 'out there' as exclusively social constructs and 'in the forest' as physical, living beings (Jalais, 2008). The physical beings have a history of attacking and killing humans, while the social constructs serve as a 'rallying cry' for conservation efforts (Jalais, 2008). Named as the national animal for both countries, tigers became 'constructed' by NGOs, the government, and 'urbanites' as 'high-status' animals worthy of conservation (Jalais, 2008, p. 36). Local people found

themselves suddenly located below these constructed tigers in terms of importance, yet still suffered losses at the claws of real tigers (Jalais, 2008).

These constructed tigers and de-animalized pandas serve as an introduction to the ways in which elephants who find themselves in shared landscapes with humans may suffer from conflicting identities. As creatures who migrate across large ranges, wild Asian elephants find themselves passing through human-dominated landscapes as they cross political and geographic borders which place them in the centre of conservation and land use debates (see GoN, 2009; Barua, 2014).

Wild Elephants and Tourism

Elephants find themselves portrayed in recent academic literature as cosmopolitan actors who mobilize ideas, people, and money from one area of the globe to another (Lorimer, 2010a; Barua, 2014; Chaudhuri, 2017). The conservation of elephants and their habitats lends itself to a cosmopolitan view due to their large presence – physically, with regard to their need for landscape-scale preservation, as well as their large presence as a charismatic species in both conservation literature and pop culture (Jalais, 2008). The conservation of real elephants requires governmental and public input, and often includes the imposition of outside ideals on local communities (GoN, 2009; Barua, 2014).

Thanks to human population growth in former habitats, elephants find themselves losing literal ground to humans at an alarming rate (Menon and Tiwari, 2019). In Nepal, the loss and fragmentation of elephant habits is forcing herds into narrower migration routes which run alongside, and through, human villages (GoN, 2009; Yadav *et al.*, 2015; Szydlowski, 2023b). As elephant–human contact escalates into conflict, these herds find themselves being governmentally managed. Humans created non-physical boundaries between protected areas and across national borders, and the elephants choose to ignore these boundaries, remaining cosmopolitan in their choice of dwelling places (GoN, 2009; Yadav *et al.*, 2015). Humans create property lines for

croplands and farms yet continue to plant crops which elephants desire while simultaneously pushing the herds into smaller habitats (GoN, 2009; Yadav *et al.*, 2015). Humans create national parks to protect wild elephants and forcibly relocate human settlers, but elephants continue to roam beyond their assigned spaces (Kharel, 1997; GoN, 2015). Like the tigers above, these cosmopolitan elephants respond to humans and human barriers much the same way they would natural barriers or any unfamiliar beings in their path.

The conservation of these cosmopolitan wild elephants is of global concern and mobilizes personnel and finances (see Santiapillai and Jackson, 1990; Sukumar, 2006; AERSM, 2017; Chaudhuri, 2017; Menon and Tiwari, 2019). Conservation efforts which focus on the landscape-level projects which endangered animals require are often backed, or controlled, by NGOs and INGOs (West *et al.*, 2006; Heatherington, 2010; Barua, 2014; Chaudhuri, 2017). The organizations create or destroy boundaries, displacing people and animals in the process and forcing nations to restructure their lands to fit an 'externally imagined set of categories' (West *et al.*, 2006, p. 256). The creation of these boundaries also influences the ways in which humans experience the environment (West *et al.*, 2006).

As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, ecotourism and conservation-focused travel is commonly promoted in these areas and is touted as a way to finance environmental or species protection. This travel is promoted by governments, ecotourism operators, and NGOs to increase the conservation of global resources by good cosmopolitan citizens (Sullivan, 2006; Fletcher, 2009, 2015; GoN, 2009; Chaudhuri, 2017). Instead of concerning themselves with bringing in tourists, Chaudhuri suggests that NGOs should instead focus on supporting the 'rural poor who are rooted in a place' (Chaudhuri, 2017, p. 413). In this way, NGOs can change their focus from consumption to ecological connectivity (Chaudhuri, 2017). Approaching ecology through the twin goals of sustainability and social justice would truly be a cosmopolitan approach (Chaudhuri, 2017).

Captive elephants, mahouts, and communities

Captive elephants might also benefit from a cosmopolitan approach to their care and welfare. These individuals share their history, homes, meals, and work with humans (participant observations, 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2019). Yet, as mentioned in the Introduction to this volume, data on the captive elephants of Nepal are limited to several small studies of specific populations, and much of these data refers exclusively to biological or bacteriological studies (Shrestha and Gairhe, 2006; Gairhe, 2012; see Chapter 5, this volume). This lack of research is possibly due to the small number of both captive and wild elephants in Nepal relative to other range states such as Thailand, India, or Myanmar (Vidanta interviews, 2019).

Anthrozoological studies of captive elephants in Nepal only began with Hart's (1994) examination of drivers' perceptions regarding their elephants' social behaviour and interactions. These drivers felt that while they were 'loved and trusted' by the elephants, the elephants would still rather be 'free' (Hart, 1994, p. 297 and 309). Hart (1997, 2005) conducted further studies into the effects of the tourist gaze on the human member of the team (see also Hart and Locke, 2007).

Locke (2008b, 2011) began working in Nepal in 2001, with studies of elephant–mahout relationships at the Elephant Breeding Centre *hattisar* (i.e. elephant stable; elephant is *hatti* in Nepali). These studies focused on the stable as a multispecies institution in which elephants and humans face rites of passage and gain 'new competencies and status roles' (Locke, 2008b, p. 87). Locke (2011, p. 36) explains that elephants in this hattisar are seen simultaneously as 'animals, persons and gods', and mahouts relate to their charges through the seemingly irreconcilable ideas of dominance, devotion, and companionship. According to Locke's informants, elephants even 'seem to willingly collude in their captivity', making them appear to embrace their status as human co-workers (Locke, 2011, p. 36).

Coining the neologism 'ethnoelephantology' for these unique studies of mahout–elephant pairs, Mackenzie and Locke (2012) call for a multidisciplinary approach to documenting the traditional knowledge and training practices of elephant handlers. Locke (2008b, p. 80) explains that elephants and humans both 'dwell in sentient and affective lifeworlds' and have co-evolved in ways that leave their 'social, historical,

and ecological relations' intertwined. This shared history means, according to Mackenzie and Locke (2012 p. 4), that humans have an 'ethical' obligation to discover which conditions are 'healthiest' for elephants, and to create 'spaces where both species can thrive'.

Captive elephants often serve as a rallying cry for NGOs, much like the Sundarban tigers discussed previously (Jalais, 2008), and enter other cultures as 'ontologically diverse bodies' instead of living beings (Barua, 2014, p. 570). Lorimer (2010a) suggests that while wild elephants are well protected by global efforts, companion, feral, or cosmopolitan elephants are instead at the mercy of human interests in shared landscapes. These elephants live in a hybrid natural–anthropogenic world, in which humans often invoke the name 'elephant' to control the flow of 'financial resources and political potential' (Lorimer, 2010a, p. 500). Lorimer (2010a, p. 503) suggests that instead of focusing on a 'universal solution' which only accounts for the 'current identity' of elephants, we might instead accept that cultures, organisms, and landscapes are dynamic. Rather than using captive elephant population as a rallying cry for welfare or a fundraising opportunity, Lorimer (2010a) argues that we should focus on the well-being of individual elephants in whatever situation they are found. However, the dynamic relationships Lorimer (2010a) describes in Sri Lanka often involve free-ranging elephants, which differ from the tightly restrained elephants of Nepal. While consideration of Nepal's elephants as cosmopolitans might result in their being offered greater financial support or access to shared landscapes, improving the lives of individual elephants requires a different approach. These individual elephants, and their relationships with both individuals and organizations, likely require an interdisciplinary, multi-sited, multispecies ethnography.

New identities

Perhaps there is a need to introduce entirely new definitions for the elephants who share life-worlds with humans. Lainé (2019, p. 84) describes those elephants sharing lives with the Khamti people of Laos as 'village elephants', thanks to their 'intersubjective engagement'. Following capture, breaking, and socialization, these elephants begin a

new life as human co-workers. Lainé (2019, p. 86) argues that thanks to the difficulty of forcing an elephant to do something she prefers not to, this captivity can't be seen 'solely as a form of enslavement', but rather as a form of negotiation and consent to shared labour. This shared working environment requires caring both for and about each other.

Lainé (2019, pp. 92–93) argues that the (predominantly Western) need to 'save' elephants from these villages has resulted in a poorer quality of life for the rescued elephants. Removed from their semi-wild village existence and placed in elephant camps, these individuals suffer as camp-mandated non-traditional feeding, medication, and management styles are enforced (Lainé, 2019). Their historical mahout–elephant relationship is damaged as the pair navigates the new world of the camp, and the elephant is transitioned from family member to member of a new 'artificially' recreated herd (Lainé, 2019, p. 97).

While I agree that the elephants in many range states have been well-integrated into a type of multispecies community (although I do not necessarily agree that they have chosen this life freely), the elephants and elephant–mahout pairs of Nepal do not fit neatly with those found in other range countries. As the following chapters in this volume will demonstrate, the relationships between elephants and mahouts, community members, and owners in Nepal have become enmeshed in power struggles and disagreements over appropriate care and ethical treatment.

Conclusions

Discourses surrounding conservation and biodiversity preservation have become entangled with neoliberal critique. Originally used to describe the privatization of markets, neoliberalism is now used in anthropological literature to describe how policies affect people and how people respond to these changes. Neoliberal scholarship often focuses on the areas where government is involved in managing natural resources and is tied to areas where participatory development and conservation areas intersect, such as in the protected areas of Nepal.

Ecotourism in biodiverse areas, especially in the Global South, is often tied to conservation efforts, and is one area where academics are divided. Touted alternatingly as a force for world peace, the key to wildlife preservation, and nothing more than the exploitation of nature, ecotourism's effects on local communities could benefit from a more rigorous, interdisciplinary approach. While ecotourism and CBC practices in Nepal have largely failed to improve living conditions for most families, there may be positive aspects to encouraging visitors to the area. Further study into changing perspectives on ecotourism's effects in the CNP area is needed.

Ecotourism is also tied to the lives of elephants throughout Asia. Elephants inhabit a liminal space, as tourist or research conveyance, endangered species, and a construct around which to build welfare activism. These elephants may be seen as cosmopolitans responsible for the movement of money and humans around the globe, as co-workers, community members, enslaved beings, sources of zoonotic disease, or as individuals to become-with. Concepts of 'care' and 'welfare' are intimately tied to the differing definitions of elephants above, and often rely upon the observer's country of origin. The status of elephants as endangered species in need of conservation is often at odds with the view of elephants as captive animals. How each of these concepts serves to construct elephants will again be encountered in Chapters 9.1 and 9.2 of this volume.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) examines the genesis of both elephant safari and elephant disease in Nepal. It draws upon data collected from interviews with management at the original safari lodge, along with interview data from veterinarians, elephant owners, and welfare workers to paint a picture of the relatively short history of large-scale elephant-backed safari. Tiger Tops, the first hotel to offer private elephant-backed safari in the areas surrounding CNP, serves as the primary case study for the chapter. Chapter 4 ends with a discussion of the applicable laws surrounding ownership of captive elephants in Nepal, and the ways in which these laws are interpreted or disregarded.

Notes

[1] For example: see Bajracharya and Dhakal (2018) for information on biodiversity efforts over the last 25 years in Nepal; Stronza *et al*. (2019) for a review of the literature on ecotourism's relationship to conservation; and Mishra (2008) for the story of CNP and its wildlife, etc.

[2] The Global South has nothing to do with hemispheric geography but refers to lesser-developed nations and replaces the use of terms like 'Third World.'

[3] Schuller (2009, pp. 96–97) uses two cases from Haiti to demonstrate his points but paints a picture of the global 'NGO class' which is used transnationally to promote a 'vision of globalization' reliant entirely upon outside influences.

[4] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[5] This information was presented in a paper presentation at the International Society of Anthrozoology Conference in September 2020 (Gautam, 2020).

[6] This has been seen in studies from Nepal (Bookbinder *et al*., 1998; Roka, 2012; Puri, 2019), Africa (Sullivan, 2006), and Chile (Fletcher, 2009), among others.

[7] Nepal did not meet its intended goal, as the country closed its borders temporarily during the COVID-19 outbreak. International flights resumed in September 2020, only to shut down again in 2021 (Prasain, 2021). Tourism fell by approximately 80% between 2019 and 2020 (GoN (Government of Nepal), 2022). Nepal saw a total number of 230,085 international visitors (GoN, 2020, n.p.). By the end of 2021, tourism was still down by approximately 34% from the previous year (GoN, 2022).

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4 The Advent of Elephant Tourism in Nepal

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Abstract

This chapter's journey through the elephant stables of Sauraha begins with a discussion of how elephant-backed safari came to be practised within the area. Drawing upon data collected from interviews with lodge management, veterinarians, elephant owners, and welfare workers, this chapter examines the relatively short history of large-scale elephant-backed safari. It examines the advent of privately owned elephant tourism and the challenges faced by elephants and their caregivers. The rise of elephant tourism resulted in the spread of disease, which in turn led to an evolution in veterinary care.

With a lack of applicable Nepalese legislation to protect privately held elephants, their welfare relies on a variety of social codes and management policies. This chapter discusses the practices and policies surrounding elephant care and their impact on elephant welfare.

As discussed in Chapter 1 (this volume), the human–elephant relationship in Nepal has a long and storied past (Kharel, 2002; Locke, 2008; Sukumar, 2016). While individual privately owned elephants have been recorded in what is now Chitwan National Park (CNP or Chitwan) since the early 1900s, the use of elephants for tourism is not nearly as old an institution as many elephant owners want visitors to believe (Kharel, 2002; Mishra, 2008; Thakur, Gairhe and Vidanta interviews, 2019).[1] When speaking with Nepalese informants about elephant-backed safari, one common refrain was heard: Nepalis have been using elephants as tourist conveyance for so long that it is a culturally

ingrained practice and therefore cannot – and perhaps should not – be easily changed. This refrain extended across economic lines, National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) veterinary staff and management, shop owners, and mahouts, sexes, and castes (Rajesh, Rao, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019), and bears discussion. While records do show that elephants were used to ferry royal guests on hunting parties for the past several hundred years, private tourist safaris did not start until the early 1960s (GoN, 2015a).

According to Mishra (2008, p. 82), the story begins in 1963 with two Americans on a tiger-hunting trip. The Americans met a Russian hotel owner and enjoyed a few drinks (Mishra, 2008). This chance meeting of John Coapman, Teddy Lee Wynne, and Boris Lissanevitch led to plans for a partnership focused on tracking tiger and rhino – not to kill, because this was, according to them, too easy – but to photograph. The government of Nepal treated this idea with a great deal of scepticism; tourists generally avoided the Terai due to fears of malaria and flooding. The trio first had to befriend and convince then Prince Basundhera that their plans were sound; the prince soon convinced the government to extend Coapman sole rights for tourism in Chitwan for a fee of US$500 annually (Mishra, 2008, p. 83).[2] Tiger Tops Lodge was built within the boundaries of the then-called Royal Chitwan National Park (Mishra, 2008), and a landing strip laid for the planes of rich clientele. To ensure that guests experienced wildlife, Coapman used live bait to draw predators into the area (Mishra, 2008). Thus began the practice of allowing foreign interests access to government-owned protected areas and encouraging private commerce within CNP, which ushered in an era of neoliberalism (Campbell, 2007; Castree, 2008).

According to the government's long-term veterinarian, Dr Kamal Gairhe,[3] rides on government-owned elephants became popular in the 1960s, which created competition among tourists for tickets (Gairhe interviews, 2019). Despite the popularity of these rides, the government decided that it should be using its captive elephants for forestry, anti-poaching patrols, and animal census instead. Thus, it offered the elephant-backed tourism trade to Tiger Tops (Mishra, 2008; Thakur and Gairhe interviews, 2019). Tourism in this part of Nepal was hardly

booming during this era, so the level of competition for rides was in no way comparable to the current situation. For example, in 1962 only 6000 tourists visited the entire country of Nepal (Bhattarai *et al.*, 2005, p. 672). By 1970, however, this number had skyrocketed to 70,000 (Bhattarai *et al.*, 2005, p. 672). As discussed previously (see Chapter 3, this volume), this number continues to rise, with pre-COVID projections estimating over two million visitors in 2020 (GoN, 2019). The global spread of COVID-19, however, changed the tourist landscape within Nepal, and numbers did not rebound quickly (see Chapter 6, this volume).

Pioneering private elephant-backed safaris was not enough to keep Tiger Tops afloat, however. According to Mishra (2008), Coapman's passion for alcohol, feasts, and lavish gifts for women led to his downfall. Coapman retained Tiger Tops only until 1971 when it was sold to Brit Jim Edwards, who converted it to a wildlife observation company. Edwards' partner, Chuck McDougal, is credited with creating a 'more ethical' company, which remains their marketing strategy (Tiger Tops, 2019). A few years later, the Nepalese government asked the owners of Tiger Tops to act as advisors during the formation process of CNP (Tiger Tops, 2019).[4]

In 1980, Edwards founded the International Trust for Nature Conservation to preserve wildlife in areas of high human–wildlife conflict (Tiger Tops, 2019). This UK trust is active globally but focuses primarily on Nepalese and Indian projects including a 'vulture restaurant' and a rehabilitation centre for injured birds. The same year, the government turned to Tiger Tops for help converting the former royal hunting grounds on the south-western Terai into Bardia National Park – even today one of the least developed parts of Nepal (GoN, 2017). In 1982, Tiger Tops completed its Tharu Lodge in Kawasoti on the edge of CNP, which remains in operation and served as a field site for the present study (Spotlight Nepal, 2012).

Tiger Tops was forced to relocate its original Jungle Lodge in 2012 when the government of Nepal decided to remove all hotels from within the boundaries of CNP (Spotlight Nepal, 2012; Thakur interviews, 2019). This move came amid ongoing complaints from tourism operators

located outside the park boundaries that those hotels located outside the park were unfairly penalized by the high entry fees required for hotel-owned elephant safaris to enter the park (Grimm, 2012, n.p.). Originally slated to move out in 2010, these lodges gained a reprieve when the government announced Tourism Year 2011 and allowed the lodges to stay until 2012 to handle the influx of visitors (Grimm, 2012). This tourism campaign was extremely successful, raising the number of tourists visiting Nepal to over 330,000 – up 18% from 2011 (Spotlight Nepal, 2012).

The Tiger Tops company is now run by Edwards' sons. While many of Tiger Tops' contributions no doubt benefited the wildlife of Nepal, one specific creation has led to protests which continue today: elephant polo. Elephant polo was played in India during the early 1900s but fell out of favour with the disappearance of the ruling class (Mishra, 2008, p. 87). To attract wealthy clientele, Edwards partnered with Pan American Airlines to revive the game, bringing in celebrities like Ringo Starr and Margaux Hemingway, and sponsored by such lofty names as Cartier. British teams originally played against locals, but more recent games include teams formed by the World Elephant Polo Association (WEPA), which claims to support over 25 charities focused on conservation (WEPA, n.d.). WEPA (n.d.) also lists several questionable statements on its website, including 'strict rules against harsh treatment by drivers' and purporting that their elephants 'eat a diet similar to that of wild elephants'. According to biologists, polo is dangerous for elephants. For example, being forced to run heavily and switch directions quickly can be harmful to their health (Varma and Ganguly, 2011, p. 42). In addition, the types of training necessary for these events, and to achieve the unnatural behaviours needed for polo play, are stressful to elephants (Varma and Ganguly, 2011). Some members of the elephant owners' cooperative agree, with one describing elephant polo as 'not nice' and explaining that it requires too much 'hitting and bleeding' (Vachan interviews, 2019). In 2017, citing support for movements against animal cruelty, Tiger Tops stopped its elephant polo games after 35 years (Prasain and Poudel, 2017).

Chain-Free Pioneers[5]

Tiger Tops' marketing materials now carry the tagline 'pioneering environmentally responsible tourism'. I had the opportunity to spend time conducting interviews and participant observations at Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge (TTTL), on the edge of CNP. This lodge is located several kilometres away from Sauraha and is a destination resort located in a small village. A conversation with Tiger Tops' owner led to an invitation to tour the TTTL facility and speak with management, staff, and mahouts about their history and transition to a chain-free facility.

Perhaps ironically – given its status as the first private safari organization in the area – TTTL was the first hotel in the Chitwan area to use chain-free corrals for all its elephants. In 2016, the lodge began building chain-free elephant corrals (in which elephants are allowed to move freely rather than being chained in one place) on its property. According to manager and 21 year employee 'Mr Thakur', Tiger Tops ownership believed that the safari mentality was changing and had transitioned to two safaris per day in contrast to the four to nine that took place in Sauraha. Guests however, Thakur explains, did not seem to differentiate between a few daily safaris and massive overuse of elephants. In addition, Tiger Tops staff realized that 'elephant back safari is not animal appropriate or environmental [*sic*]'. Owners started to ideastorm ways to improve the quality of life for captive elephants and hoped to provide tourism opportunities with 'very minimum impact' on elephants. Thakur says there was no real pressure from outside organizations to stop elephant-backed safari, rather the change was driven by an internal sense of needing to pay back the elephants ('We have used them so long', says Thakur) and offer something new in the tourism arena.

Releasing the elephants from their chains was a learning experience, according to Thakur. Tiger Tops ownership initially reached out to INGO3[1] for help and guidance building chain-free corrals. This international non-governmental organization (INGO) offered to build numerous enclosures, but Thakur says they didn't want to commit to a full-scale change in case the new corrals made the elephants' or drivers'

lives 'worse' or 'more difficult'. Having not seen chain-free corals in large-scale use, they were concerned that the experiment might fail (which it did at the NTNC facility; see Chapter 6, this volume). After the original corral was completed, the hotel hired a technician from India to continue expanding the chain-free areas. This technician trained the staff, and they now build and maintain these structures themselves.

Changing what he calls the 'drivers' 50 years riding culture [*sic*]' was challenging. Introducing new ways of motivational training to the mahouts and reducing dominance training required some convincing. Thakur felt that showing the mahouts examples of successful training techniques using positive reinforcement, and not forcing rapid change upon them, was key to the successful transition.[6] Management approached the changes as an experiment and told the mahouts that nothing was written in stone; 'If it doesn't work, it doesn't work.' After being encouraged to try walking the elephants a bit further each day without yelling or bull hook use, the mahouts came to their own conclusion that it was possible. Even though hitting with sticks has also been condemned, many of the mahouts still carry one with them. Apparently, having the stick accessible has a psychological effect on both mahout and elephant. The mahouts report feeling safer just in case of emergency, and report that the elephants know the stick is there, leading them to behave. This is an example of sensitization training, in which an elephant realizes that a tool causes pain and attempts to avoid interacting with it (Boakes *et al.*, 2011, p. 15). The elephant may exhibit fear or stress upon having the tool in visual range, and thus should behave in a way which will prevent its use (Boakes *et al.*, 2011).

According to Thakur, the biggest and most disheartening learning experience took place when staff first released the elephants into their new chain-free corrals. After meetings involving both management and mahouts, the crew came up with groups of elephants that they thought would do well together – elephants who were 'good friends' in the past. Staff assumed, given the shared history of these elephants, that they could simply release females into enclosures together to explore. Some elephant groupings resulted in physical altercations, and after one female killed her companion, they saw that being chained nearby or working

together did not elicit the same responses to one another as being free did. The staff has learned to respect the elephants, accepting that while some 'get along' fine, they do not wish to share corrals. Some of the elephants seem to prefer living alone, and so they are housed individually.

Perhaps these issues could easily have been avoided if ethological studies of the Tiger Tops herd had been conducted, or literature on the topic consulted. For example, the importance of clear social bonds along matriarchal lines, and the resultant problems associated with the early breaking of these bonds, is well documented in literature (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kurt and Garai, 2006; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Females who have been separated from their maternal herds may later be unable to deal with stressful stimuli, and the addition of unrelated or unknown herd members can cause stress and anxiety and disrupt sleep (Evison *et al.*, 2020). Aggression towards other elephants may arise due to frustration, stress, enclosure size, or a myriad of other conditions, and is more common in captive elephants (see Chapter 5, this volume).

Modern chain-free living

Thakur feels elephants 'are sensitive, and psychologically we can understand how happy they are', despite our lack of a common language. He has seen a change in this happiness in both elephants and mahouts since the transition to chain-free corrals. Thakur feels that both human and elephant lives have become easier, not only because the amount of work required to maintain elephants in chain-free enclosures is less, but because their stress level is now lower.[7] The mahouts no longer need to be 'yelling all the time' to keep the elephants in control and on time to safaris. Instead, Thakur states the elephants 'have a very good attachment' with their mahouts and can build upon this relationship. In fact, in contrast to other elephants in the area (see following chapters in this volume), these elephants do not need to be chained to eat.

Guests at the lodge can relax and watch the elephants from outside their enclosure, or accompany elephants, mahouts, and naturalists on guided walks. Thakur points out that this is not a final fix for elephant tourism, and if Tiger Tops later comes up with a way to engage tourists that is better for the elephants, they will embrace it. It should be noted that at the time of the present study, not all elephants owned by Tiger Tops were chain-free. Four other elephants reside in different towns, and while they are not taking part in elephant-backed safari, they had not yet been transitioned to chain-free enclosures.

The ownership of Tiger Tops has agreed that they will not purchase additional elephants as their current herd passes away. Instead, they will focus on 'trying to keep [the current herd] happy' for the rest of their lives. Thakur credits Tiger Tops' successful change to what he calls a more 'responsible' form of tourism to Tiger Tops' current ownership. Having someone at the top who is concerned with animal welfare, he says, makes a difference in the way the company runs. They can choose a different path, because they are not part of the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC) (see Chapter 7, this volume) or any cooperative management group. Their location on the other side of the CNP ensures they are under no obligation to supply elephants for Chitwan's cooperative-run tourist safaris.

The welfare of animals is not the only concern shared by Thakur and Tiger Tops ownership. A medical clinic for the local human community stands in front of the resort. When there were no other clinics or hospitals in the area, this facility operated four times per week. Now that there are alternatives, the Tiger Tops facility opens only once per month, offering free medications and check-ups for local community members. In addition, it provides emergency first aid and offers use of lodge-owned vehicles as ambulances. Tiger Tops staff purportedly want to share their sustainable development message with other hotel owners, mayors, municipalities, and anyone else they can invite to the table. Their hope is that by establishing a focus on wildlife and community they can change the focus of tourism from money to conservation. Thakur feels that this is one reason for the success of the lodge – their care for the community has resulted in a 'place in people's hearts'.

Another major reason why Tiger Tops has had success establishing non-riding tourism is the nationalities of its clientele. As a high-priced tourist destination, most of the visitors to Tiger Tops are Europeans and Americans.[8] Tourists from these countries appear to be drawn to facilities labelling themselves as 'ride-free', even if other contact with elephants is allowed (Aadita, Bames, Thakur and Prakash interviews, 2019; see also Long, 2013). One elephant welfare advocate feels that the success of Tiger Tops in bringing in this high-end clientele is changing the mindset of other owners in the area. However, she is quick to point out that Tiger Tops doesn't market its facility as 'a sanctuary'. Interlocutors point out that Tiger Tops (and other ride-free facilities) still earn a great deal of income from elephants (Gwala, Prakash, Raj and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Thakur says that he was concerned that when frequent guests first heard that elephant-backed safaris were stopping, they would be upset. Instead, tourists readily accepted management's decision to stop the rides, and some commented on how nice it was to visit their 'old friends' now living in chain-free corrals. Others commented that they preferred the new method of walking behind elephants rather than riding on top of them.

The original purveyor of privately owned elephant safari in Chitwan, Tiger Tops has continued to be responsive to changes in human attitudes towards animal activities. An evaluation of how its elephant stables meet the needs of its residents and aligns with considerations for positive welfare and good health will be discussed in Chapter 10 of this volume.

The Rise of Captive Elephant Care and Disease in Sauraha[9]

When Dr Kamal Gairhe came to Sauraha in 1990, it was with the understanding that his focus would be on the care of the nearly 60 elephants owned by the government. At that point, there were no other captive elephants in the Sauraha area, and these government elephants were used solely for the entertainment of tourists. In addition to daily

care such as feeding and watering the elephants, Gairhe was tasked with doing physical exams and post-mortems.

Gairhe says that the 1960s 'push' by the government to promote private elephant-backed safari led to an influx of elephants from India into the CNP area. Many of these elephants were leased from Indian owners, and often came complete with their own Indian mahout. Because the Nepalese businessmen who leased these elephants had little idea how to care for them, they relied solely on the mahouts' judgement. These mahouts were 'traditional', says Gairhe, and suspicious of science and medicine. Many elephants died, and the government stepped in to insist upon medical intervention for the remaining individuals. Routine medical care was undertaken at the stables, which were – and still are – open-air and publicly accessible. Gairhe felt that providing 'modern' medical care in front of the community was a big step in getting locals to buy into the use of Western medical interventions. Not only did the mahouts begin to trust the veterinary staff, but the community members did as well. This trust led to veterinary staff being allowed to use (in Gairhe's words) 'modern' methods on livestock as well.

According to Gairhe, most of the marginalized population in the area relied on livestock such as chickens, duck, and goats for survival. Many of these people have hired veterinarians in the community for health care. Sadly, many of them could not afford to pay for veterinary visits or medication, and instead had to watch their animals suffer and die from treatable illnesses. The government of Nepal partnered with the Zoological Society of London to provide free care and medications for domestic animals in four stand-alone clinics (Sainsbury, 2015). They were able to keep the programme running for 2 years, and then switched to a subsidized-rate programme. In 2003, the programme was turned over to the community as a non-profit and is still in place today. As a result of this successful programme, community members developed bonds with the government veterinary staff, and began to report injuries and illnesses of wildlife. Now, Gairhe explained laughingly, they report the smallest scratch on the body of a rhino and worry that the national park staff is not doing its job. The technicians at these clinics are vital informants for the NTNC, alerting them to livestock disease outbreaks that could jump into wildlife (Sainsbury, 2015).

In 1984, an elephant breeding centre was established near CNP (Gairhe, 2012). Despite the annual rise in successful births at the centre, there were not enough elephants to go around, and their price skyrocketed. Soon, the 60 government-owned elephants were joined by 60 private elephants, as some community members realized the soaring profits that could be made from tourism (Gairhe interviews, 2019). There were numerous wounds and 'incidents' within the elephant camps as the population rose and elephants unfamiliar with each other were suddenly thrust into close quarters.

Then came the elephant tuberculosis (TB) epidemic. The worst cases were euthanized, and a massive testing survey undertaken which showed that 13% of captive elephants were infected (Mikota *et al.*, 2015). Between 2002 and 2014, ten elephants died of TB (Mandal and Khadka, 2013; Thapa *et al.*, 2016). By 2012, approximately 23% of all captive elephants in the area tested positive and are still housed with the general population despite veterinary advice urging that TB-positive individuals be segregated (Gairhe, 2012, p. 29; Szydlowski, 2022). While Nepal has made major inroads in the treatment and prevention of human TB, around 45% of the human population remains infected (GoN, 2016b). The presentation in both humans and elephants is similar, and the bacterium appears to be zoonotic in both directions – which makes sense given that the first cases were likely due to a human pathogen passing into elephants centuries ago (Davis, 2001; Paudel and Sreevatsan, 2020). TB is a major concern in the area, due to its potential for spread into populations of wild elephants and captive livestock species (Mikota *et al.*, 2015), and its implication in the deaths of endangered wild rhino in Nepal (Thapa *et al.*, 2016). Despite these dangers, Drs 'Vidanta' and Gairhe confirm that there is no current testing being done on the captive elephant population in Sauraha. The 'urgent need' (Mikota *et al.*, 2015, p. 222) for testing and control is being ignored, because it angered the elephant owners. Owners felt that the test was unreliable and gave too many false positives, resulting in costly treatment (400,000 Nepalese rupees (Nrs) or ~US$3400), difficulty in accessing repeat testing, and the potential stigma for private owners (de Vries, 2014; Rajesh interview, 2019). While there are multiple issues with the TB assays used on elephants, including 'suspect but incongruent' test results (Mikota *et al.*,

2015, p. 226) and a lack of laboratory facilities able to mediate testing issues, it is still vital to continue screening both elephants and mahouts, as there are documented cases of elephant-to-human transmission, including an outbreak at an elephant refuge in the USA (Murphree *et al.*, 2011; Paudel and Sreevatsan, 2020) and suspected transmission from elephants to chimpanzees (Stephens *et al.*, 2013). Ironically, during research for the current study I was the recipient of TB bacteria – likely from the time spent interacting with TB-positive elephants during fieldwork. Two months after my return from Nepal, I was diagnosed with latent TB requiring more than three months of antibiotic therapy. These antibiotics can have severe side effects, and in my case resulted in two separate emergency hospital visits during treatment. My TB was discovered via an annual test which is required for my work with pachyderms, supporting findings that annual testing is key to TB prevention (Mikota *et al.*, 2015; Paudel and Sreevatsan, 2020). My case seems to reinforce the ease of spreading the TB bacterium, even through casual contact, and perhaps underlines the importance of considering One Health objectives in captive elephant management (Schwabe, 1984; Davis, 2001; Cassidy, 2016). During the preparation of this book, several more government patrol elephants succumbed to TB. This is a pressing concern given their daily incursions into wild elephant habitat (Ilian and Vidanta PCs, 2020).

On top of chronic TB concerns, elephant endotheliotropic herpesviruses (EEHVs) are becoming more common throughout Asia and are the leading cause of death among captive Asian elephant calves between the ages of 1 and 8 years (Murray, n.d.). This emerging group of diseases has killed more than 50 elephant calves in Western countries and more than 45 calves in Asia (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Hayward, 2014a, b; Vidanta and Gairhe interviews, 2019). EEHV is symptomatic in 20% of the global Asian elephant calf population and is present in almost 10% of the European elephant population (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Hayward, 2014a, b).

There are at least 19 types of elephant herpesviruses (some of which infect only Asian elephants and some only African), and juveniles may recover from one strain only to be infected with another (Hayward, 2014a, b). Because the disease has a latent form which is undetectable, a

cure is impossible, and latent strains carried by adults may become active years later and be transmitted to calves (Hayward, 2014a, b). This disease is particularly concerning in Nepal, where a jump into the wild population could have disastrous results (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2016). Also of concern is that EEHV is considered zoonotic (transmissible to humans) (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Hayward, 2014a, b; Vidanta and Gairhe interviews, 2019).

Nepal saw its first documented case of EEHV in 2002, but no one there at the time knew what the disease was called. Even with decades of experience, veterinarian Dr Gairhe wasn't sure what they were seeing. The next case didn't appear until 2009 and another in 2011. Nepalese vets tried famciclovir at that point but were unsuccessful in saving the calves. In 2015, another case appeared in the NTNC stable. This calf was born to the same mother of a prior case, and as Vidanta explains, Gairhe was out on a call, and Vidanta had no idea what he was seeing. EEHV was not covered in veterinary school, he says, and he had never heard of it. Although the veterinary technician recognized the symptoms, they were unable to save the calf. This launched Vidanta's interest in the disease, and he started studying EEHV. When the next case showed up in 2016, he was ready. This calf, Deepak Gaj, survived and remains with his original herd. When I interviewed the current owner of this calf, I was told that he survived thanks to his mahout and the patient application of heated mustard oil and herbs (a traditional treatment for nearly every ailment, according to Vidanta) after the government vet 'gave up'. When I mention this to Vidanta, he says 'Nobody will give credit to the doctors', with a laugh. He elaborates that veterinary staff spent days and nights treating Deepak with famciclovir (an antiviral medication), but his breathing remained laboured – even on oxygen. Vidanta tried diuretics as a last-ditch effort and the calf urinated large amounts of fluid. As his owner explained, he was 'unplugged' and recovered (Kumar interview, 2019).

Vidanta says this is a common issue – that he treats patients with allopathic medicine, but this medicine is often accompanied by ethnomedical support. However, when discussing treatments, Vidanta says the ethnomedical approach always gets the credit for the cure. Documents mentioning the use of medicinal plants in Nepal date back

more than 6000 years (Kunwar and Bussmann, 2008), and these plants still serve as a 'readily and cheaply available' alternative to allopathic treatments in areas of marginalized communities (Kunwar and Bussmann, 2008, p. 5). Vidanta feels that preserving this indigenous knowledge is vitally important. Examples of current ethnomedical use, including minerals and local plants, can be found in the following chapters of this volume.

Laws and Debates Surrounding Captive Elephants in Sauraha

Before COVID-19 hit in the autumn of 2019, approximately 112 captive elephants lived in the Sauraha area. Approximately 60 of these were privately owned, and the rest belonged to the government or the NTNC. This number varies slightly each year as new elephants are brought into town and others sold to buyers in India. Elephants are marketed by the government of Nepal as vital to providing safe viewing of wildlife on safari, and that 'adventure activities' such as elephant polo and the annual elephant races create 'value-added' tourism (GoN, 2009, p. 11). The Elephant Conservation Act of 2009 planned to 'maximize economic and environmental benefits through the management of domestic elephants', bring 'private entrepreneurs and others into domestic elephant management', and 'uplift the living standard of resident communities through equitable sharing of profits' gained from elephant activities (GoN, 2009, p. 12).

However, Asian elephants have been listed as a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) Appendix I animal since 1975, and this status prohibits trade of these animals across international borders for commercial uses (CITES, 1997). CITES (1973) allows for the trade of Appendix I animals for non-commercial uses, such as scientific research, but requires an export and import permit. The offspring of captively bred individuals (even if one parent is wild) are considered 'Appendix II species', and the trade in these requires a permit or certificate from both the 'scientific authority of the

state of export' and the management agency of the state of export (CITES, 1997, Article IV). Furthermore, these state agencies must verify that the individuals will be 'prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment' (CITES, 1997).

Despite these protections, poaching, illegal trade in body parts, and the exchange of live individuals continue to reduce wild populations in both India and Nepal (AERSM, 2017). CITES documents repeatedly reinforce the need for better regulation of trade in wild fauna (CITES, 2019). They 'urge' governments to inspect certificates, 'encourage' parties to prioritize ending trade in endangered species, and 'recommend' that any suspicious documents be reported (CITES, 2019, p. 2, 9 and 17). This language leaves much to be desired, as everything in the CITES updates is worded as mere suggestion – leaving the interpretation entirely up to each nation (CITES, 2019).

In the town of Sauraha, Nepal, there is little attempt to hide illegal trade in elephants (Bames, Brown, Raja, Randy, Thomas and Vachan interviews, 2019). Westerners, locals, and even news agencies are aware when an elephant has been bought from or sold to India (Nepali Times, 2021; Brown, Raja, Randy, Thomas and Vachan interviews, 2019). While writing this volume, each time an elephant would leave or arrive, a flurry of messages would appear on my phone, 12,000 km away. It is for this reason that it seems impossible that governmental agencies and CITES officers are not aware of these practices.

While one owner explained that 'nobody wants to buy new elephants' and claims that the practice has stopped (Rajesh interview, 2019), in fact two or three new elephants appear in the Sauraha area annually, and according to NTNC staff, these individuals find their way into Nepal in a variety of ways (Brown, Sama, Sona and Thomas interviews, 2019). Some are described as 'legally' purchased from people in India who hold dual citizenship, thereby making it appear that Nepalese are selling to other Nepalese and not across international borders (Vidanta interviews, 2019). Locke (2011, p. 33) found that private buyers could also avoid the perception of illegality by simply exchanging 'gifts' of elephants in exchange for a 'cash donation'. Some elephants are simply listed as captive-born on their paperwork (if asked for any when crossing the border) (Baral interviews, 2019). Other owners claimed that they simply

trade elephants among themselves, acknowledging that 'it's not allowed to buy or sale [*sic*]' elephants (Vachan PC, 2020). However, there is a general acknowledgement among owners and the community that elephants are regularly, and illegally, bought and sold (Pyakurel, 2021; Brown, Raja, Randy, Thomas and Vachan interviews, 2019).

Government documents also recognize that new elephants enter the country each year, and in fact tell owners exactly where to go to purchase them (GoN, 2009). The governmentally endorsed Conservation Act explains that breeding elephants in captivity is difficult but buying them is easy (GoN, 2009, p. 11). They acknowledge that most private owners head to India's annual cattle fair in Sonepur of Bihar, where 'huge numbers' of elephants are 'traded' (GoN, 2009, p. 11).[10] However, in the same document the government of Nepal admits that this act is prohibited by CITES (GoN, 2009). It is this acceptance of both the illegality of elephant purchase and its practice that confuses visitors to Nepal (Crane, Pabin, Randy, Thomas and Zed interviews 2019; Crane, Pabin, Randy, Thomas and Zed PCs, 2020).

In addition to CITES, the government of Nepal has several documents recommending the development of frameworks that more tightly control illegal trade in elephants, mitigate human–elephant conflict, and save wild elephants (GoN, 2009, p. 11 and 16). What is lacking is the enforcement of existing laws regarding this trade of endangered species (Gautam, 2020). Government documents (the Domesticated Elephant Management Policy (DEMP) from as early as 2003 called for the registration of captive elephants in Nepal, with all registration data to be sent to the CITES secretariat (GoN, 2015b). However, this registration process has been unsuccessful, and elephants continue to be traded across the India–Nepal border without any paperwork (Brown, Raja, Randy and Thomas interviews, 2019). In 2019–2020, three new elephants arrived from India, nine elephants have been returned or sold back to India, and two others have been sold to Indian buyers and are awaiting transport (Raja, Randy and Thomas PCs, 2020). These transports, according to interlocutors for the present study, often happen in the middle of the night, when elephants quietly disappear from stables (Brown, Randy and Thomas PCs, 2019 and 2020).

Other laws applicable to elephants

While wild elephants are protected under both international and national regulations, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2029 (1973), captive individuals have no enforced legal protections (Kharel, 2002). A 1966 bill passed rules for the treatment and management of captive elephants, but the Civil Service Act of 1993 (CSA-1993) replaced these protections (Kharel, 2002). The CSA-1993 applies only to government- and NTNC-owned elephants, and outlines caregiving tasks and stipulates specific amounts of food and water for captive elephants (Kharel, 2002). It requires that each elephant have three caregivers, several stable managers, and a national-level oversight officer (Kharel, 2002). Again, these protections apply only to government-owned and NTNC elephants – and as will be discussed in following chapters, are not, in fact, enforced. Privately owned elephants have no such protections currently in place. The Chitwan National Park Management Plan does call for attention to be paid to the husbandry of captive elephants, such as their need for space, hygiene, food, regular vaccinations, deworming and medication (GoN, 2015a, p, 72). In addition, regular check-ups for all elephants and their mahouts are suggested, as is regular veterinary care for TB-positive elephants and an improvement in 'housekeeping' in stables (GoN, 2009, p. 72).

In addition, the Nepal Veterinary Council Act, 2055 (1999), Section 9, lists standards of education for animal care providers, and briefly mentions the council's ability to make suggestions to the government regarding animal medicine, veterinary, and animal health issues (Nepal Veterinary Council, 1999). Like other legislation, this section is vague regarding actions which should be undertaken and mentions nothing specifically about elephants (Nepal Veterinary Council, 1999). This legislation accompanies the Animal Health and Livestock Services Act 1999 allowing the government to create a committee for the prevention of cruelty to animals via a notification in the Nepal Gazette (much the same way the NTNC can act as an oversight committee for wildlife) (Tewari, 2016, p. 14). This act outlines treatment of animals in quarantine but fails to address any other welfare needs (Tewari, 2016, p. 14 and 23).

The DEMP, mentioned above, acknowledges the terrible health condition of elephants in captive breeding centres, such as malnutrition, lack of sleep, and common reproductive issues such as miscarriages and stillbirths. The policy describes the need for more research and says that the government will act to facilitate and regulate private elephant-owner involvement (GoN, 2015b). The DEMP also reinforces earlier restrictions on private elephant access to national park land (GoN, 2015b). Privately owned elephant safaris do not, in fact, enter the national park itself, but instead travel through the buffer zones and community forest (GoN, 2015b). Private elephants have not been allowed in the national park since the expulsion of the lodges from within park boundaries (GoN, 2015b). Citing the need to maintain a distance between wild and captive elephants to prevent disease passage, these elephants are allowed only in the buffer zone and community forest areas surrounding the park (GoN, 2015b). This document claims that the elephants are allowed to play and bathe in the protected areas for 6 hours daily, but these activities do not happen in practice (Brown, Minsky, Sama, Taraswin and Vachan interviews, 2019 and 2020; participant observations, 2019).

The current legal situation

The more recently created (but not yet adopted) Animal Welfare Directive 2073 (2016) specifically lists working elephants as covered animals and advises use of the five freedoms as a guideline for welfare (GoN, 2016a). The act was written and filed by the government's Ministry of Livestock Development under the authority of the previous Animal Health and Livestock Services Act, 2055 (GoN, 2016a), but appeared to be stuck in limbo awaiting approval from higher government (see GoN, 2016a; Animal Nepal PC, 2020). According to Animal Nepal, it assisted in the preparation of this document which, while endorsed by the government, has yet to be implemented for any species except working equines (Animal Nepal PC, 2020).

The welfare directive specifies that sick animals be kept from work, and states that healthy animals may not be used in extreme temperatures or for more than 8 hours in any day (GoN, 2016a, p. 6). When in their

stable, elephants must be able to turn around, but no provision is made for lying down (GoN, 2016a). Cruelty to elephants is specifically prohibited, including beating with sticks, knives, or axes (GoN, 2016a, p. 9). In addition, there is a call for coordination with government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in implementing this directive, indicating that NGOs active in Sauraha might have the opportunity to positively impact captive elephant welfare on a population level (GoN, 2016a, p. 10). Specifically, the directive instructs INGOs to raise awareness of animal welfare concerns and report cruelty (GoN, 2016a, p. 12). This would seem to indicate a willingness on the part of the government to allow NGOs more of a voice in elephant welfare, but many individuals active with welfare in the Sauraha area felt threatened by members of the elephant cooperative (Taraswin interviews, 2019; Smith PCs, 2019 and 2020). One NGO head explained that in 'almost 20 years of travelling the globe going into the worst areas of the world ... I have never left a town early scared for my life' yet had to do just that in Sauraha (Smith PC, 2019).

The Animal Welfare Directive (GoN, 2016a) reinforces the requirement for the registration of animals listed in prior legislation. It provides an animal welfare measurement index for use in assessing animals, but sadly, this welfare index is a health and husbandry measurement tool, asking only for physical condition statistics, amount of food offered, condition of shelter, and length of restraint used (GoN, 2016a, p. 13). No true welfare metric is offered. This may be a problem with the language of care found in Sauraha, and uncovering a way to increase communication between organizations active in the area is a key objective of this volume.

Conclusions

Elephant-backed safari has been a popular, and competitive, activity since its privatization in the 1960s and is now a large part of the annual income of CNP. Beginning with the transfer of tourism activities from the government to Tiger Tops, elephants have become synonymous with

tourism in the area. Growing numbers of elephants have resulted in an increase in communicable and zoonotic diseases, especially in areas of human–wildlife contact or at the wild–captive interface. In addition, a lack of testing or commitment to treatment for diseases such as TB has led to high infection rates. While improvements in stabling and veterinary care have taken place over the last decades, Nepal lacks appropriate legislation or enforcement of existing laws regarding elephant husbandry, sale, and welfare. The existence of the Animal Welfare Directive may signal that governmental agencies are willing to consider changes in elephant health and welfare standards.

In addition, the transformation of Tiger Tops to a chain-free, ride-free facility may serve as an example for other hoteliers wishing to continue their elephant-based income while addressing 'Western' concerns for elephant welfare. Further studies on the continued feasibility of this model, especially as the current herd passes away and is not replaced, are needed.

Before beginning a discussion of the other organizations involved in elephant ownership or advocacy, these elephants must be viewed as biological organisms, with very specific physical and emotional needs. The next chapter (Chapter 5) offers a view into these needs. It includes an examination of legislation, health and welfare data from the USA, Europe, and Asia. Given the low numbers of both captive and wild elephants in Nepal, data from other range-country camps and US and European zoos will serve as a basis for comparison. These data will allow the construction of a set of health and welfare parameters applicable to the unique situation surrounding captive elephants in Nepal.

Notes

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[2] Figure was not given in Nepalese rupees, so the conversion at that time is unknown.

[3] Gairhe's name and position are used with permission.

[4] This advisor role is not mentioned in the history provided by the Nepalese government, however (GoN, 2015a).

[5] The following information comes from phone conversations and emails with K. Edwards, the hotel owner, and face-to-face interviews with Thakur, a pseudonym, unless otherwise cited.

[6] This type of training offers treats or physical attention as a reward for a requested behaviour. See Appendix I (this volume) for a discussion of positive reinforcement training (PRT) and other methods.

[7] Other elephant specialists disagree, stating that changing management styles requires specialized training to avoid confusing the elephant (Desmond and Laule, 1994) and an excellent grasp of herd structure for success (Clubb and Mason, 2002).

[8] In the rest of Nepal, the largest group of international tourists typically comes from India (20%) or China (9%), which because of the culturally based demand for elephant-backed safari, leads to further complication of captive elephant issues (GoN, 2022, pp. 26–27); this will be discussed in following chapters. Domestic tourism is also on the rise, with 56% of travel and tourism's contribution to Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) coming from this sector in 2016 (WTTC, 2017, p. 1).

[9] Information included here comes from interviews, PCs, and participant observations with Kamal Gairhe and 'Prakesh Vidanta', unless otherwise cited. Dr Gairhe's name and position are used with permission. As the only veterinarian for a 30 year period, and as an author of research studies, it was important to maintain his identity here. Dr Vidanta's name has been pseudonymized.

[10] There is allegedly a long-standing ban on the sale of elephants at this fair. However, elephants continue to arrive in Nepal following the event (GoN, 2009; Roy, 2019; Raja PC, 2020).

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5 Measuring Elephant Health and Welfare

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Abstract

This chapter contains a discussion of the needs of elephants. Because the number of both captive and wild elephants in Nepal is miniscule relative to other Asian countries, any assessment of health and welfare must begin with research from areas with greater populations. In addition to Asian range states, such as Thailand and India, zoos in the USA and Europe will serve as a basis for a discussion of health and welfare parameters.

There is a need to develop welfare standards and measurements which can be applied to captive elephants in a variety of situations. The specific elements of welfare and physical well-being which can be applied to captive elephant stables in Nepal are the primary focus of this chapter, along with a discussion of the key issues facing elephants in captivity.

In Chapter 4 of this volume, conservationist and hotel manager 'Thakur' described his belief that the conversion from foot chains to chain-free corrals at his facility resulted in happier elephants and easier, less-stressful lives for mahouts. Thakur described the sensitivity of elephants and humans' ability to 'psychologically' understand when they feel happiness. But how can we really tell if an elephant is healthy, happy, and stress-free?

The answer is both incredibly simple and unbearably complex. Like the words 'necessary care', 'sanctuary', and 'welfare', which will be discussed in future chapters of this volume, perceptions of health and happiness may be culturally dependent and value laden. As animals

ourselves, we can certainly understand that behaviours such as play, sex, and sleep can be measurable 'pleasures', curiosity about other individuals a sign of engagement, and having the space to express natural behaviours allows for observation of the 'realisation' of goals (Yeates and Maine, 2008; Balcombe, 2009, p. 210 and 212). This chapter offers a discussion of these, and other, impactors of and metrics for health and welfare assessment in captive elephants. Because the number of both captive and wild elephants in Nepal is far less than that of most other South Asian countries, available research into their health and welfare has taken place in other countries (Varma, 2008; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, b). Any assessment of elephant welfare therefore needs to begin with research from more populated pachyderm habitats such as India and Thailand even though large-scale assessments of pachyderm welfare in any country are rare (Varma, 2008). In addition to these range countries, health and welfare parameters described by larger organizations tasked with assessing the needs of captive elephants, such as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) in the USA and the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), will serve as a basis for the discussion of what constitutes good health and positive welfare. As the discussion proceeds, it is important to remember that some negative welfare outcomes happen despite handlers' attempts to provide positive welfare, and some animals thrive despite having caregivers that don't really care (Mason and Veasey, 2010a). This chapter will focus on how humans and human-created facilities affect elephant health and welfare and will create a foundation for the following chapters' discussion of individual animals, local stables, and an assessment of captive elephant care in Nepal.

What Is Welfare?

A quarter of the world's Asian elephants live in captivity, and individuals of this species have been used by humans for at least 4000 years (Desai, 2008, p. 67). The roles of elephants in ceremonies and their use as transportation and labour need to be reconsidered in view of

humankind's changing attitudes, new knowledge of the biological and social needs of elephants, and the availability of alternatives to this labour (Desai, 2008). Elephants used in zoos, tourism venues, and circuses may have, in the past, been seen as ambassadors for their species, bringing awareness to conservation issues. However, the use of these individuals for such purposes, and their ability to experience positive welfare in a variety of settings, is the subject of academic and popular debate (Desai, 2008).

Human definitions of welfare have changed over the last three decades, as have perceptions of which beings deserve our concern regarding their welfare (Brambell *et al.*, 1965; FAWC, 1979; Broom, 1986; Balcombe, 2009). Broom (1986, p. 524) described welfare as one's 'state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment'. If an individual fails to cope, or must expend a great deal of energy coping, then his or her welfare is poor. Broom (1986) recognized the impact of housing, nutrition, and treatment on the welfare of animals, and suggested that both population-level and individual welfare be assessed. Welfare is assessed external to ethical concerns, but once welfare is measured the decision must be made whether the welfare state is ethically 'tolerable' (Broom, 1991, p. 118). But measuring welfare is far from straightforward; Broom (1991) acknowledged that the subjective feelings of animals can be hard to assess, creating difficulties in developing appropriate metrics.

An early attempt to ensure good welfare, which began in the UK and spread globally, took the form of the 'five freedoms' which originated with *The Brambell Report* (Brambell *et al.*, 1965; FAWC, 1979). This report suggested that prior laws were inadequate to ensure that intensively farmed animals did not suffer (Brambell *et al.*, 1965). The five freedoms were developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) and written for the layperson to provide general guidelines for animal welfare, rather than as a structured set of instructions for institutional animal caregivers (FAWC, 1979; Meehan *et al.*, 2016; Mellor, 2016b). The five freedoms include: 'freedom from thirst, hunger or malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter; prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment, of injury and disease; freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour' and 'freedom from fear' (FAWC, 1979, p. 2).

Critics of the five freedoms have long argued that they focused more on the prevention of suffering than increasing positive well-being (FAWC, 2009; Mellor, 2016a). To this end, the FAWC updated the five freedoms to include provisions which further define appropriate conditions for farmed animals (FAWC, 2009). These provisions expand upon what is required for mental and physical health and include having access to fresh water and a healthy diet, shelter and resting areas, an avoidance of mental suffering, adequate space, and the company of other individuals of the same species (FAWC, 2009, pp. 14–16). The five freedoms and their provisions have become a generally accepted basic measure of welfare in farmed animals, those housed in zoological facilities, and those under other forms of human care. Therefore, the five freedoms provide a good place to begin a discussion regarding elephant care and ethical treatment (FAWC, 2009; Meehan *et al.*, 2016; Mellor, 2016a).

Expanding the five freedoms

Mellor (2016a, b)5_60 suggests that the freedoms are lacking details necessary to balance both positive and negative states and suggests a model which includes quality of life indicators such as the pleasure derived from eating and drinking (both in availability of food and in variety of food items), excited playfulness, and sexual gratification. Other welfare assessments are beginning to delve further into the area of positive psychology that has become common in assessing human well-being (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology focuses on the creation of a pleasurable life instead of one merely free from pain or suffering (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; FAWC, 2009). Yeates and Maine (2008, p. 297) recommend thinking of welfare in terms of 'everyday sensational pleasures' such as play, sex, and sleep, along with curiosity about and engagement with other individuals. As tactile creatures, elephants' desire to touch each other demonstrates that, like for other animals, touch can be an observable source of sensory pleasure (Balcombe, 2009). Space for the expression of natural behaviours and the agency to make choices (e.g. in food items or

movement) allow for the realization of goals, which in turn increases positive welfare (Yeates and Maine, 2008; Balcombe, 2009).

Global zoological governing organizations such as the EAZA and the AZA have begun exploring the need for consistent welfare metrics and regular assessments (see Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Greco *et al.*, 2016a; Veasey, 2017; Collins, 2020; EAZA, 2023). What is lacking, however, is a universal measurement applicable to the variety of captive situations, and one which focuses on individual instead of population-level needs (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Kagan *et al.*, 2015; Greco *et al.*, 2016a, b; Veasey, 2020).

Of course, welfare debates surround the effects of captivity itself. Animal welfare and animal rights groups state that captivity itself has exclusively negative effects on welfare (de Vries, 2014; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017; PETA, n.d.). Some researchers agree, suggesting humans should use nature as a guide – arguing that welfare (outside wild settings) is highest in those captive habitats which most closely reflect the natural ecology of the species, and allow for more 'natural' social groupings and expressions of 'natural' behaviours (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Varma, 2008; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019). It is hardly that simple, especially when considering that some individuals, such as captive-born elephants, have never experienced life in the wild. This adds a layer of complexity to an already difficult measure of welfare. For example, one must consider that animals in captivity benefit from protection from predation, disease, starvation, natural disasters, etc., and that this protection might have the potential to balance the reduction in welfare due to a presumed lack of 'wildness' (Veasey, 2006, p. 66; 2017). However, it cannot be assumed that a lack of these problems (e.g. disease and predation) has an exclusively positive effect on welfare (Veasey, 2020).

For example, despite having access to better health care, financial support, and updated information, population-level studies indicated that elephants in Western zoos had poorer overall welfare than those in well-run sanctuaries and reserves located within Asian elephant range states (Sukumar, 2003, p. 397; Mason and Veasey, 2010b; Veasey, 2020). Life expectancy in some Western zoos was less than in intensively managed systems in Asia (see 'Lifespan and reproduction' section below). This information needs to be reflexively considered by those studying captive

elephants both in Asia and abroad. Further studies are needed to determine why this phenomenon exists.

Health and Welfare: Two Inseparable Ideas

Assessing captive elephant health and welfare, in Asia or Western countries, is not an easy or consistently undertaken process due to a lack of data on normal stress levels and affective states in the wild (Pokharel *et al.*, 2018; Brown *et al.*, 2020). In addition, health and welfare do not exist separately but rather influence each other both positively and negatively (Veasey, 2006; Mason and Veasey, 2010a, b). Furthermore, poor health is not necessarily indicative of poor welfare, and elephants in perfect health do not necessarily experience positive welfare (Veasey, 2006; Mason and Veasey, 2010a, b). Therefore, a discussion on what is necessary for both good health and positive welfare will naturally weave together health measures, husbandry concerns, and environment or habitat.

A review of relevant literature indicates that the health of elephants in captivity throughout South-East Asia is inadequate, due in large part to poor husbandry and their maintenance in facilities that do not adequately meet their biological, social, and ecological needs (Sarma *et al.*, 2003; Miller *et al.*, 2015; Menon and Tiwari, 2019). In a study of veterinarians from range countries, over two-thirds felt that improving basic husbandry for captive elephants was 'important', and 71% felt that supplementation and/or nutrition needed improvement (Miller *et al.*, 2015, p. 5). A lack of available diagnostics and a shortage of trained staff created the biggest issues for veterinarians working with elephants (Miller *et al.*, 2015, pp. 4–5). Other basic items needed for good overall health, such as appropriate shelter, were deemed inadequate by 64% of participants, and concerns regarding elephants' limited access to clean water were mentioned by more than half (Miller *et al.*, 2015, p. 5).

Elephant health and welfare specialists agree that there are several key issues facing elephants in captivity globally. Among these are adequate protection from the elements (FAWC, 1979; Yadav *et al.*, 2015), access to

fresh water for drinking and bathing (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005; Harris *et al.*, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2015), availability of a variety of natural browse (Sukumar, 1989; Harris *et al.*, 2008), and appropriate nutrition which includes seasonal dietary changes (Vancuylenberg, 1977; Sukumar, 1989; Angkawanish *et al.*, 2009). Socially bonded groups of related females (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Vidya and Sukumar, 2005; Poole and Granli, 2009; Williams *et al.*, 2015; Greco *et al.*, 2016a; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016), freedom of movement (Clubb and Mason, 2002; FAWC, 2009; Poole and Granli, 2009), and the ability to make meaningful choices are considered key elements of elephant welfare (Poole and Granli, 2009; Foerder *et al.*, 2011). Other major impactors of elephant health and welfare include having experienced trauma such as early separation from the maternal herd, experiencing the Phajaan or another breaking ritual (Garrison, 2008; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Greco *et al.*, 2016a, b; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2016), or being handled with violent dominance-based management (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, 2016; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019). Several of these key areas are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Common captive elephant health and welfare impactors

Stabling

Space is a primary issue in captive facilities, and most minimum elephant enclosure guidelines for Western facilities are 60–100 times smaller than the minimum reported wild range (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 41). Likewise, stables in Asia lack space; in Nepal many stables are barely larger than the elephant they house (see Chapters 4 and 10, this volume). Enclosure size not only affects the numbers of elephant each facility can hold but also decreases freedom of movement, choice in feeding and social activity, quality of locomotion, and mental welfare (Clubb, 2002; Veasey, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 41; Varma and Prasad, 2008; Poole and Granli, 2009). To counteract some of the

negative impacts of captivity, Varma and Prasad (2008) recommend enclosures include, at minimum, a variety of habitats for foraging, grazing, and space to escape aggressive interactions with other elephants. Enclosures should also be well ventilated, provide shaded areas, and allow for individual choice in resting locations (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005; Varma and Prasad, 2008).

Space concerns may also result in overuse of chains in captive facilities. Prolonged chaining in one place resulted in poor welfare, yet 48% of the elephants in US zoos were chained overnight (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 227–228, p. 237). Chains are regularly used throughout South-East Asia, as well, and may be excessively short – less than 1.3 metres (4 feet) – to limit an elephant's ability to dig within the shelter, limit the dropping of urine and faeces to one area, prevent elephants from approaching visitors, and discourage leaning against stable posts (see Chapters 9.2 and 10, this volume). Elephant specialists have suggested banning the use of chains within Indian facilities (Varma and Prasad, 2008, pp. 55–62). In Thailand, however, the use of chains and hobbles (even spiked hobbles, which do not allow movement without pain) were considered 'acceptable' and even actively encouraged (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 27). Spiked collars were also allowed and considered 'quite humane' as the elephant could 'choose' to stop struggling and therefore end her pain (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 34).

Water

Free-choice access to drinking water, which should be accessible all day from a dedicated on-site water supply, is necessary for good health and positive welfare (Varma and Prasad, 2008; FAWC, 2009). Likewise, at-will access to fresh water for bathing and play is important for elephants (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005; Harris *et al.*, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2015). Captive elephants' access to water will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters of this volume.

Howdah use

The use of elephants for large-scale tourist safari requires a *howdah* (riding platform). These howdahs are traditionally made of wood and may weigh up to 100 kg when unoccupied (de Vries, 2014). The recommended safe weight for elephants to carry is approximately 200 kg, meaning that an elephant carrying a wooden howdah, her mahout, and a single guest has met or exceeded her safe limit (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). In Nepal, elephants carry their mahout and up to four tourists at a time and may perform up to nine rides daily (de Vries, 2014; Szydlowski, 2022; see Chapters 4 and 7, this volume). Newer howdahs, made of lighter weight metal, are now available, and were reported for the first time in Sauraha in 2021 (Tika and Vidanta interviews, 2021; personal observations, 2021).[1]

A study by Magda *et al.* (2015, p. 3) found that 64% of elephants working in tourism practice carried active lesions, with ~50% of these located on their backs. Lesions were predominantly caused by howdah use, and extended working hours created more frequent and worsening lesions (Magda *et al.*, 2015, p. 4). The weight of the howdah did not appear to impact the incidence of lesions, but the use of rice sacks (a common practice in Nepal) as padding significantly increased their eruption (Magda *et al.*, 2015, p. 6). Taking more breaks was suggested as an option, but this practice may cause further issues from the rubbing of loosened girth straps while resting (Magda *et al.*, 2015, p. 6).

Social interaction and social bonds

Social and familial groupings are an important aspect of elephant lives and affect overall welfare (see Introduction, this volume). Wild groups spend up to 20 hours per day moving about and foraging, which requires the interaction of a multitude of muscles and offers a large amount of mental stimulation (Poole and Granli, 2009, p. 3 and 7). Herd foraging behaviours also provide opportunities for teaching calves how to navigate differing environments, as well as how to find and efficiently consume appropriate foods. These behaviours are key to future reproductive success (Kurt and Garai, 2006; Poole and Granli, 2009).

Early removal from matriarchal herds, as well as the breaking of social bonds among adults, may create lifelong issues with social skills, future

bond creation, and the development of successful coping strategies (Kurt and Garai, 2006, p. 121; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Disruption of social and familial bonds is also implicated in the development of stereotypies (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; see Chapter 10, this volume). For this reason, 'quality and quantity' social time for calves and mothers is vital, as is allowing parturition to occur with unchained adult females in attendance (Varma and Prasad, 2008, p. 58).

The AZA (2012) recommends waiting to move captive calves until they are at least 3 years of age. Removal from the family herd is very stressful and some experts believe 3 years is still too young, with some suggesting that delaying forced separation of male calves until a more natural age of dispersal (around 10–12 years of age) and leaving female calves with their mothers permanently would improve elephant welfare in captivity (Garai, 1994 in Clubb and Mason, 2002; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018).

The mental well-being of individuals is especially affected by isolation (Veasey, 2006; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016), but despite organizational recognition of the need for larger social groups (AZA, 2012; EAZA, 2020), adequate social structure in captive facilities is lacking and may be implausible due to exhibit size restrictions (Veasey, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 2008). The EAZA (2020, p. 46) recommends zoos 'maximise opportunities for every elephant to have unrestricted physical contact with other members of the herd for as many hours each day as possible', outside of those individuals who have justifiable reasons for separation. It is important that elephants who must be housed in isolation maintain olfactory, visual, and auditory contact with conspecifics to promote their sense of herd belonging (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Harris *et al.*, 2008; Varma and Prasad, 2008; AZA, 2012).

While it is recommended that bulls be housed in groups of two or more (AZA, 2012, n.p.), the difficulties associated with housing bull elephants were cited as reasons for keeping only one per Western facility (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 232). In Nepal, adult bull elephants are rarely kept in private stables for these reasons (see Chapter 7, this volume). Studies have shown that husbandry issues may be at fault for prolonged periods of musth (the hormonal surge during which males under human control

may become harder to handle) and increased aggression, so many of these difficulties may be escalated through human error (Clubb and Mason, 2002). When possible, bulls should be kept where they can be 'maintained without chains, isolation, starvation, or beating' (Varma and Prasad, 2008, pp. 55–62) and within sensory communication of conspecifics, even during musth (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Harris *et al.*, 2008). Food changes during musth traditionally include items with lower nutritional value such as banana-tree stalks, green squash, and dried grasses with salt (for taste) (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 54; see also Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kurt and Garai, 2006; DEFRA, 2012; Gairhe, 2012). These foods are thought to shorten the duration of musth, whereas high-protein foods are thought to prolong it (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 54). This diet also creates the feeling of being full quickly, which is thought to decrease musth 'symptoms'.

Enrichment

The goal of enrichment is to increase animal welfare by lowering stress and stereotypic behaviours, and while anecdotal evidence has been collected in Western zoos, there has not been a large-scale study regarding the usefulness of these enrichments in promoting positive welfare in any country (Mellen and MacPhee, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002; Greco *et al.*, 2016b). Enrichment items such as dirt piles, browse, pools, and logs are provided in zoos, to allow for the display of natural behaviours like scratching, digging, bathing, and problem-solving (Mellen and MacPhee, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002; Greco *et al.*, 2016b; EAZA, 2020). Most often, scheduled enrichments were used in US zoos; these enrichments included items which provided elephants with opportunities for self-maintenance, instead of more complex enrichment activities involving problem-solving (Greco *et al.*, 2016b, p. 12). In general, these enrichments involved adding a physical object to the exhibit, such as a toy, and not a holistic approach to overall enrichment (Mellen and MacPhee, 2001, p. 214). A holistic approach would need to consider the individual elephant's history and preferences (Mellen and MacPhee, 2001, p. 214), but of course this type of practice would make population-level studies even more difficult.

Elephants have been documented using 'inciteful problem solving' to reach food or explore, offering further opportunities for enrichment in captivity (Foerder *et al.*, 2011, p. 3). Determining the welfare value of problem-solving has been difficult but creating the opportunity for captive elephants to experience different types of enrichment appears to be important (see Mellen and MacPhee, 2001; Greco *et al.*, 2016b). As will be demonstrated in the following chapters of this volume, enrichment is not offered in the private stables of Nepal, unless provided by a non-Nepalese non-governmental organization (NGO).

Sleep

Sleep is important for all mammals, and a combination of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-REM sleep is required for good health (Tobler, 1995). Observing sleep (or inability to sleep) can offer insight into the welfare of captive elephants (Harris *et al.*, 2008), and is mentioned here owing to the lack of sleep opportunities faced by captive elephants in Nepal (see Chapter 10, this volume). In elephants, shorter bouts of standing sleep need to be combined with recumbent deeper sleep for good health (Tobler, 1995; Gonfalone and Jha, 2015). Sleep in herbivores is inversely correlated to their body mass, meaning that elephants typically sleep for only 3–4 hours per night in several cycles (Siegel, 2005; Gonfalone and Jha, 2015, p. 65 and 67). Mammals that are sleep-deprived suffer from a variety of ailments from skin lesions to a loss of focus and ability to perform survival functions (Siegel, 2005, p. 1268). REM sleep serves to reset and restore thermoregulatory systems, and regulate emotions (Siegel, 2005).

Land-dwelling mammals experience a loss of muscle tone (atonia) during REM sleep and must therefore be recumbent to safely attain REM sleep (Siegel, 2005, p. 1265; Gonfalone and Jha, 2015, p. 66). Therefore, the ability to lie down for rest is an important element of elephant welfare in captivity (Kurt and Garai, 2006; Asher *et al.*, 2015) and synchronized recumbent sleep within a social group indicates a higher level of social integration (Kurt and Garai, 2006; Evison *et al.*, 2020, p. 402). Sand, preferably in piles or mounds, is an ideal substrate which allows for recumbency (Asher *et al.*, 2015); these mounds support the process of

getting up and down (Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018). When lateral recumbency is not possible, items for leaning upon should be placed in a horizontal position to allow for the adequate rest (Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018). The presence of other herd members during periods of rest is important to welfare (Williams *et al.*, 2015, p. 416), and in facilities where multiple elephants reside, multiple mounds, piles, or rest structures are needed (Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018, p. 143). These should be placed where subordinates have choice in, and access to, equally restful areas (Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018).

Feet

According to Fowler (2001, p. 3), 'foot problems constitute the single most important ailment of captive elephants'. Elephants in any type of captivity are prone to such issues, including overgrown nails or foot pads. These issues occur in 50% of captive elephants – even those who regularly receive human-provided foot care – and should not automatically be seen as a sign of neglect (Csuti *et al.*, 2001; Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001). Elephants who are regularly chained, however, showed an increase in foot problems compared to unchained individuals (Clubb and Mason, 2002). These foot problems have been documented in as many as 80% of UK elephants, similar to numbers found in intensively managed Indian camps (Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 44).

Asian elephants naturally dig, kick, dust-bathe, and rake their feet as they forage, and a lack of opportunity to exhibit such behaviours results in poor foot health and a decrease in mental well-being (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001; Veasey, 2006; Poole and Granli, 2009; Yadav *et al.*, 2015; Miller *et al.*, 2016; Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018). Digging in soft surfaces such as mud strengthens leg and foot structures, decreases the incidence of degenerative joint disease, and leads to better foot health throughout their lives (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2016). In addition, mud serves to clean between nails and around cuticles (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001, p. 21). A lack of these substrates in captivity may result in overgrown cuticles and/or nails, cracked nails, and uneven pad growth which then require human intervention to prevent deep cracks, infection, and fluid pockets which

result in pain, abnormal gait adjustment, and potential toe deformations (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001, pp. 35–38; West, 2001; Veasey, 2006; Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2016). As elephants get older, they are more prone to such foot abnormalities (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2016), making substrate choices even more important for ageing populations. Ideal substrates are those such as sand which drain well, allow the elephant lie down, and allow standing weight to be evenly distributed across the pad surface (Veasey, 2006, p. 74). Appropriate substrate allows for wallowing, foraging, and dust-bathing, and enclosures should include posts for scratching feet and legs (AZA, 2012; DEFRA, 2012; EAZA, 2020). Creating captive habitats where foot care is performed by the elephant interacting with its environment should be the primary goal (Veasey, 2020).

Likewise, understanding foot anatomy is crucial to caring for captive elephants (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001, p. 34 and 48). Knowing how much nail to trim without exposing sensitive tissues is vital and should only be done by experienced persons. Excessive or incorrect nail or foot pad trimming can lead to toe deformation, gait change, or pain, and elephants may be distracted by pads that feel strange after trimming and end up removing too much tissue themselves by rubbing feet on surfaces (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001, p. 37). As will be seen in the following chapters of this volume, foot care in Nepal is often undertaken by inexperienced or untrained individuals.

A common and serious foot health concern in Nepal is pododermatitis, or foot rot (Shrestha and Gairhe, 2006). For this reason, the composition and cleanliness of substrate are vitally important, as is the availability of dirt for digging and the expression of normal behaviours. Stationary elephants' feet develop more wounds, and these wounds quickly become purulent and host fungal infections (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001; West, 2001; Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2016). Increased time standing in urine and faeces (which is common in the stables of Nepal, especially during the off-season) has been shown to impact these infections, as the soft, wet tissues of the feet are breeding grounds for saprophytic organisms (Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001; West, 2001; Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2016). Changes in husbandry methods and the provision of alternative substrates have been shown to positively

impact foot health (Fowler, 2001; Roocroft and Oosterhuis, 2001; West, 2001; Veasey, 2006; Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2016).

Skin

Common skin issues seen in captive elephants include parasites, sunburns, nutritional deficiencies resulting in skin changes, fungal or viral diseases, abscesses, wounds, pressure sores, and dry skin (Mikota, 2006; Shrestha and Gairhe, 2006). Some of these issues are caused by howdah use, some by improper use of tools such as ankus or sticks, and others by dry skin from a lack of sufficient bathing (Mikota, 2006). Some specialists have recommended that elephants in Asia be scrubbed for 75–90 min per day to maintain skin health, and scrubbing the base of tusks, behind the ears, and in other folds may be important for preventing parasites (Krishnamurthy, 1992; Mikota, 2006). However, interlocuters in the current study felt the captive elephants within Nepal were 'overbathed', resulting in additional skin issues. Elephants were 'forced' to lie down in the river, allowing tourists to climb upon their bodies or scrub them with rocks. Mahouts felt pressure to keep elephants 'clean' for tourists by preventing dust-bathing, digging, or lying down in the mud, and the combination of overbathing with lack of natural protection from the elements may put elephant skin at greater risk (Bames, Brown and mahout group interviews, 2019 and 2020).

Nutrition

One major issue creating tension between elephant owners in Nepal and those concerned with captive elephant welfare is that of nutrition. The diet supplied to captive elephants in Nepal is not what elephants consume in the wild nor what they are provided in captivity in other countries. Elephants in Nepal are not given adequate time to manipulate and consume fodder, nor are they offered 'natural' food of appropriate protein/carbohydrate balance (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Hatt and Clauss, 2006; Harris PC, 2020). In fact, the precise nutritional and digestive requirements of captive elephants are still largely unknown, and many

diets are based on horse, not elephant, needs (Edwards *et al.*, 2019; Koirala *et al.*, 2019).

More than 112 species of plants are eaten by wild elephants, and consumption patterns vary seasonally (Sukumar, 1990; Koirala *et al.*, 2019). During the dry season, for example, wild elephants consumed a higher ratio of food to body weight. Crude protein intake varied greatly across the seasons, with the highest intake in the monsoon season (Sukumar, 1990; Koirala *et al.*, 2019). To balance protein levels during times where plant variety is limited, elephants compensated by eater greater amounts of lower-quality food. Elephants also modified their consumption of woody plants seasonally, perhaps due to the need to balance macronutrients and minerals (Koirala *et al.*, 2019). The availability of different plant species did not seem to influence elephant feeding choices, which may indicate that there are other undiscovered nutritional requirements at work (Koirala *et al.*, 2019). This need for dietary variety and the ability to choose appropriate plants during each season may be partially to blame for ongoing health and welfare issues in captive populations. Foods need to be seasonally cycled to create proper balances of fibre, micronutrients, and protein (Hatt and Clauss, 2006; Koirala *et al.*, 2019).

In contrast to wild individuals, captive or privately owned Nepalese elephant diets are made up of 70% human-provided (provisioned) items. These elephants have little opportunity to graze, especially during the tourist season (Szydlowski, 2017; Brown, Rao, Sama, Vachan and mahout group interviews, 2017 and 2019; personal observations, 2017 and 2019). This is important when weighing the nutritional needs of these individuals, who are consistently fed unhusked rice as their main staple. According to interlocutors, rice is perceived by owners and mahouts in Nepal to be a 'high nutritional value' food (Raja, Rao, Saroj, Vidanta and Vachan interviews, 2019). Other interlocutors stated that it was used simply to make elephants feel full and for its ease of storage over long periods of time (Bames, Brown, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019).

Unhusked rice, along with other agricultural products (such as chickpeas) consumed by elephants in Nepal, is not historically found in the diet of wild elephants. Of course, due to the expansion of human-

dominated landscapes, crop-grazing by wild elephants is becoming more and more common, causing some academics to view crop-raiding as an evolution of wild elephants' 'optimal foraging strategy' (Sukumar, 1989).

This use of rice as a staple may be an example of a social fact (Durkheim, 1982) taking hold; interlocutors in the current study often quoted so-called 'traditional' methods of feeding but lacked any explanation of how rice became common fodder. Likewise, owners and mahouts were unable to explain the belief that provisioned items fulfilled the basic dietary requirements of elephants (Rao and Taraswin interviews, 2019). Rice is used in small amounts in countries such as Sumatra and Thailand, but only as a supplement to standard elephant diets (Stremme *et al.*, 2007). The Thai *Elephant Care Manual for Mahouts and Camp Managers* suggests that rice is offered only to underweight elephants as a high-carbohydrate supplement but recommends no more than 5 kg be given at one time lest digestive issues occur (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 23).

Veterinary care

Kharel (2002, n.p.), former director of the Nepalese Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) (and long-time elephant researcher), states that although the Department of Animal Health is quite extensive, elephant veterinary care is still a little-studied field with few willing practitioners. With only a single DNPWC veterinary officer and technician, care at the elephant camps and breeding centres remains 'poor' (Kharel, 2002). The lack of funding for drugs and equipment which are needed to properly care for captive elephants creates additional problems (Kharel, 2002).

For example, vaginal tearing, dystocia, and agalactia strike captive female elephants with regularity, and 20% of elephants carry parasitic worms (Gairhe, 2012; Mandal and Khadka, 2013). Constipation due to inappropriate fibre content of diets and sand-eating is common in captive elephants and is often treated through the rectal administration of locally available items such as soap and water or mineral oil (Shrestha and Gairhe, 2006).

Other issues arise from the lack of walls on elephant stables, which allow for regular interactions between domestic cattle and elephants (Kharel, 2002). Sharing space is dangerous due to the threat of disease transmission from livestock to elephants (Kharel, 2002; Szydlowski, 2022). A lack of properly stored fodder, a lack of space to store grass and straw, and a lack of planning and planting to ensure food during lean times are other ongoing issues for elephant caregivers (Kharel, 2002). Training for mahouts and management is lacking, as are ongoing research studies or monitoring of elephants' impacts on the national parks and their buffer zones (Kharel, 2002).

A 2013 study of 66 captive elephants residing in the area surrounding Chitwan National Park (CNP) found tail issues (including chopped tails from those seeking to make good-luck bracelets from tail hair), joint problems, tuberculosis (TB), tusk damage or abnormal growth, elephant endotheliotropic herpesviruses (EEHVs), and anthrax in the captive population (Mandal and Khadka, 2013, pp. 37–38). In fact, during the period between 2004 and 2009, ten individuals – 15% of the study group – died from broken legs, ligament rupture, dystocia, and disease (Mandal and Khadka, 2013, p. 38). In addition, older camp elephants in Nepal are susceptible to respiratory issues, especially during the colder months (Shrestha and Gairhe, 2006). Nepalese stable structures are inadequate to keep out the cold, particularly in the Bardia area, where winter temperatures can drop to dangerous levels (Varma and Ganguly, 2011). The lack of any kind of elephant care manual, the status of mahouts as a lower-caste group, and a high turnover rate in mahouts may be partially to blame for a lack of appropriate elephant treatment (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020; see following chapters in this volume).

Measuring Welfare

The above sections are an introduction to the types of health and welfare impactors that are important to consider in captive facilities. But how can we quantify whether these considerations result in good health and positive welfare? Overall good health can be measured in a variety of

ways, including appropriate body condition, bloodwork and faecal studies which fall within normal parameters, normal appetite, normal sleep, interest in one's environment, and a lack of obvious disease processes (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Fowler, 2006; Brown *et al.*, 2020). Poor welfare may be observed through body mass loss, ulcers, lowered reproductive rates,[2] or early death, and some of these measures may not be visible except upon necropsy (Veasey, 2006, p. 65). The development of structured, quantifiable measurements is needed to properly assess the welfare of elephants in captivity, and these measurements do not currently exist in any widely accepted form (Greco *et al.*, 2016a, b; Veasey, 2017; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020b). To fill in the gaps, several facilities use a variety of less-invasive welfare measurements to keep tabs on their herds.

Available measurement tools

Hormonal studies

Welfare can be assessed through various physical or health-related measurements (Veasey, 2017, pp. 414–415). These measurements include stress-related hormones or changes in breathing or heart rate, but one must consider that these are the same measurements which may be affected by exertion, excitement, or the stress of collecting samples (Veasey, 2006, p. 65). One proposed method for quantifying welfare is testing for elevated levels of adrenal hormones. These hormones, known as faecal glucocorticoid metabolites or FGM (aka fGCM), have been used as an indicator of stress in captive elephants (Norkaew *et al.*, 2018; Seltman *et al.*, 2020). Tests of FGM levels in UK zoo elephants in 'regular conditions' showed levels similar to those of an Asian elephant during a stressful relocation process, indicating that captive elephants chronically experience stress (Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 46). In another study, FGM levels were higher on days zoo elephants were exposed to humans, indicating that the presence of *any* humans may be stressful (Millspaugh *et al.*, 2007, p. 1258). A recent FGM study in Thailand showed that elephants allowed to spend their nights in the forest (i.e. more natural settings)

instead of inside the open areas of camp showed lower levels of FGM (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019, p. 10). To the surprise of the researchers, however, studies of captive elephants in Thailand showed *higher* concentrations of the hormones in elephants housed in camps that did not allow riding or shows when compared to those that offered these tourist interactions (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019, p. 7). The same study found that elephants with wounds showed higher levels of these hormones overall, but lower levels when suffering moderate or severe foot problems (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019, p. 12). Another study found that captive bull elephants in Thailand showed higher concentrations of FGM, possibly due to harsher management techniques (Norkaew *et al.*, 2019). Due to the lack of data on wild elephants, these higher levels in males may simply be normal hormonal functioning (Millspaugh and Washburn, 2004; Norkaew *et al.*, 2019).

This FGM method has been used to compare the effects of stress on repetitive behaviour (stereotypies, see 'Behaviours' section below). In one study, 54% of elephants performed stereotypies, but their FGM levels measured similarly to those of wild elephants (Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 46). In another, 25% of the elephants were reported to perform stereotypies, but unexpectedly these elephants were found to have lower levels of FGM (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019, p. 8). The inconsistent results of this test thus far may be due to collection techniques, sample storage methods, and even biological factors such as normal seasonal hormone fluctuations (Millspaugh and Washburn, 2004; Mumby *et al.*, 2015; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019; Norkaew *et al.*, 2019). Other studies showed that FGM measurements varied greatly without obvious environmental factor changes, or correlation with intensity of stereotypies, making them suspect as wide-scale tools for stress measures (Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 38, 46 and 63). These tests should therefore only be used in combination with behavioural and other welfare measures (Harris *et al.*, 2008; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019).

Wide-scale FGM studies have not been undertaken in Nepal for a variety of reasons. While the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) has a microbiology lab, it often lacks training in the use of the equipment (Bames, Tika and Vidanta interviews, 2019 and 2020; personal observations, 2017–2020). Likewise, permits for studies within

the national parks (i.e. on wild elephants or governmentally owned individuals) are difficult to obtain (Tribish and NTNC staff interviews, 2017 and 2019).

Behaviour

Behaviour can be used as a welfare measurement and is presumably easier to observe in captive elephants residing in a variety of captive environments (see Chapter 10, this volume, for a discussion of behavioural measures and their applicability to the current study). Observing preferences, such as the willingness to give up a comfort in order to engage in a preferred behaviour, offers further insight into what an individual needs for mental well-being (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Veasey, 2006). Veasey, 2020, p. 4) is testing a new welfare measurement tool using 12 criteria to determine the 'psychological significance of behaviours and cognitive processes'. These criteria are being evaluated by professionals and scientists in order to provide insight into what might constitute the most important welfare factors for a species. For Asian elephants, behaviours which maintain physical health were some of the most important 'welfare priorities', followed by browsing, drinking, and walking – behaviours which often take place in social groupings of wild elephants (Veasey, 2020, pp. 8–10). While these are physical needs, the psychological exercise and enjoyment of these behaviours has a direct impact on welfare. This is still an experimental system, and discrepancies between rankings of captive elephant behaviour and wild elephants were found which likely reflect the differing opportunities experienced by each group (Veasey, 2020).

Behavioural measurements should also include observations of what individuals actively avoid, as well as what they seek out to the detriment of other needs (Mason and Veasey, 2010a, p. 240). Avoidance of new stimuli (neophobia) or a lack of curiosity about new situations may indicate stress or anxiety (Mason and Veasey, 2010a; EAZA, 2020). Elephants faced with situations in which they are unsure how to respond may turn to displacement behaviours such as repeated twisting back and forth of their trunk tip, foot-swinging, or touching their face or temporal gland area (Mason and Veasey, 2010a, p. 241). These behaviours often

increase when the individual is faced with conflicting possibilities (Mason and Veasey, 2010a, p. 241). In addition, behaviours such as unpredictability, charging at caregivers, startling, hiding, self-injuring, or distress calls may be seen in elephants experiencing trauma or stress (Mason and Veasey, 2010a, p. 242; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018, p. 120).

Potentially related to these displacement behaviours are stereotypies. Stereotypies, repetitive and seemingly unnecessary motions, have long been used as an indicator of negative welfare (Veasey, 2006; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; see Chapter 10, this volume). These behaviours may include head-bobbing, trunk-tossing, and weaving along with front and back repeated steps, and are reported in 50% of Asian elephants and 25% of African elephants in UK zoos (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Harris *et al.*, 2008). Recent studies have confirmed stereotypies within timber, temple, and privately owned elephants in India (Harris *et al.*, 2008; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016). Whether stereotypies are troubling behavioural tics, or an expression of exaggerated normal behaviour, depends upon which expert is consulted. Some believe that expressing these behaviours may simply offer an outlet for the reduction of stress (Veasey, 2017, p. 414), while others plainly state that these behaviours are due to environments which are (or have been in the past) 'unsuited for their species-specific needs' (Harris *et al.*, 2008, p. 42). Some studies have noted that head-bobbing has been documented in wild elephants at rest, but others state this behaviour is unseen in the wild (McKay, 1973; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017). Like hormonal measures, studies suggest that these behaviours may be simply a response to excitement or stress (Veasey, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 2008). Perhaps these behaviours provide a sense of control over one's environment and may be a result of events in the elephant's complex history, such as early removal from family groups (Veasey, 2006; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016). There are reported correlations between restrictive enclosures or chaining and the incidences of stereotypies, as well as stereotypies caused by social problems in young orphans (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016). Other stressors, such as an environment devoid of opportunities to problem-solve, may be to blame and increasing the agency of the animal by offering opportunities to make decisions and face challenges may decrease stress, increase welfare, and reduce stereotypies (Widman *et al.*, 1992; Carlstead and

Shepherdson, 2000; Meehan and Mench, 2006). Elephants who exhibit stereotypic behaviour in one place often carry this behaviour to a new facility (Veasey, 2006, p. 68), but these behaviours may decrease in frequency with more freedom of movement or through the addition of enrichment activities (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 223). In one study, data on individuals proved statistically accurate, but institution-wide data did not serve to predict stereotypies (Greco *et al.*, 2016a, p. 25). Social experiences and social environment had the greatest impact on these behaviours, with positive social experiences lowering rates of stereotypies, while negative social experiences, such as transfer to a new facility, caused an increase in stereotypical behaviour (Greco *et al.*, 2016a; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016).

A contrasting study found no evidence that elephants who walked less had more stereotypic behaviours and no evidence that less walking impacted foot issues or musculoskeletal health, reporting that elephants who walked more were no more likely to have ideal body condition scores, better health, or increased welfare (Holdgate *et al.*, 2016, p. 12). Feeding conditions were the driving force for walking distances, so more research is needed on how opportunities to walk affect overall health and welfare (Holdgate *et al.*, 2016, p. 10).

Other behavioural indicators of low welfare might include changes in vocalization, aggression, shyness, a decrease in grooming and foraging, and even self-mutilation (Veasey, 2006, p. 68). Veasey warns that even these seemingly obvious behaviours should be considered within the context of the elephant's current situation (Veasey, 2006, p. 67). Aggression towards other elephants could be caused by frustration, stress, or pain, enclosure size, or a myriad of other conditions, and appears to be more common in zoo elephants than in wild female herds (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 231). Aggression towards humans is a common occurrence in zoo elephants, and whether this aggression is due to dominance training, restraint methods, or hormonal changes remains to be seen (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 232).

Lifespan and reproduction

The early mortality rates of captive elephants should also be considered when measuring welfare (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Clubb *et al.*, 2008). Zoo-born elephants had a shorter life expectancy than wild-born individuals, and elephants kept in smaller facilities – such as zoos – lived only half as long as elephants living in protected areas of range states (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Clubb *et al.*, 2008). Zoo elephants also faced higher rates of infant mortality and stillbirth, and these rates have not improved over time (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Clubb *et al.*, 2008). In addition, wild-caught individuals faced earlier mortality rates than captive-born elephants (Lahdenperä *et al.*, 2018, p. 7).

Furthermore, captive Asian females reproduce around ten times slower than wild females, and only around 20% of the captive population has bred at all (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003). This in itself is not an issue – the captive population is considered unlikely to help with population rebuilding around the world – but it is a sign of impacted welfare (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 211–214; Sukumar, 2003; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016). Other signs of decreased welfare such as stress, low male fertility, and obesity may play a part in the low reproductive rates of these captive elephants (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 211–214). While reproduction rates are low in all elephants held in captivity, those in Western zoos are especially problematic when coupled with an extremely high rate of stillbirth (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Clubb *et al.*, 2008).

Infrared thermography

Infrared thermography (IRT) has been suggested as a non-invasive way to study animal welfare (Stewart *et al.*, 2005, p. 321). By measuring electromagnetic radiation to determine heat gain and loss, IRT can be used to measure stress responses and signs of infection (Stewart *et al.*, 2005, p. 322). Because it typically does not require restraint, it may prove to be a valuable tool in measuring elephant welfare. However, IRT is affected by normal circadian rhythms, feeding schedules, recumbency, and weather, making it of questionable use in many field situations (Stewart *et al.*, 2005, p. 324; Nääs *et al.*, 2020). IRT may prove useful in

situations where other equipment or large numbers of personnel are unavailable, such as Nepal.

Newer welfare metrics

Carlstead *et al.* (2013) undertook a large-scale study of North American zoos using an epidemiological format – meaning that it involves the study of patterns in populations, including the 'prevalence of hazards and the risk factors associated with their occurrence' (p. 321). Using 291 elephants in 72 zoos, they collected physical evidence such as photos and videos, blood tests, veterinary examination results spanning 10 years, and biographical and historical data on individuals (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013, p. 330). These results were combined with data on enclosure specifics, training procedures, and management programmes, as well as ratings from zookeepers based on holistic evaluations of welfare (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013, p. 330). Using these data, they developed seven criteria they felt were meaningful to elephant care (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013, p. 328). These criteria included 'feeding and avoiding obesity', 'freedom of movement to seek physical comfort', 'optimal health', 'species-appropriate social behaviours', good human–elephant relationships', 'avoidance of negative emotions' such as fear or apathy, and the 'experience of positive emotions' such as security or contentment (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013, p. 329). Combining information from the above sources will likely help paint a more complete picture of the needs of captive elephants (Miller *et al.*, 2015; Tewari, 2016).

A Sauraha-specific study: 'An elephant is not a machine' (de Vries, 2014, p. 1)

A 2014 survey of the elephant stables in Sauraha found that 82% of captive elephants were living in 'unsuitable conditions' (de Vries, 2014, p. 2). The welfare of these elephants appeared to be directly connected to the welfare of their mahouts (de Vries, 2014), which is similar to findings in other parts of Asia (Varma, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2015, p. 2; also, GoN, 2015; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a). Mahouts who were 'well taken care of'

had elephants who scored higher on health assessment (de Vries, 2014, p. 2). De Vries (2014, p. 2) found a variety of concerns: 24% of the elephants had wounds, and one suffered from a spinal injury. Four elephants were working while blind, six of the elephants were housed alone, and most were chained for multiple hours daily (de Vries, 2014, p. 23). Elephants had no protection from adverse weather conditions, no ability to bathe in dust or water, and stood on packed dirt floors with no drainage (de Vries, 2014, p. 23). Dung from these elephants was piled in the hattisar or burned (de Vries, 2014, p. 23). The metal stable roofs lacked any insulation, leaving the elephants exposed to extreme temperatures (de Vries, 2014, p. 23). Other issues such as a lack of fresh food, appropriate supplements, and repeated beatings were noted (de Vries, 2014, p. 25). Some mahouts stated that a lack of nutrition was helpful in controlling elephants, as a weak elephant may follow commands more quickly (de Vries, 2014, p. 32). Elephants undergoing treatment for TB were given two months of the 10 month treatment off, then returned, and tourists were allowed to interact with a variety of sick elephants (de Vries, 2014, p. 17).

While de Vries's study was well designed and reflects many of the same issues seen in my four trips to Nepal, it must be noted that it is not peer-reviewed and is self-published. As one of the co-founders of both Animal Nepal and the Animal Welfare Network in Nepal, de Vries is a respected advocate for animals and works with members of the Jane Goodall Institute-Nepal. In addition, other studies of stables in Nepal found the same issues with heat stress in elephants due to a number of factors described in the de Vries study. Yadav *et al.* (2015) compared housing at the government breeding centre, the NTNC, and hattisars in Sauraha. These stables all had metal roofs which do not dissipate heat, and elephants who are chained cannot move to more comfortable areas, resulting in heat stress (Yadav *et al.*, 2015, p. 297). Elephants who were housed outside the stable also struggled, demonstrating heat stress indicators such as ear-flapping and attempted dust-bathing, as they were chained in one place and could not move off into the shade as needed (Yadav *et al.*, 2015, p. 297). Yadav *et al.* (2015, p. 297) found that the NTNC stables were more appropriate enclosures, due to their location in a tree-covered area.

Conclusions

Despite the lack of standardized welfare measurements, the above studies have created at least an outline for what is necessary for positive elephant welfare. Opportunities for social engagement are an extremely high priority, along with exercise, a varied diet, and freedom to spend long hours preparing and consuming food. Appropriate, clean substrate is vital to foot and joint health and the expression of natural behaviours. The ability to lie down for rest, protection from the elements, and free choice of food and water *ad libitum* are important to overall health. Freedom of movement and the ability to make choices are needed for positive mental health. Combined with the five freedoms of animal welfare, these data will be used to discuss the health and welfare of the captive elephants around CNP. It is important to note that these key areas are not limited to research done in more developed countries but represent a high degree of consensus from a wide variety of nations and researchers. Further information on the needs of elephants and the practices surrounding their care throughout Asia can be found in the appendices of this volume.

It appears that range state governments, as well as those that lack Asian elephants in the wild but hold individuals in collections, are concerned about captive elephant care. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are aware that a lack of regulation and enforcement has had massive impacts on the health and welfare of captive individuals. India, Thailand, members of the European Union, the USA, and other global entities have attempted to implement health and welfare standards for elephants, but enforcing any standards has failed in many range states. The complexity involved in providing appropriate care for elephants in captivity is daunting, and often results in facilities continuing to use outdated or so-called 'traditional' methods. It is important that captive elephant facilities, especially those in range states, are provided with access to up-to-date information regarding husbandry and nutrition, and the necessary support to provide positive health and welfare.

What follows next is an introduction to the key human players and organizations which play a large part in the complex elephant-focused melodrama of Sauraha, Nepal, to begin to answer the overarching research question of this volume. Can the health and welfare of captive elephants and their caregivers be improved through an examination of the similarities and differences in ethical approaches used by elephant owners and NGOs active in Sauraha, Nepal? The next chapter (Chapter 6) introduces the government stables and examines the ways in which elephants are employed in Nepal.

Notes

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[2] Although this measure is under debate in wild situations. See Asian Elephant Range State Meeting final report (AERSM, 2017).

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6 Elephants Working in Conservation Practice

© Michelle Szydlowski 2024. *Elephant Tourism in Nepal* (M. Szydlowski)
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Abstract

The primary groups one needs to discuss with regard to conservation in Nepal are the government and the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). The original founders of the national parks system, the government (whether the monarchy or the current federalist republic) has typically held ultimate control over conservation efforts in Nepal. The government of Nepal has tasked the conservation of care of wildlife and landscapes to the NTNC, an autonomous not-for-profit organization focused on nature conservation.

Both the NTNC and the government also own and use elephants in their daily practices. This chapter includes a look at these stables and the health and welfare of their occupants. The chapter will begin to examine the ways in which these organizations interact with one another, the wider community, and with captive elephants. This discussion will continue throughout the following chapters.

There are numerous non-governmental agencies active in the Sauraha area which purport to work towards elephant conservation, social change, and equity. These non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have the opportunity to gather data from and convene a workforce of large groups of researchers, volunteers, and communities. But do these organizations share information and resources? Do they support the work of other organizations who may have the same goals? Or do they get in each other's way? Are the motivations of each group so different that they perceive a need to work separately from others who profess to share a common goal? Is there a way to frame conservation, ethics, and

care in a way which will lead to more successful outcomes (although, what constitutes a successful outcome may vary among individuals) by finding a common language of elephant care? These questions will be considered through the lens of both interlocutors and relevant literature throughout the following chapters.

Through a qualitative analysis (see Chapter 2, this volume) of each organization's promotional material, along with narrative analysis of information gathered from face-to-face interviews along with participant observations, the following chapters explore the differing ways in which each group perceives itself as doing what is 'right' for the animals, and its methods of determining what its best 'care' practices entail. As will be revealed, the perception of each group's care and treatment of non-human animals, especially 'privately owned' endangered species, varies drastically depending on the cultural background, educational history, and embodied knowledge of its members.

How various organizations fulfil their stated aims and demonstrate their best practices in elephant care will be examined using both organizational and individual elephant biographies in the following sections. Beginning with an examination of the quasi-governmental National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), we can begin to untangle the complex story of captive elephants and NGOs in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal and the National Trust for Nature Conservation

Thanks to relationships built on early trips to Nepal, my initial contact during the current study was with the NTNC and the elephants who reside at their two hattisars (elephant stables). The first, the NTNC hattisar, houses four to five elephants at any given time. These elephants serve as conveyance for researchers and special guests of the NTNC. The second hattisar is the government-owned and NTNC-managed Elephant Breeding Centre. This centre is a major tourist attraction and serves as the only location tourists can encounter newborn elephant calves. These two herds occasionally intersect, as NTNC females of breeding age are

sent to be inseminated at the breeding centre. Before describing these hattisars and the unique situation of the captive individuals residing at each, a brief history is necessary. This history must begin with notes on the government of Nepal and how the NTNC came to be in charge of the wildlife (and the captive elephants) of Nepal.

As seen in Chapter 1 (this volume), the original founders of the national parks system, the Nepalese government – whether the monarchy or the current federalist republic – has typically held ultimate control over conservation efforts in Nepal. Part of the governmental support of protected areas, and much of the reduction in poaching activities on protected lands, comes through the posting of Nepalese Army platoons at bases within the national forests, and the deployment of army anti-poaching patrols (GoN, 2015a; Nepal Army, 2019). These patrols are undertaken on foot, motorcycle, and elephant back.

While the government of Nepal has been historically unstable (Brown, 1996; Whelpton, 2005), a platform focused on conservation has been a mainstay of many, if not all, modern regimes. Currently, it is the governmental Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MFSC) and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) which oversee conservation efforts and biodiversity in Nepal. Wording in its 1973 National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act allows the government to 'entrust the management of any conservation area' to any outside conservation interests simply by posting a notification in a Nepalese newspaper (GoN, 1973, p. 1). Currently, the implementation and oversight of the primary ecological maintenance and conservation activities fall to the NTNC (NTNC, 2019b).

The NTNC was first established in 1982 as an 'autonomous not-for-profit' organization focused on nature conservation, and currently manages projects focusing on biodiversity preservation, cultural heritage protection, and ecotourism (NTNC, n.d.; Pokharal interviews, 2019).[1] The NTNC's overarching mission, according to its website, is to link nature conservation with ethical community development, while supporting alternative methods of income production (NTNC, n.d.; NTNC, 2019a, p. 61). It reports impacting over 80,000 local communities in this manner (NTNC, 2019a, p. 61). The NTNC is also

responsible for wildlife rescue, census and translocation, community and professional education programmes, reforestation efforts, and wildlife veterinary care (NTNC, 2019b). In addition, the NTNC functions as the primary manager for about 33% of Nepal's protected areas, including national parks and their buffer zones. In the remaining protected areas, the NTNC is involved with various stakeholders in research, anti-poaching, and capacity-building (NTNC, 2019a).

While described by non-Nepalese informants as an NGO, many Nepalese employees and locals refer to this organization as a 'quasi-governmental' entity, due to its close connection to, and oversight by, the government (Naresh, Paudel and Phuyal interviews, 2019). One NTNC employee described the organization as a 'government NGO' (Rao interview, 2019). Nepalese informants were asked to explain the differing responsibilities of these groups, and only a handful could identify where one ended and the other began (Gwala, Naresh, Paudel and Zed interviews, 2019). In fact, many thought that the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the NTNC were one entity, or that the NTNC was simply a branch of government. According to government employees, the easiest explanation is to consider the government the owner of all flora and fauna, and the NTNC the manager employed by the government (Gairhe and Tika interviews, 2019). One employee explains that while the NTNC can offer 'informal' suggestions on animal or environmental issues to the government, the government is the 'more powerful' party (Phuyal interview, 2019). 'Phuyal' explains that the role of the NTNC is 'to assist with resources and monitoring, knowledge' (Phuyal interview, 2019). Another interlocutor described the relationship in terms of wildlife care: the government might send its vet to check on an injured animal, but the vet would take an NTNC employee for specialty technical support and a WWF employee to ensure financial support (Phuyal interview, 2019).

The NTNC is not alone as it attempts to practise conservation, having numerous international entities offering research and project support. These entities include the Zoological Society of London, Chester Zoo, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Smithsonian, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the joint USAID/WWF Hariyo Ban programme (NTNC, 2019a; 2019b,

n.p.). One NTNC conservation officer explains that there is a pressing need for these collaborations, as larger organizations 'can have high impact [*sic*]' on conservation (Phuyal interview, 2019). He is thankful for the role of the Smithsonian in training the NTNC as 'technical experts' and wants observers to understand that without the Smithsonian's guidance, there would be no NTNC (Phuyal interview, 2019).

The involvement of the Nepalese government with NGOs and foreign governments in the formation and continuing support of Chitwan National Park (CNP) needs to be considered through the lens of neoliberalism. As discussed in previous chapters of this volume, NGOs are often associated with conservation movements and accompany participatory development efforts, such as Nepal's goal of linking conservation to poverty reduction (World Bank, 1998; Mishra, 2008). Nepal's approach has historically created conflict between park management and local communities, and this type of park management has denied local people access to forest provisioning (Mehta and Heinen, 2001; Campbell, 2007, p. 83; Plehwe, 2007). Nepal continues to work on community-based conservation efforts, but often under the influence of and financing by foreign aid organizations (GoN, 2015a; NTNC, 2020).

In the case of the government-owned CNP, entities from the Global North, such as USAID and the US-based Smithsonian Institute, continue to have a say in its management and research today (Phuyal interview, 2019). The United States government sends up to US$146 million in aid to Nepal yearly, with up to US$12 million aimed at environmental protection (USAID and DOS, 2023). USAID and the USFWS fund wetland management, human–elephant conflict mitigation training, technician training, and rhino and tiger habitat protection, among other projects (NTNC, 2020, pp. 4–11).

The NTNC is the recipient of a large amount of this conservation-aimed funding, but interlocutors in the current study expressed concern with how this money is being spent (Gwala, Minsky and Thomas interviews, 2019). While there was little doubt that assistance with natural resource management has positively impacted rhino and tiger populations (USAID, 2020), other expenditures on items such as laboratory and radiography equipment – which sits idle thanks to a lack

of staff training on its use – has resulted in non-Nepalese informants reaching out to the US government demanding that they no longer supply funding to the NTNC (Dora, Minsky, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019 and 2020).

One Nepalese interlocutor expressed concern about the USAID Hariyo Ban programme's far-reaching initiatives in Nepal (aimed at biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation) (WWF-Nepal, 2017). He feels that 'USAID initiatives have fostered corruption in the country' and refers to Hariyo Ban as 'one of the most corrupt programmes' (Gwala interviews, 2020). These feelings are not atypical. In the neoliberal culture of NGOs, financial benefits from programmes like Hariyo Ban are often inequitably distributed and power used to promote the interests of local elites (Kellert *et al.*, 2000; Schuller, 2009). This inequitable distribution of funds is also reflected in the distribution of profits from entry tickets purchased by tourists riding elephants, with everyone from elephant owners to nature guides expressing concern that funds are not benefiting local families (Puri, 2019; Raja, Shor and Vachan interviews, 2019). Non-Nepalese interlocutors expressed concern that the USA is funding, even inadvertently, the captivity and use of an endangered species for profit (Crane, Minsky, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019). These captive endangered elephants, and how they fit into conservation efforts, will be discussed in the following section.

The Biodiversity Conservation Centre and the NTNC hattisar

The area which encompasses the NTNC offices in Sauraha and the surrounding open space is known as the Biodiversity Conservation Centre (BCC) (Sainsbury, 2015, n.p.). NTNC staff members described this centre as a 'learning laboratory' (Phuyal interviews, 2019), and it is a vital field site for researchers from universities around the world as well as local scientists (Sainsbury, 2015, n.p.; NTNC, 2019a; b). This research is undertaken with the help of captive elephants, and just beyond the BCC courtyard lies the elephant hattisar. While this hattisar is not technically open to the public, there are no perimeter fences (or warning signs), and tourists are often seen wandering through to look at the

elephants housed within. Staff largely accept the practice, as long as tourists listen to mahouts and avoid touching elephants (Sama and Pokharel interviews, 2019; personal observations, 2017 and 2019). During the current study, the management of the NTNC elephants was in flux. The long-term Subba (stable supervisor) had recently been diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB) and reassigned to watching the visitor gate, leaving the running of the stable undefined (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019). The NTNC-Chitwan project director stated that he, also, had no idea who was currently in charge of elephant management (Rao interviews, 2019). The above-mentioned issues are representative of ongoing problems which have arisen from the lack of management manuals and a general lack of oversight throughout Sauraha's stables. Such issues have resulted in inconsistent treatment of elephants and mahouts, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

For decades, NTNC-owned elephants were used for tourist safari, but were transitioned exclusively for researchers and officials needing to traverse the national park, as well as for VIP guests (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019; personal and participant observations, 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2019). According to staff members, these VIP guests include visiting family, dignitaries, researchers, conservation groups, and any donors to the NTNC. These rides are offered to anyone else connected in any way to the NTNC or who is, as Rao described, 'very interested' in riding (Rao interviews, 2019; personal observations, 2017 and 2019). Individuals referring to themselves as conservationists, and those representing conservation organizations, are offered rides on these NTNC elephants, for a slightly higher price than rides on privately owned elephants. Some conservation-based group members happily accept, seeing no conflict of interest in riding one elephant while working to conserve another (Szydlowski, 2017). During fieldwork for this book, I was offered rides as a 'special guest' even as I discussed ending elephant safari with NTNC management. Senior staffers were flummoxed as to why I refused such an honour. While I tried to explain my personal position regarding riding elephants for fun, not research, staffers felt that riding was part of the 'Nepal' experience and should thus be enjoyed. These offers were polite and generous, but as I explained to staff, counter to my goals. Instead, I spent a great deal of time with the mahouts and

elephants at this stable and experienced their connection along with their shared work. These elephants were my initial view into animal labour in Nepal and will serve as focal points for a discussion of work, care, ethics, and perceived violence.

Hattisar co-workers

One researcher described the multispecies occupants of the NTNC hattisar as 'co-workers' (Gragg, 2018). Like in most work situations, the hattisar's employees, in this case both human and elephant, are interdependent (Coulter, 2016, p. 1; Gragg, 2018), but the distribution of work is not always equitable or peaceful. Elephants and mahouts have a variety of duties, the most important of which is to provide quiet, fossil-fuel free transport for guests interested in visiting the forest (Rao, Larina, Phuyal and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Elephant-back incursions allow these guests to get closer to wildlife than a noisy jeep would allow (Rao, Larina, Phuyal and Vidanta interviews, 2019). In addition, these safaris provide income which is then, according to the NTNC, reinvested into the BCC to assist with injured wildlife rehabilitation and the conservation of wild elephants (NTNC, 2015, p. 51).

These elephant–human co-workers provide transport and tracking of wildlife for translocation, animal census, and any other research needs. In return, the elephants are covered by the Nepalese Civil Service Act, which requires that each receives a standardized amount of food and water, along with a staff of three drivers (Kharel, 2002, n.p.). These elephants and their mahouts are involved in what Kendra Coulter (2016, p. 31) might call 'body work'. Mahout bodies are instrumental not only to lifting heavy howdahs and placing them on or off elephant backs, but also in the backbreaking daily tasks of cutting and collecting grass to feed their charges, cleaning stables, and preparing *kuchis* (grass bundles filled with rice, salt, and molasses) (see Chapter 5, this volume).

Elephant body work requires the carrying, for up to 12 hours per day, of heavy howdahs which may contain four tourists or researchers along with a mahout. These elephants may spend long days wandering in search of wildlife for census, study, or simply for the pleasure of tourists. Like other working animals, these elephants are forced to control their

'instincts and feelings' while on duty, such as browsing, scratching against trees while walking, or interacting with conspecifics, thus performing emotional work as well (Coulter, 2016, p. 73 and 76; see Chapter 5, this volume). Mahouts also face emotional work, initially through the ritual forging of a bond with their elephant (see Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Locke, 2011b, p. 37) and later by facing caste-related prejudice along with accusations of violence towards their charges (Hart and Sundar, 2000; Varma, 2008; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020; Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014).

According to Coulter (2016, p. 1), shared workplaces can be 'where the most widespread and extreme examples of violence against animals occur', and the hattisars of Nepal are no exception. Both NGO-owned and privately owned hattisars inherently contain potential for animal exploitation (Coulter, 2016). But like other industries, they are also sites of compassion, care, and love (Coulter, 2016; Raja, Rao, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Therefore, the work of elephants must be examined through both their suffering and the care they receive (Coulter, 2016). This work should also be viewed through a lens of individual preferences and needs, as, like humans', animals' emotions and desires exist on a spectrum (Coulter, 2016). Participants in an earlier study described the relationships between elephants and elephant drivers at the NTNC hattisar as highly dependent upon the individual personalities of each (Szydlowski, 2017). While some reported witnessing mahouts 'yelling', 'beating', and 'smacking' elephants, others reported 'quiet' and 'amazing' shared experiences (Szydlowski, 2017).

Elephant–human relationships, and the words used to describe them, are highly dependent upon the situation in which they are observed and who is observing. Many times, the intensity of dominance exhibited by these mahouts was reduced when non-Nepalese – in this case tourists on elephant-backed safari – were present (personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019; see also Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020b). According to Gragg, the NTNC mahouts were much less 'violent' towards elephants than mahouts employed by private facilities (Gragg PC, 2020). Gragg feels that the amount of outside 'influence' in the form of financial support and the great deal of observation by outsiders created an 'understanding of what westerners expect' among the NTNC mahouts,

which results in less aggressive behaviour towards these elephants (Gragg PC, 2020). Gautam and Khatiwada (2011) described similar findings in their study undertaken at the Elephant Breeding Centre, at least while mahouts and elephants were in view of the public (see below). Perhaps this change in behaviour is akin to Foucault's (2008, p. 4 and 10) idea of 'disciplinary power', wherein actions can be controlled via surveillance.

In addition, Gragg feels that the NTNC offers significantly more infrastructure support to its mahouts than do private stables (i.e. in the form of elevated, wooden housing, an outdoor kitchen, and a break/tack room), resulting in less need for power-based struggles between human and elephant (Gragg PC, 2020). The stable maintains the specific chain of command mentioned in previous sections, which is no longer found in other stables due to the massive turnover in mahout staff (see Locke, 2011b). This style of management relies upon the retention of experienced mahouts, and many of the current drivers have been employed at the facility since before my first visit in 2012. Elephant handlers have large impacts on the welfare states of their charges, and therefore consistency in care and mahout retention are important to positive keeper–elephant bonds and positive elephant welfare (Desai, 2008, pp. 71–72; Carlstead *et al.*, 2019). Carlstead *et al.* (2019) found that elephant keepers in zoos who described having strong bonds with elephant individuals or positive relationships with their herd had higher job satisfaction, resulting in greater retention. Zoo elephants with strong keeper bonds demonstrated less fear and stress, indicating that caregiver–elephant bonds are mutually beneficial (Carlstead *et al.*, 2019, p. 110).

During participant observations, it appeared to me that NTNC-employed mahouts functioned more as the 'enclaved community' Locke (2011b) described as 'spatially separated and socially segregated' from the larger community (p. 35). This group gathered in their communal kitchen, where they took turns brewing tea to be passed around. They prepared and ate meals together and gathered to watch sporting events (participant observations, 2017 and 2019). During observations for the present study, and prior ones as well, I did not witness mahouts working at the NTNC stable engaging in beating or overt abuse of elephants.[2]

Instead both humans and elephants employed much embodied knowledge as they went about their day, acting around each other much the same way as they would around their conspecifics. The elephants knew when and where to follow their mahouts, and when to wait, standing patiently by. Human and elephant knew when touch was appropriate, and when to remain aloof. The mahouts performed their duties – such as feeding, harnessing, and dusting off elephants – in much the same way they performed their duties to other humans at the stable. The only difference seemed to come when the elephants returned to their specific stable – at which point they were hobble-chained for extended periods of time, including overnight.

Many of the mahouts interviewed for the present and prior studies referred to themselves as 'elephant drivers', comparing their job to that of bus drivers in the USA (see Szydlowski, 2017; Gragg, 2018). This analogy was offered more frequently in the private stables, where the description of elephants as buses, jeeps, or trucks was more common (mahout group interviews, 2017 and 2019). While these mahouts spent a great deal of time caring for elephants, it appeared that to many this care-work was the same as performing maintenance on the boss's car. Non-Nepalese often expanded upon the metaphor, saying that owners invested the minimum – putting in gas and washing the jeep but not caring if the jeep was covered in dents and roughly driven (Crane, Thomas, Zed and anonymous interviews, 2019). Much like bus drivers or mechanics, these mahouts do not own their vehicle, but rather drive it along predetermined routes for the benefit of others.[3]

Another unique characteristic of the NTNC facility is the retention of an elderly female elephant who is 'retired' and another 'semi-retired' individual used only when there are 'large numbers of guests' (Rao interview, 2019). Typically, elephants too old to work are sold back to India to become beggar or temple elephants (Rao, Brown, Thomas and Vidanta interviews, 2019). 'Rao', the director of the NTNC in Chitwan, stated that 'of course' they would keep these retirees at the facility. He states that the NTNC has received offers for the retiree, but they feel that she deserves to stay in her home (Rao interview, 2019). She requires special care and support from mahout staff, as she has lost her final set of

teeth[4] and can no longer eat much solid food. Her mahouts cook large tubs of rice for her daily, and the amount of work involved in her day-to-day care demonstrates a dedication to her health and well-being.

The location of the NTNC stable, between an army base and the BCC, offers its residents a quieter existence than the stables located on the main street of Sauraha, or that of the Elephant Breeding Centre which will be discussed below. NTNC elephants face a much less frenetic safari loading and unloading process than do privately owned elephants – they load and unload within the stable area, and do not face the crowds of tourists gathering at the tourist gates. Because they enter the buffer zone for safari via a different location than private elephants, these elephants do not face the 'rush hour' traffic or its associated stress.

Another hattisar: the Elephant Breeding Centre at Khorsor

Owned by the government and managed by the NTNC, the Elephant Breeding Centre is located adjacent to CNP. The site was established in 1985 to serve as a base for scientific study and reproduction of captive elephants (Kharel, 2002). This centre also serves as a cultural attraction for many tourists visiting Sauraha, as well as a training facility for calves born to captive mothers (Naresh, Pradip and Shor interviews, 2017). The male calves born at this facility will eventually become working government elephants, serving in anti-poaching units, census and translocation efforts, and search and rescue operations. The females will go to the NTNC, the government, or remain at the breeding centre.

Piloted by an initial population of four captive males and 16 captive female elephants imported from India, Myanmar, and Thailand, this government programme has produced 33 calves over the last 35 years (Kharel, 2002; GoN, 2015a, p. 16). Sadly, between 1979 and 2002, 13 calves died or were stillborn (Yadav, 2003, p. 27).[5] This represents over a 40% mortality rate, and first-time mothers had a higher rate of stillbirth (Yadav, 2003, p. 27; Gairhe, 2012, p. 29). This calf mortality rate is common in captive environments around the world and is likely due, in part, to the early breaking of family bonds (Clubb and Mason, 2002;

Sukumar, 2003; Kurt and Garai, 2006; Clubb *et al.*, 2008; GoN, 2015b). Mothers at the centre also face challenges in performing other functions of their 'care work' (Coulter, 2016, p. 63 and 65). They are unable to keep their calves in close physical proximity for the period of time they would in the wild (a lifetime for females or 10–20 years for males; see Sukumar, 2003; Vidya and Sukumar, 2005), and are unable to offer reassurance or pleasure via touch to their offspring-in-training or other captive mothers (Yadav, 2003, p. 30; Balcombe, 2009, p. 213).

Mahouts at the breeding centre also face daily work struggles. These men work up to 17 hours each day, and typically live adjacent to or in the stable and away from their families, for an average of 2450 Nepalese rupees (Nrs) monthly (about US$21) (Yadav, 2003, p. 28; Cheetri and mahout group interviews, 2017 and 2019; participant observations, 2014, 2016 and 2019). This work period is more than 2.83 times what a normal 'peon' (the lowest work level designation in Nepalese civil service) performs, and mahouts do not get regular holidays like other civilian staff, who are allowed 70 days of vacation time for religious festivals, including Saturdays (Yadav, 2003, p. 28). Mahouts also lack life insurance, a major concern as at least four mahouts have been killed by elephants, and numerous others injured, at this facility alone (Yadav, 2003, p. 28; Cheetri and Larina interviews, 2017). This lack of adequate pay and the inherent danger are major causes of mahout resignation (Yadav, 2003, p. 29). These mahouts face emotional labour as well, forced (Locke, 2009) to use only dominance-based elephant handling practices which rely on maintaining both physical and emotional control of their charges, which can lead to retaliation from elephants.

Female mahouts face additional stress and emotional labour. There were, at one point, five female mahouts serving at the government stable (only one remains), and in town there is one female tourist safari driver (Pokharel, 2020; Larina interview, 2019). A new development, these mahouts are facing discrimination from other mahouts as well as tourists, who regularly question their abilities (Kafle, 2018).[6] One female mahout from Bardia National Park, Himani Tharu, has faced such discrimination and harassment that she has taken to the media, encouraging other women not to follow in her footsteps (Pokharel,

2020). As a member of the marginalized Tharu ethnic group she faced further harassment, despite the fact that mahouts have traditionally been Tharu (Hart and Locke, 2007, p. 512; Locke, 2011a, p. 68 and 75). Her human co-workers have abandoned her in the jungle; and have taken and abandoned her elephant as well (Pokharel, 2020). Thinking she was getting a stable government job, Tharu instead faced sharing her dorm with 15 men (Pokharel, 2020). She has since sought another job outside of the elephant field (Pokharel, 2020).

Creating biocapital

Income from the conservation fee charged to enter the Elephant Breeding Centre is mixed with income from the Gharial crocodile breeding centre, and this fund pays for staff salaries, construction, and operational support of both facilities (GoN, 2015a, p. 16). The presence of baby elephants and the low entry fee at the elephant centre (less than US$1) result in large numbers of tourists – up to 25,000 annually (Yadav, 2003, p. 28; personal observations, 2019). The noise from these visitors, especially during mating activities, has resulted in attacks on humans (Gairhe, 2012, p. 28), and has also been attributed to general stress and welfare reduction among captive elephants (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a).

The centre currently houses 17 individuals: ten adult females and seven sub-adults of both sexes (NTNC, 2019a, p. 69). Reproduction now relies upon wild males to impregnate captive females (see Chapter 1, this volume), as captive bulls have not been kept at the facility since 1996. These males now reside at government outposts and serve on anti-poaching patrols or in other conservation-focused activities. Breeding centre elephants represent a large amount of biocapital,[7] 'lively capital' (Haraway, 2008, p. 46; Rajan, 2012, p. 2), or 'undead capital' (Saha, 2017, p. 173). This particular undead capital is found at the intersection of commodification, tourism, and ethics. Elephants in Nepal tick two boxes: that of 'meaty machines to be captured, trained, worked, bought, sold' (Saha, 2017; p. 172; see also Locke, 2011a, p. 61 and 62); and as half of a much studied, often romanticized duo vital to Nepalese tourism

practices (Locke, 2011b, pp. 36–39; Locke, 2017, pp. 362–365; Haraway, 2012, p. 93).

While raising these elephant calves is 'very expensive', the centre more than covers its costs during non-COVID years (Yadav, 2003, p. 30; Gairhe, 2012, p. 28). Yadav (2003, p. 30) estimates that the breeding centre brought in over 1.2 million Nrs during the 2001/02 fiscal year (around US$256,000, at that time; the most recent data available). In addition, calves were born adding assets worth approximately 5.6 million Nrs and joined a captive herd worth approximately 19.3 million Nrs (approximately US$4.13 million at the time), while the annual operating costs of the facility, including staff salaries and elephant food, were only 7.8 million Nrs (Yadav, 2003, pp. 29–30). The cost of supplies for training each calf was estimated at 30,000 Nrs, with another 150,00 Nrs set aside to buy supplies, such as sacrificial animals for the breaking ritual (Yadav, 2003, p. 30). The price associated with raising calves and the financial and emotional cost of 'breaking' them are considered necessary for what Suzuki (2020, p. 242) calls 'converting wildlife into valuable capital'. This capital serves as reproductive labour, in patrol work, or as tourism marketing.

Breaking elephants

The Elephant Breeding Centre serves as the location for the training of all young elephants born in private, government, or NTNC stables who will spend their lives working with humans (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011, n.p.). Even the most recent calf from Hotel1 – the home of the INGO2's 'chain-free' and 'rescued' elephants (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011) – has undergone 'breaking' at the breeding centre (see Chapter 7, this volume). The Nepalese breaking ritual (or hattiko talim; see Locke, 2009, n.p.) follows a similar pattern to ceremonies practised in Thailand and India called the Phajaan or Pha Jaan (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Cohen, 2015; Randy interview, 2019). This ritual involves the separation of mother from calf, and in some areas is thought to drive out bad spirits that could hurt the baby (Mahout and Thai Elephant Development Education College, 2005). Locke (2009, n.p.)

argues that instead of a 'humanly-imposed modification and control', this process might instead be viewed as a 'ritually-sanctified mutual attunement', wherein the elephant becomes bonded to humans.

This ritual needs to be examined both through a lens of human tradition and one of elephant welfare. As van Dooren (2015, p. 3) explains, situations in which 'decisions with ethical consequences' are being made need to be examined to prevent them from becoming commonplace and invisible. The refrain of traditional or ritual behaviour becomes dangerous when it involves socially sanctioned violence against other living beings. In Nepal, captive elephants are a vital part of conservation work aimed at preserving endangered species, including wild elephants (see above; Kharel, 2002). For captive elephants to be 'usable' by humans, they must be broken (Mar, 2020, n.p.), and this breaking process regularly takes place without any 'conscious reflection' (van Dooren, 2015, p. 3) by elephant handlers. The need to capture or birth, tame, break, and train an endangered species in order to preserve the same endangered species in the wild did not make sense to non-Nepalese informants or to those Nepalese not involved in elephant tourism (Szydlowski, 2017; Aadita, Brown, Minsky, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019). But to elephant handlers, veterinarians, researchers, and owners interviewed for the current study, elephants employed in shared labour with humans 'must' be controlled for the safety of tourists and mahouts, and this control is achieved by their ritual breaking, subsequent dominance-based training, and the use of tools such as the bull hook (Cheetri, Larina, Sama and mahout group interviews, 2017 and 2019; see also Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a). Mahouts and employees believe that this 'violent care' (van Dooren, 2015, p. 9) is absolutely necessary to sever the relationship between mother and calf and create the bond between baby and humans (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Cohen, 2015).

The initial phase of the Nepalese breaking process is the physical separation of mother and calf, wherein calves are tied several feet away but within their mother's (and other siblings') line of sight (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Locke, 2011b, p. 37). After days of crying and trying to reach her mother, the calf eventually gets used to her seclusion, but the mother may continue to be distraught (Locke, 2011b, p. 37; Minsky

interviews, 2019). Forced to watch and hear their calves undergo this ritual has resulted in lasting trauma for some mothers and in one case, an ongoing 'mental break' according to interlocutors for this study (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Minsky interviews, 2019). Studies on the long-term effects of this breaking process on elephant mothers themselves are needed, as non-human emotion and trauma are well documented (King, 2013; Masson and McCarthy, 1995; Newberry and Swanson, 2008; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018; Turnbull and Bär, 2020).

The next stage of the breaking process involves the ritual purification of the training post and the sacrifice of animals (such as goats, pigeons, and roosters) to the gods before the desensitization process can begin (Yadav, 2003; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011, n.p.; Locke, 2011b, p. 37). The calf is then tightly roped and chained by both front legs and her neck to a wooden post on a dirt mound, typically in full view of her herd (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011, n.p.; Locke, 2011b, p. 37; personal and participant observations, 2019). Hattisar employees surround the calf, wave fire at her, beat her with sticks on her body and the tip of her trunk, make noise, and roughly scrub her body. They mount her, poke her, and sing ritual songs each night (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Locke, 2011b). The calf may trumpet repeatedly out of fear, injure herself in attempts to escape, or hide her trunk in her mouth, all signs of stress (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Kipu interviews, 2019). During each day, the calf is freed, allowed to roam the area surrounding the stables. This process continues for 2 to 3 weeks, but the intensity may decrease over time, and end with singing and caressing as fire is waved around her (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Locke, 2011b). Despite their harsh treatment during the desensitization stage, mahouts at the breeding centre were seen putting ointment on the elephant's legs in the places where the tight ropes had caused bruising (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). In the eyes of elephant owners, the veterinary staff, and handlers, these mahouts demonstrate their care for elephants in both the performance of their violent-care duties and subsequent gentle-care tasks (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; van Dooren, 2014, p. 91; see also Dugas and Locke, 2006; Vidanta interviews, 2019).

While 'their' elephant is undergoing training, the mahout may have to perform his own emotional work. He is expected to remain pure by

staying away from women, meat, and alcoholic beverages (Locke, 2011b, p. 38). He must also keep the elephant clear of metal objects due to their relationship with man-made processes and may have to remake parts of the elephant's harness for use during the ritual (Locke, 2011b). While the mahout performs some of this work alone, the larger community of mahouts at the Elephant Breeding Centre takes part in the breaking process itself, which Locke (2009, n.p.) credits with building stronger relationships within the 'institution' of handlers. The emotional labour of these mahouts, and how the breaking process affects their mental health, is another area that could benefit from further study.

The next step in training a juvenile elephant is to pierce her ear in order to use a metal hook to 'instil the sense of direction' in her, and to act as a safety net for gaining quick control in case there is trouble (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). In addition, a barbed shackle is placed on the juvenile elephant's leg, and this shackle is connected to the saddle so that the elephant cannot move swiftly without pain (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). During the next phase, the calf is taken to the jungle to experience wild animals. The trainers try to encounter wild rhino, tiger, boar, and deer in order to desensitize the calf. In addition, the calf is taken to the highway to learn not to be alarmed by vehicles. Lastly, the calf is used to perform work such as carrying logs to gain experience with her handler prior to being placed on safari or patrol (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011).

Nepalese and non-Nepalese interlocutors felt that this ritual was overly traumatic for mothers and calves, and resulted in 'damaged' or 'mentally broken' elephants (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; de Vries, 2014; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018; Carlstead *et al.*, 2019). They felt that as long as this process remains the primary method of training elephants, mahouts will also continue to rely upon what they called 'cruel' and 'outdated' violent methods of elephant management instead of adopting less dominance-based styles (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011, n.p.; de Vries, 2014, p. 2).[8]

As mentioned in Chapter 5 (this volume), breaking social and familial bonds so early can have lifelong effects. These bonds are vitally important to elephants' future ability to adapt to stressful situations, maintain

physical fitness, and learn to choose appropriate foods (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Kurt and Garai, 2006; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Breaking family bonds too early may result in infanticide or infant rejection as adults, perhaps due to missing social information which would normally be imparted by older relatives (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kurt and Garai, 2006; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Traditional training methods, like the breaking ceremony, may result in future fights for dominance between handlers and elephants (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). This breaking process has come under fire from organizations around the world, and the filming of a breaking ceremony in 2002 by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) went viral (PETA, 2002), igniting a call to boycott elephant tourism. World Animal Protection (2020) has also shared a video showing hobble-chained, screaming elephant calves undergoing the Phajaan in Thailand. World Animal Protection has stated that the ceremony has a 'significant negative impact' on the health and welfare of elephants (Schmidt-Burbach, 2017, p. 13). These videos are painful to watch, perhaps especially so because they involve what are easily identifiable as 'babies'.

Instead of a cruel, anthropocentric practice benefiting only the human part of the equation, Locke (2009) describes a ritual that somehow flows in both directions between elephant and handler. Locke seems to romanticize the breaking process in his work, describing it simply as 'elephant training' and indicating that within 2 or 3 weeks the elephant and mahout will become magically bonded (Locke, 2009). Locke's writings, while detailed and culturally respectful of the *humans* in his studies, perhaps miss the mark by describing this ritual separation and socially sanctioned torture of calves as a 'joyous celebration' (Locke, 2011b, p. 39). Locke's arguments are predicated upon the belief that traditional knowledge has been passed along which ensures the success (and perhaps safety) of this ritual practice (Hart and Sundar, 2000; Varma, 2008; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020; Locke, 2011b; Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). However, in light of the fact that elephant handling is no longer a familial job in Nepal,[9] this defence may no longer

apply (Hart and Sundar, 2000; Varma, 2008; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020; Locke, 2011b; Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). Instead of 'traditional practice', elephant breaking is now undertaken by inexperienced mahouts without governmental or veterinary oversight (Hart and Sundar, 2000; Varma, 2008; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). Rather than the happy celebration witnessed by Locke (2011b) the breaking ritual may instead have become disassociated from its cultural purpose and institutionalized for the production of 'undead capital' (Saha, 2017, p. 173; see 'Creating biocapital' section above).

Some Asian elephant biologists (such as Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 13) claim that no studies have been done to quantify whether breaking rituals have lasting impacts on elephant psyches, or whether there are any lasting differences between positive reinforcement training (PRT) and traditional methods. There is, however, empirical evidence of greater calf mortality around the time of weaning and training, leading some to blame these deaths on the methods used during breaking rituals (Mar *et al.*, 2012). Studies have found post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in both African and Asian elephants who have undergone breaking rituals and dominance training, and elephants may show lifelong symptoms of this PTSD if not handled properly (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2016). According to Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2016), it is possible to mitigate expressions of PTSD through appropriate husbandry techniques, and via post-trauma interventions and positive relationship-building with mahouts.

There are viable alternatives to the breaking process in use in Thailand and Nepal (Varma and Ganguly, 2011; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a). Several years ago, the World Society for the Protection of Animals and the WWF piloted a humane training programme for mahouts in Sauraha (Locke, 2011b; Varma and Ganguly, 2011). This programme outlines, among other things, 'pre-schooling' for calves under the age of 3 years in order to instil an understanding of positive or negative reinforcement. The Working Elephant Program of Asia (WEPA) trained five juveniles using touch, vocal cues, food rewards, and pressure release training (Varma and Ganguly, 2011).

However, Gautam and Khatiwada (2011) found no evidence that this pre-schooling was still taking place. During an undercover visit, researchers found that mahouts and centre staff behaved patiently when visitors were in attendance at the breeding centre but resorted to violence once away from visitor view (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). Training at the centre now appears to have returned to the same methods as before the humane training programme, with the exceptions of the discontinuation of lowering food levels during training and leaving fewer scars and wounds (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). Government and NTNC employees claimed that cruel training methods are no longer in use, despite evidence to the contrary offered by interlocutors in the current study (Vidanta and mahout group interviews, 2019; participant and personal observations, 2017 and 2019).

Gautam and Khatiwada (2011) observed 'natural' 'love and affection' from mahouts for elephants, but despite training in PRT, mahouts continued to embrace violent or dominance-based methods. Like interlocutors in research done for this volume, participants in the 2011 study found that the deeply ingrained belief that cruel methods are necessary for training was difficult to overcome (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Cheetri, Larina and Vidanta interviews, 2019). According to the breeding centre training director, mahouts won't take the chance on using different methods, as they believe elephants trained with more humane methods are more likely to kill their mahout (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). However, Gautam and Khatiwada (2011) found two cases of young elephants successfully (or in ongoing training) trained using only ear piercing or beating. In one case, the calf was trained with nothing but the ear piercing and is now operating as a safari elephant without issue.

According to the chief warden of CNP, elephants are such a vital part of conservation and anti-poaching activities that 'animal welfare' concerns simply do not apply, as compromising the welfare of government elephants is 'inevitable' (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). He feels that the elephants must be ready to deal with adverse conditions, and that the government must choose conservation over elephant welfare (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). There are ways, however, to increase the welfare of these elephants while maintaining their

'usefulness'. One way is to create more oversight by experienced personnel in hattisars and during the breaking ritual. To this end, Gautam and Khatiwada (2011) recommend that senior-level officers and veterinary staff observe the more intense portions of future trainings. They further recommend that the separation of calves becomes more gradual and less stressful, introductory methods be instituted with young calves, and more training in more humane methods be offered (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). The number of staff at the breeding centre should be increased to facilitate earlier training in a more playful manner, reduce the number of accidents resulting from mahouts who are in charge of more than one elephant at a time, and increase the possibility for building long-term bonds between caretaker and elephant which is lacking due to time constraints from understaffing (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011).

Offering an alternative view, Locke (2009) decries the elephant-centric view of individuals in these hattisars rather than on bonded mahout–elephant pairs, and suggests that a more substantive approach is needed to recognize the 'agency, expertise and lifeworld of handlers' (n.p.). By focusing on elephant individuals, and applying phrases such as 'human use', Locke worries that researchers are offering only an 'impoverished perspective of domination' instead of a 'dynamic tradition of skilled practice' (Locke, 2009 n.p.). Because these elephant handlers view their charges simultaneously as 'animals, persons and gods' (Locke, 2016, p. 159; Vidanta interviews, 2019), Locke (2009) feels that Western researchers have wrongly misclassified treatment by mahouts as cruel. In Locke's (2009) view, the agency of elephant handlers has been taken away as the traditional practices of dominance training and cruelty were pressed upon them as the only acceptable way to work with elephants. These handlers, according to Locke (2009), are trapped – forced to adopt the practices used in their hattisars, despite their personal feelings. Locke (2009) feels that the PRT offered by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) came about out of the 'representation of indigenous training practice that perhaps unduly emphasized the role of fear and cruelty', which he feels is an unjust description of these practices. Locke (2009) defends traditional methods of training, *appearing* to claim that as indigenous training practices they must be

appropriate. Locke (2009, n.p.) feels the rationale behind attempts to teach humane training practices is 'critical and neo-imperialist, implying that indigenous practices are intrinsically backwards and cruel'. It is hard to determine if Locke is simply attempting to acknowledge the agency of mahouts in an evolving practice, or if he is truly claiming that 'tradition' serves as a defence of cruel practices. If it is the latter, this view of 'traditional' or 'local' automatically equalling 'worthy of keeping' is problematic (Lister, 2003, p. 183). Instead, a wider view of the legitimacy of disparate practices, and how different stakeholders view this legitimacy, is needed (Lister, 2003).

Rather than placing the focus on the past history of these mahout–elephant pairs, no matter how dynamic it may appear, I believe we should instead be focusing on their current practices, which are described as cruel and abusive by both Nepalese and non-Nepalese informants (Bames, Brown, Crane, Gwala, Minsky, Randy, Taraswin and Zed interviews, 2019). While I found myself becoming less and less accepting of these methods as research progressed, I acknowledge the need to include mahout history, agency, and welfare in any conversations regarding recommended changes. There appear to be alternatives to exclusively neocolonial approaches to ending dominance-based management in Nepal. For example, in Locke's (2009) study, mahouts interviewed following training in humane management methods commented that they felt they were working with the trainer, and not just learning from them. These handlers seemed proud to be a part of an elephant management team, instead of feeling ignored by those interested only in their elephants (Locke, 2009). This attitude would seem to indicate that education in alternative training methods, and an inclusion of mahouts in decision making, could decrease the alienation felt by mahouts while increasing the elephant–mahout bond, and perhaps encourage mahouts to develop more humane treatment methods as true partners in these programmes.

In Thailand, mahouts place the blame for continuing cruel management practices on tourists' demand for elephants who engage in unnatural behaviours like painting, dancing, or sports (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Mahouts argue that these behaviours are only possible after breaking and beating elephants (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018).

Mahouts in the cited study said that they prefer to work at sanctuaries, which they consider better for the elephants and themselves (better working conditions, a better family life, and the freedom to practise religion). Some said they were surprised how easy it was to communicate with the elephants without dominance treatment and described how working at a sanctuary has given them more respect for elephants and their intelligence (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). For this type of behaviour to spread, Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2018) believe tourists will need to take responsibility and stop paying for unethical experiences at facilities that increase suffering and trauma.

Further studies which equally represent the health and welfare of both members of the mahout–elephant pair, and their extended families, are much needed (Locke, 2009; de Vries, 2014, n.p.; Mackenzie and Locke, 2012). While the following chapters in this book demonstrate an elephant-centric view of the situation in Nepal, due to the author's history caring both for and about a variety of non-human animals, consideration is also given to the human side of the equation. Next is a discussion of the ways in which the NTNC and government hattisars are perceived by various stakeholders, including NTNC and government employees, local community members, nature guides, expats, and visitors.

Discourses Surrounding the Government and NTNC Hattisars

The person serving as the NTNC project manager during fieldwork for this book is someone known to the author for nearly a decade, as the owner of a local hotel and elephant stable featured in previous research. 'Rao' has been described in a variety of ways by interlocutors for the present study, as the most 'renowned person in Sauraha', a 'mafia godfather', and a 'big man' (Gwala, Taraswin and Randy interviews, 2019). My experiences with Rao, however, have been predominantly pleasant and respectful.

Rao was promoted to project manager of the BCC after a long career with the NTNC and has far-reaching ties to the community stretching back through his father's tenure as the leader of a large community forest users' group (Rao interviews and PC, 2012–2019). As the owner of a hotel close to the NTNC's BCC, it is convenient for international visitors to stay at his facility, which they do. International guests who chose other hotels are asked to leave those facilities and move to Rao's lodge, creating the feeling among some interlocutors that he uses his position at the NTNC to support his businesses. This may at first appear at odds with non-Asians' perceptions of ethical practices. However, according to Nepalese interlocutors, the reason behind these perceived differences in 'ethical' behaviour is due to the fact that men in Nepal are encouraged to 'be big' (Gwala PC, 2020). Parental support and community expectations and support are not directed towards following one's passions or creating community, but rather towards one being well-placed and successful (Gairhe and Panta interviews, 2019; Gwala PC, 2020). It may be this social pressure that leads people in positions of power to overlook what non-Nepalese might label 'best practices' in favour of that which directly benefits their immediate family (and may represent 'best practices' for a Nepalese businessman).

Like other interlocutors in this study, I felt a sense of the fox having been put in charge of the henhouse when I realized that someone who uses elephants for money-making tourism activities oversees the welfare of wild individuals of the same species. This conflict was less troublesome to employees of the NTNC, who, as mentioned above, regularly use NTNC-owned elephants to entertain their personal guests and see little wrong with it (Rao, Larina, Phuyal and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Many private elephant owners, like Rao, report no cognitive dissonance when discussing elephants both as fiercely protected endangered species and captive tourist conveyance. However, the *ownership* of captive elephants by a conservation organization such as the NTNC draws consternation from visitors, and while some credit these elephants with playing an important role in conservation, others state they are strictly entertainment providers – 'only an adventure for the people, nothing more' (Larina and Phuyal interviews, 2019).

The NTNC herd is also used in for-profit ventures undertaken personally by staff. Contracting with international organizations, young people from outside Nepal visit Sauraha to experience hands-on 'work' with these elephants (Larina and Raja interviews, 2019; personal observations, 2017 and 2019). These young people make elephant kuchis, follow mahouts as they attend to matters at the stable, and accompany elephants to the river for bathing (Elsa, Doris and Raja interviews, 2019; personal observations, 2017 and 2019). These programmes and other local, privately organized offshoots have something in common – they are organized by former NTNC staff or current hotel owners who have family members employed by the NTNC. This seems to be another conflict of interest between an NGO whose stated aims are to conserve endangered species, and its use of the same species for personal and organizational income. As discussed in previous chapters of this volume, organizations operating in this way tend to promote competition rather than conservation and line the pockets of only a few elite community members (Sullivan, 2006; Puri, 2019, p. 78).

Veterinary staff potential conflicts of interest

As the NTNC veterinarian and technician, 'Prakesh Vidanta' and 'Ravi Saroj' are in positions that might seem to reflect another conflict of interest to an outsider. Vidanta and Saroj receive a sum of money from the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative, which will be discussed in upcoming chapters, to care for its members' privately owned elephants. This means that in addition to sharing responsibility for the care of every wild animal in Nepal with only one other veterinarian and technician, Vidanta and Saroj look after the 112 captive elephants who reside in government, NTNC, and private stables (Gairhe, Rao, Saroj and Vidanta interviews, 2019). In fact, Saroj describes the care of these captive elephants as the 'most important thing' he does (Saroj interviews, 2019). Saroj appears dedicated to his job, says he enjoys caring for captive elephants, and is widely respected among Nepalese and non-Nepalese interlocutors as the person most familiar with each elephant's unique personality and health (Brown, Thomas and Vidanta, interviews, 2019).

Saroj says he is continuing to learn new things about elephant care and has developed positive relationships with mahouts in the area.

Why does an NGO tasked with wildlife conservation provide staffing for privately owned elephants? According to NTNC project manager Rao, this practice started in 2012, when he requested a veterinarian be assigned to the CNP team since they were using a 'CITES-listed animal' with no veterinary support (see Chapter 4, this volume). Rao describes the entire NTNC veterinary services as now designed for 'looking after' these privately owned elephants (Rao interview, 2019). Rao also feels that such an 'important' endangered animal deserves better care than currently offered and explains that since the land surrounding Sauraha is government owned, these elephants should be afforded the same land use within the national park as wild individuals (see Chapter 4, this volume, for concerns regarding this proposed practice).

The private elephant owners' control of NTNC veterinary staff extends to their work hours and daily routine. Private elephant owners reported being angry when the NTNC vet staff does not respond to their queries right away. But according to veterinary staff, this delay is intentional. Staff often put off visiting an elephant until the owner has called them several times, especially for foot care. In this way, the veterinary staff feels that they are increasing the perception among owners that their care is more valuable by making it harder to access (Vidanta and Saroj interviews, 2019). The effects of these delays on elephant health and welfare were not concerning to staff, but I found them disturbing. While I understand the importance of encouraging owners to value veterinary care, delaying treatment which might decrease pain or increase welfare runs counter to my decades of caregiving experience. While I may not agree with their delays, after experiencing the difficulties Vidanta and Saroj face in providing care (such as mahouts disappearing with their elephants during scheduled visitations, or owners failing to heed recommendations), I can at least understand their desire to build value into their time.

In addition, non-Nepalese interlocutors in the present study were confused by the use of NTNC staff to treat privately owned elephants and felt that because donations – especially from international organizations – are given to the NTNC to support wildlife care, using staff to care for

privately owned animals seemed contrary to the mission of the NTNC (Crane and Zed interviews, 2019). With a single exception, the care of wildlife during fieldwork for the current study fell exclusively on the shoulders of NTNC 'wildlife techs' and the government veterinarian, while the NTNC veterinary staff dealt exclusively with captive elephants.[10] At first, I thought it was my presence keeping staff from engaging with wildlife, but after numerous conversations with veterinary personnel it became clear that there was currently little else for them to do. There is much down time between wildlife needs, as it is unsurprisingly an unpredictable field. I appreciated the amount of time staff members were able to offer me for stable visitations.

The use of NTNC staff to treat private elephants is not the only concern expressed by interlocutors in the current study, however. Expats from Europe and Canada, residents of Nepal, American and European tourists, as well as researchers approached for the study felt that both the government and the NTNC were not fulfilling their stated goals (Gwala, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019; Gwala, Thomas and Zed PCs, 2020). Interlocutors felt that given the amount of foreign aid sent to Nepal, there should be a much greater academic knowledge base on many of the species residing in the area, and more follow-up on procedures such as necropsies of larger wildlife.[11] Some informants explained that supplied materials (i.e. lab equipment, husbandry data from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), or research data from other partners) were wasted, sitting in storage, unused (Dora and Zed interviews, 2019). Others questioned why what they felt were readily accessible online academic and husbandry resources were not used to improve animal health, especially given the amount of available down time experienced by staff (albeit Internet coverage is sometimes spotty throughout Nepal) (Zed interviews, 2019; personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019). Additionally, visitors were concerned that the funding of the first wildlife hospital by the WWF and various smaller organizations had not netted any results (Dora, Laye and Zed interviews, 2019; Dora, Laye and Zed PCs, 2019). While the hospital building was completed in 2018, it is still rarely used as anything but office space· Rao and Vidanta cited the need to wait for office furniture to be purchased before moving operations

to the building for a delay of over 2 years (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019 and 2021). A large grant for hospital supplies was awarded by the government of Nepal, and purchases have been made. These purchases include a radiograph machine and processor, which were obtained without protective gear and without education on their use (GoN, 2020, n.p.; Vidanta and Thomas PCs, 2020). This equipment was improperly stored, and as such the batteries died before it was ever used. While various organizations offered to supply training and new batteries, as of 2023 the machine remains unusable (Bames, Brown and Vidanta interviews, 2019 and 2021; personal observations, 2021).

I consulted faculty and students at Nepal's Tribhuvan University, who shared their concerns about the NTNC, the government, and their professed conservation goals. As academics, they disagreed with certain policies, such as the practice of gifting endangered animals to other countries. Gift animals are offered to foreign governments as a sign of good will, and during the writing of this volume, two young rhinos were sent to China (Vidanta interview, 2019). The students and faculty felt that these animals should instead be protected and kept within the borders of Nepal to allow for natural reproduction opportunities (Bhatri and Thapa interviews, 2019). They believed that China, which lacks a wild population of rhinos, would fiercely protect the rhinos, but could offer little opportunity to increase the global population. Furthermore, they stated that large-scale habitat preservation should instead be the key focus of government, along with the preservation of sustainable sites which can be locally managed by buffer zone and community forest agencies. They also felt that local communities were suffering due to a lack of provided education on natural disasters which are becoming more and more frequent – such as fires – as well as on man-made disasters such as deforestation and pesticide use. One faculty member mentioned that he would like to see local communities having more say over conservation measures instead of the top-down (and possibly neoliberal) approach currently in practice (see Chapter 3, this volume). He explained that the NTNC itself has a clear conflict of interest when it comes to its stated goals. Instead of focusing on the changes in animal populations or whether conservation policies are working, the NTNC appeared to focus on public-relations type items like 'beautiful photo

databases of tigers'. Instead of research into the conservation of endangered species, the NTNC's focus has been on marketing (Bhatri and Thapa interviews, 2019).

Other interlocutors worried that the government and NTNC were missing the bigger conservation picture. 'Phuyal Puri', who owns a business on Sauraha's main street, explained that due to widespread governmental corruption, funding supplied to the government and proceeds from activities like national park entry fees were not 'getting down' to where they needed to be (Puri interview, 2019). In addition, he shared his worries that smaller, less charismatic species such as local birds were being overlooked in favour of more marketable species. He described the plight of urban wildlife and explained that smaller birds were dying out or moving away thanks to tourism. Because modern hotels were being built to accommodate the growing number of visitors, thatched roofs were falling out of fashion, and these birds have nowhere to nest. He took me across the street and into a home to view an electrical pole through a window. Doves had created a nesting space among the rolled wires thanks to a lack of other options. Puri would like to see some of the park funds spent on less charismatic species residing outside the official park boundaries.

Another business owner shared similar concerns, but in his case regarding plants and perceptions (Bandhu interviews, 2019). As tourism grows, he explained, roads are getting wider and busier – but not better cared for. He felt that local government was forgetting that tourists coming to view wildlife did not want rugged roads and ugly walls instead of beautiful tropical plants and lively landscapes. 'Bandhu' also wanted some of the park income to go towards city-wide beautification projects and suggested including native species of plants which have been removed in favour of roads.

In contrast, Doma Paudel, the first female nature guide in Nepal and current ecotourism business owner, feels that the governmental policies surrounding the national park fees are sound, but inadequate.[12] The 30–50% of entrance fees set aside for local communities is simply not enough. Paudel explains that each community needs to make progress towards sustainable development, conservation, and livelihood

protection goals, but the funds simply do not cover it all (Paudel interviews, 2019). In addition, Paudel cites a lack of 'government policy to support people and educate' them in ways which could increase livelihoods (Paudel interviews, 2019). This lack of progress creates negative feelings among community members (Heinen, 1993; Kellert *et al.*, 2000; Paudel interviews, 2019). Further creating discontent are current policies on reimbursement for human victims of wildlife attacks within the forest. Many landless people must enter the forest for survival provisioning. Currently, when a human is attacked within the park boundaries, there is no restitution from the government due to the illegality of the practice. Villages surrounding the park face 10–15 fatalities each year from this type of human–wildlife conflict (Lamichhane *et al.*, 2018; Paudel interviews, 2019). In addition, there is no governmentally funded health care in Nepal, nor do most employers offer health insurance, leaving those whose jobs require them to enter the park at risk (Paudel interviews, 2019). For this reason, both the Chitwan Nature Guide Association and expat elephant advocates are eager to develop an insurance safety net for both guides and mahouts (Bames, Brown, Thomas and Paudel interviews, 2019).

Most interlocutors (*including* elephant owners) felt that the government was failing in its responsibility to enforce existing legislation regarding the trade of elephants across the border with India (Crane, Gwala, Minsky, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019). One explained that elephants are not 'a phone you can put in your pocket' and sneak across the border, so enforcement should not be difficult (Pabin interviews, 2019). Nepalese and non-Nepalese interlocutors alike felt there was a complete failure to enforce any type of registration, documentation, nutrition, or permit requirements for elephant owners. Concern surrounding the transmission of disease across the captive–wild interface (during breeding activities, grazing, and patrolling) and the lack of disease testing for captive individuals were cause for further concern among participants (Crane, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019).

The NTNC and INGO3: a troubled relationship[13]

Before moving on to discuss elephant health, welfare, and the various other organizations involved in Sauraha, I would like to introduce an NGO that serves as an example of the typical relationship arc in the area. It is likely that no NGO has been as positively impactful, or drawn as much ire from residents of Sauraha, as 'Georgia Lewis' with INGO3. Initially starting her career as an elephant trainer – who taught her elephant certain physical 'tricks' for zoo and circus performances – Lewis had a change of heart and became interested in elephant welfare and trauma recovery (INGO3, 2018b,c). Lewis is a public figure in her Western country, a frequent poster on social media (see below), an excellent fundraiser for her refuge (INGO3, 2018 a), and has inspired a Facebook group called 'Georgia Lewis Supporters' (2010). There can be little doubt that in her home country Lewis has made an impact in raising awareness of global elephant issues.

In the mid-1990s, Lewis co-founded a large elephant sanctuary in a Western country (location omitted for anonymity) which operated using what she calls a passive restraint management system (Clubb and Mason, 2002; INGO3, n.d.). With this type of management, there is no attempt to dominate individuals, or place oneself in a position of power within the herd (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Clubb and Mason, 2002; see also Appendix I, this volume). Instead, the elephants are allowed to express agency by making choices in their daily activities, such as where they rest, eat, and with whom they socialize (INGO3, n.d.). Lewis refers to this type of management as compassionate, and notes that it requires a 'highly skilled caregiver' (INGO3, n.d.). This style of elephant management is likely to positively impact elephant welfare, but there have been no academic studies to determine whether this is the case (Clubb and Mason, 2002). Lewis has been encouraging this type of management in Asia and offers instructional workshops in Thailand and Nepal (INGO3, n.d.). Despite repeated visits to Nepal to train mahouts, there have been no adoptions of this system in any of the private stables of Sauraha, the NTNC, or the government, with the exception of some minor use at Tiger Tops (see Chapter 4, this volume). Discussions with NTNC staff, private owners, and Westerners living or working in Sauraha paint a complex picture of INGO3's involvement in the area, and why this

type of training and the inclusion of chain-free corrals have failed to achieve results.

Why is INGO3 in Asia?

After being asked to leave her original sanctuary in 2009, Lewis decided to become involved with international elephant welfare and launched a new INGO (INGO3, 2018b). Tourists and researchers planning to visit Sauraha may be inspired by INGO3's online videos showing elephants being freed from chains and released into solar-powered corrals (omitted for INGO's anonymity, 2016). Various online news articles claim that Chitwan is still a completely chain-free village (Ways, 2016; News18, 2017). In fact, an international news agency article (omitted for INGO's anonymity, 2016) states that, 'When not working, elephants at Chitwan National Park in Nepal used to spend all their time in chains. Now, almost all live chain-free in corrals.' But the reality is quite different.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 (this volume), INGO3[14] was approached by the Tiger Tops hotel group when it decided to build chain-free corrals for its herd and was instrumental in getting these corrals built. After experiencing deaths due to aggression between individual elephants (Thakur interview, 2019), Tiger Tops rethought its approach. It is important to note that these deaths were not due to INGO3 or Lewis's involvement, according to Thakur, but rather due to mistaken assumptions by staffers as to which elephants would reside safely together (see Chapter 4, this volume). Following careful reconsideration of individual elephant personalities and needs, Tiger Tops has since become successful in releasing elephants from foot chains and into large corrals in pairs or small groups. The programme at Tiger Tops continues to serve as an example of chain-free management, however these methods have not proven successful in other stables.

For example, INGO3 spent considerable time and money installing ~50 chain-free corrals in cooperation with the government of Nepal and the NTNC (INGO3, 2020 a). If you view the INGO3 website, you might think these corrals changed the lives of elephants around Chitwan, and they did, for a few months (INGO3, 2020 a). However, as the news video mentioned above admits at its end, 'not all the corrals were successful'. In

fact, within a matter of months most NTNC and government elephants returned to leg chains (Peggy, Larina, Sama and Thomas interviews, 2019; Peggy, Larina, Sama and Thomas PCs, 2019). One reason for this rapid return to traditional methods came when, according to NTNC staff, a male elephant released into the corral abruptly broke through and killed another individual (Rushi interview, 2019). This is not uncommon – electric fences have been used throughout India, Nepal, and Africa with varying degrees of success (Kioko *et al.*, 2008; Sapkota *et al.*, 2014; Kalam *et al.*, 2018), and locals report that wild elephants are rarely deterred by electrified fences (Cheetri, Larina and Mohan interviews, 2017 and 2019). NTNC management and private owners alike were hesitant to risk their elephants in chain-free corrals following the escape. Very few of the chain-free corrals remain functional today; the majority of NTNC corrals have been torn down and moved to trash piles (see Fig. 6.1). Staffers explain that the NTNC does not want to spend the money to fix or maintain these fences, claiming that wild bulls will simply destroy them and chase off unchained females. And they have a history of doing just that – destroying corrals, mahout housing, and hattisar fences around town. The damage is extreme and widespread.

A few government-run corrals maintain their electrified areas as backup restraint for bulls in musth, although the ability of these fences to contain hormonal adult males is regularly questioned (Larina and Vidanta interviews, 2019), and males kept in these corrals during musth are still chained (personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019). Despite the failure of chain-free corrals in Nepal, at the time of writing the INGO3 website still claimed that a 'total of 106 elephants [are] released from chains forever in Nepal, Thailand and India [*sic*]', and that 'the Nepali government has gone chain-free with all its female elephants at its 15 elephant facilities, freeing 54 elephants' (INGO3, 2020 a).



Fig. 6.1. Electric fence posts in the NTNC trash heap, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author, 17 April 2019.)

INGO3's efforts in Nepal have stalled (Bames, Brown, Cheetri, Randy, Sama and Thomas interviews, 2019; Bames, Brown, Randy and Thomas PCs, 2020). According to elephant owners and welfare advocates (of several ethnicities who asked to remain anonymous), mahout classes that were being offered at the NTNC/BCC are no longer allowed, and INGO3 is not permitted to do further work with private elephants (except those maintained by non-Nepalese NGOs) in Sauraha and was denied access to government elephants (anonymous PC, 2020). Nepalese individuals who assisted Lewis on her last trip were reportedly threatened with loss of employment if they continue to communicate with her, and

others were told to chase or 'drag her' out of the country (anonymous and Gwala interviews, 2020).

According to interlocutors, the reason for this hostility is due to INGO3 and Lewis's social media presence (Bames, Rao, Thomas and Vidanta interviews, 2019; Bames, Rao and Thomas PCs, 2020). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, INGO3 raised thousands of dollars purportedly to provide produce to elephants in the Sauraha area (INGO3, 2020 a–c). Videos and photos showing fruit and vegetable deliveries appeared online, and Lewis began to take credit for saving the privately owned elephants of Nepal by feeding 70 elephants each a 50-pound bag of produce (Lewis, 2020a–e). However, when I reached out to elephant owners, they painted a very different picture. Many said they did not receive any produce, some said they refused the deliveries due to prior social media posts, and others perceived that Lewis's posts really served to raise money for her interests in the West instead of feeding elephants in Nepal (Rajesh and Vachan PCs, 2020). One went so far as to use the catchphrase 'fake news' (Rajesh PC, 2020). This is one example of the wide range of perspectives which make cooperation among elephant owners and advocates challenging. Efforts to help elephants may require further perspective-taking and increased communication with the owners' cooperative itself.

INGO3 (2020 a–e) videos state that surrounding villages were positively affected by these produce drops (Lewis 2020a–c), which took place four or five times over the first eight months of the pandemic (Brown, Bames, Rajesh, Randy, Thomas and Vachan PCs, 2020). While purchasing local produce for the elephants did no doubt help support local farmers and pickers who are struggling following the loss of tourist income, the addition of a few kilograms of produce a day was hardly 'a snack' for most elephants, according to interlocuters (Brown and Bames interviews, 2020). While produce is a good addition to pachyderm diets, the small amount offered did little to ease dietary limitations during the lockdown (Brown, Bames, Rajesh, Randy, Thomas and Vachan interviews, 2020; Brown, Bames, Rajesh, Randy, Thomas and Vachan PCs, 2020). Some locals did feel that these efforts assisted mahouts, however, since they were able to choose produce items for their family before offering it to elephants (Brown, Bames, Rajesh, Randy, Thomas

and Vachan PCs, 2020). Further creating conflict with owners, Lewis claimed on an Internet news site (omitted for anonymity, 2020) that her efforts in alerting the Nepalese government to the need for grazing rights earned privately owned elephants access to the protected forest during the lockdown (see Chapter 7, this volume). While owners also claim that this permission was granted thanks to their efforts, chief conservation officer Rupakheti claims that permission to graze was never granted to private owners, nor will it ever be (Mandal, 2020).

Perceptions of INGO3

One informant described Lewis as an unfortunate 'victim'. He felt that her attempts to help elephants began to bring unwanted attention to issues surrounding captive elephant health and welfare, resulting in her vilification by owners and the NTNC (Gwala interviews, 2020). Sadly, by mid-2020 all international organizations interviewed for this volume, and many local ones, claimed to have cut ties with INGO3 with the exception of INGO2's founder (Brown, Bames, Gwala, Randy, Thomas and Vidanta interviews, 2019; Brown, Bames, Gwala, Randy, Thomas and Vidanta PCs, 2020). Other organizations have accused INGO3 of wanting a 'monopoly of foot care' in the area, and organizational leaders reported being attacked verbally or via text and email when they tried to become active in the Sauraha area, blocked on social media, or simply denied any response to communication (anonymous, Bames, Brown, Randy and Thomas PCs, 2020). While most people interviewed for the present study described Lewis as 'dedicated' to elephants, felt she wanted to 'help' them, and was attempting to do the 'right thing' (Brown, Bames, Crane, Gwala, Minsky, Randy, Thomas and Vidanta PCs, 2020), only one organization described Lewis's methods as effectively aiding elephants within Nepal. Lewis continues to be an asset for INGO2, discussed in the following chapters. In addition, staff at the NTNC stated that Lewis is welcome back into Nepal at any time if the social media posts stop (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019).

An important point to consider is that these social media posts, while problematic for elephant owners, have been proven to work. Swim and Bloodhart (2015, p. 462) found that portraying animal suffering and

engaging people empathetically was effective at getting people to donate money. Likewise, creating feelings of worry or guilt garnered higher donation amounts (Haynes *et al.*, 2004, n.p.). As Gautam (2020, n.p.) pointed out, 'misery pimping' works well in bringing funds to animal causes in Nepal (also see Chapter 3, this volume). Perhaps in this way INGO3 will be successful in bringing elephant care issues to light or raising funds for future sanctuaries in Nepal.

Conclusions

The government of Nepal's stated aims include the preservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity in its most productive region – the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) of Nepal, home to CNP. As the legal owner of all non-human animals throughout the country, the government has a responsibility to ensure the well-being of charismatic and endangered wildlife, as well as less popular species. Towards this goal, the government contracts with various NGOs such as the NTNC. Together, these organizations care for both wild and captive elephants.

While wild elephants are fiercely protected in Nepal, there is little legislation regarding captive individuals. Traditional elephant breaking and training procedures have come under fire for decades, yet little has changed as mahouts continue to use methods reliant upon dominance, control, and violence. It is important to consider that these mahouts may themselves be trapped, forced to use methods pressed upon them by hattisar management, and with which they may not agree. Alternatively, mahouts may simply believe the social fact that beatings and dominance are necessary for their safety and that of tourists.

Traditional passage of mahout knowledge along familial lines is no longer the norm, and therefore current elephant-keeping practices may need to be re-examined. What is clear is that further studies into the health and welfare of elephants, and the perspectives of mahouts, at both government and NTNC facilities are needed. In addition, research which considers both elephants and mahouts as equal working partners is overdue.

The government remains the primary employer of captive elephants in Nepal, and its breeding centre the only facility currently able to produce the next generation of patrol and park service elephants. While these endangered individuals perform a vital function for the national parks system, their health and welfare have been largely overlooked in research. On paper, the government appears to be doing its best from an ethical standpoint, providing necessary care such as required amounts of fodder and provisions for veterinary care. In practice, the government is failing in efforts to enforce these requirements and is creating further problems by formally encouraging the illegal acquisition of elephants from India.

The NTNC faces similar dissonance between its stated aims and its practices. The NTNC serves to protect endangered lands and species, yet NTNC-owned elephants and their mahouts serve dual purposes – as research assistants and tourist conveyances. The use of an endangered species by a conservation organization, especially as a means of income, is concerning to both Nepalese and non-Nepalese observers. Furthermore, NTNC conservation officers disagree about whether the use of these elephants for money-making practices is necessary, ethical, or simply entertainment.

The next chapter (Chapter 7) introduces private owners and their cooperative. With the market in elephant-backed safari cornered, these owners have control over the stables of Sauraha, their elephants, and mahouts. As the next chapter will demonstrate, any organizations interested in making a change in elephant care will need to come to an agreement with this cooperative.

Notes

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[2] Of course, the act of chaining an elephant in place and removing her daily choices might be considered a type of violence.

[3] Thanks to Jonathon Saha (PC, 2021) for helping me expand this metaphor in his thoughtful comments on my PhD thesis.

[4] Elephants get six sets of molars throughout their lives. When the last set falls out, they can no longer consume large quantities of plant material and often experience a loss of weight and eventual death.

[5] This is the most recent study containing these data. Yadav (2003) blames these deaths on the mothers being taken off for work.

[6] For an examination of women facing discrimination in another non-traditional role, bullfighting, see Pink's (1997) *Women and Bullfighting: Gender, Sex and the Consumption of Tradition*.

[7] While initially used to describe the 'systems of exchange and circulation' in the life sciences, especially with regard to the development of pharmaceuticals (Haraway, 2012, p. 10), biocapital is a nod to Foucault (2008), p. 139) 'biopolitics'.

[8] There have been efforts to introduce positive reinforcement-based training methods. See below (paragraphs 'There are viable alternatives…' through '…time constraints from understaffing', this section) and Chapters 9.1 and 9.2, this volume, for details.

[9] Except for mahouts at Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge, according to Mumby (2019), participant observations (2019), and Tiger Tops mahout group and Vidanta interviews (2019).

[10] Except for the necropsy of a single leopard undertaken by Saroj and the government staff.

[11] More than 40 rhinos died in the year following fieldwork for this study, and many were not necropsied due to a lack of facilities, training, or refrigeration (Mandal, 2019; Vidanta interviews, 2019).

[12] Paudel's name and identifying information are used with her permission. As a local community leader and activist, it was important that her voice be identified.

[13] This information comes from INGO3 promotional materials, social media, and interviews with NTNC staff including pseudonymized personnel. Other interviewees are cited as needed. Following the interview process, Georgia Lewis (a pseudonym) withdrew consent to have her interviews included in this volume. We discussed the potential implications of the author relying solely on publicly available data for descriptions of Lewis's activities. In the end, Lewis decided to withdraw her interview data, and thus details included here are drawn from publicly available information, Lewis and her NGO's social media, and associated promotional materials. These materials are cited in the text using the INGO3 pseudonym and date but have been removed from the reference list for anonymity.

[14] Lewis and INGO3 are featured in a documentary movie following their work in Nepal. This film earned several award nods, according to INGO3. Sadly, there are concerns regarding this film from those who were featured in it (Raja and Thomas interviews, 2019). According to elephant owner Raja, he had no idea he was being filmed for use in a documentary, and he did not give consent to use his image or information in the film (Raja interview, 2019).

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7 Privately 'Owned' Tourism Elephants

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Abstract

The ways in which various organizations care for elephants in Nepal depends greatly on their organizational ethics, and the personal motivations of those involved, and the stories they tell themselves and others. The social facts and cultural practices which exist in Nepal may limit the ability of those who seek to practise conservation of endangered species and get in the way of positive change. This chapter will begin to connect the study of elephant organizations through the lens of cooperation towards a common goal.

The United Elephant Owners' Cooperative runs the elephant tourism business in Sauraha, and its story has never been told. This chapter introduces the elephant owners, their cooperative, and the single owner who refuses to join. An examination of their discourses and practices, as well as how their relationship with other organizations impacts elephant health and welfare follows.

While the government is the main employer of captive elephants and mahouts in Nepal, at any given time an additional 50–60 elephants reside in the private hattisars of Sauraha (Brown, Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019).[1] These hattisars are owned by hoteliers, restauranteurs, and a variety of other community members. Typically living alone or in pairs, these elephants serve as tourist conveyances through the buffer zones of Chitwan National Park (CNP). This chapter contributes a unique perspective on elephant use in Nepal, as the story of the cooperative's origins and its evolving practices has never been told. Thanks to a long-term working relationship between the author and

several elephant owners in Nepal, they were willing to share their stories here. Not all these stories agree upon the 'facts', however, and some directly contradict one another.

The United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC)

Prior to the early 1900s, captive elephants' use and care in Nepal was regulated by the monarchy (Krauskopff and Meyer, 2000 in Locke, 2008; Locke, 2011a). Thus, when elephant tourism began, few regulations existed regarding the use and care of these individuals (Rao and Gairhe interviews, 2019). Safari elephants spent their days under a howdah packed with as many tourists as could squeeze in, travelling back and forth through the buffer zones of the national park (Rao and Gairhe interviews, 2019). Each lodge would provide its own elephants for these tours, which left from the hotel property – some of which are 5 km from the national parks, adding to the length of elephant and mahout workdays. These safaris continued until every guest, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, was accommodated (Rao interviews, 2019).

According to Rao, former National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) project manager, hotelier, and elephant owner, privately owned elephants were not that common when CNP was new. The cost of an elephant was prohibitive, however many community members saw the few owners getting rich and wanted to participate but lacked the cash to 'buy in'. Some people pooled their money and bought or rented 'shares' of elephants. In the early years, there were no established prices for these tickets, so owners could vary costs in response to demand or the ethnicity of the riders (Rao and Gairhe interviews, 2019). To combat this disorganization and competition, two separate groups formed which loosely united owners and provided an equal cut of the profits as well as mediation for disputes (Rao interviews, 2019). These groups began to actively recruit non-elephant owners, pressuring them to buy elephants to increase their numbers (Bandhu and Raja interviews, 2019).

Rao felt that combining the two organizations would make better business sense. He approached the leader of the competition and together

they formed the 'first elephant cooperative in the world' (Rao, Gairhe and Gwala interviews, 2019). Eventually, all private owners, save one, in the Sauraha area joined the new United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC). This allowed the cooperative to divide hotel guests among the (then) 54 member-owned elephants, allegedly cutting down on the number each elephant was required to carry (Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019). Elephant–mahout pairs were assigned by cooperative staff to each gate, and only the number of pairs needed for that day was asked to report for duty. All these teams cycled through rides over time, which allegedly ensured equal profits for all owners (Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019). Cooperative membership was not required, yet every elephant owner in Sauraha – save one whose story will be shared later in this chapter – chose to join (Raja and Rao interviews, 2019). One reason cited for this large-scale cooperation was the fact the cooperative guaranteed a steady income stream without the stress of racing for the gates. Another unique characteristic of the UEOC was the collection of monies from owners' shares to maintain an 'emergency welfare fund', which covered costs associated with emergencies or accidents to guests or local community members (Vachan interview, 2019; Gwala interview, 2020).

When not on safari, both privately owned and government elephants previously spent most of their time chained in fields without shelter, and one of the first requirements of the original cooperative was the construction of roofed stables (Rao interviews, 2019). Another positive change was the discontinuation of punishment tools such as boards with exposed nails that were used by mahouts to force elephants into motion. Other tools, such as the *tengari* (a style of axe) or the traditional *khurki* knife (a curved metal tool that resembles a machete), were formerly used to 'beat and slice' the elephant when she did not obey, according to Rao, and the blood and the elephant's pain were obvious. The cooperative declared that only the flat side of these tools could be used for striking. When I mentioned to Rao that I observed numerous drivers beating elephants with the sharp side of the axe, he told me that this was simply 'not possible' (Rao interviews, 2019). These caregiving rules, and their disregard, will be discussed in following chapters of this volume.

According to Rao, other advances piloted by the UEOC included moving the mahouts into housing near their elephant co-workers, and having tourists mount the elephants at the gates near the forest instead of at each hotel. This change in loading areas cut down the amount of time elephants were carrying guests and was an attempt to make their work easier (Rao interviews, 2019). As demand for rides grew, tourists faced stiff competition to get tickets. Owners and mahouts also competed, rushing their elephants to be the first at the gates to ensure a full day's profits. Now that the profits are equally shared (see above), this race has ended. According to Rao and other owners, elephants now shared the walk to the safari gates with other elephants (and without guests on their backs), promoting their well-being, and their working hours were shortened (Rajesh, Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019).

With the advent of the owners' cooperative, other changes in veterinary care and husbandry occurred. Scheduled deworming and increased veterinary care became more common and the diets of captive elephants expanded to include salt, molasses, and vitamins – all necessary, according to Rao (Rao, Gairhe, Sama and mahout group interviews, 2019). The UEOC can purchase sugarcane, rice, and straw in bulk to ensure better prices and provide a reliable source of food for their members' elephants, which many feel has increased their overall health (de Vries, 2014; Rajesh and Rao interviews, 2019; Gwala interview, 2020).

When asked how they know what constitutes the 'best care' for their elephants, every owner participating in the current study deferred to the mahouts as the primary caregivers for elephants, explaining that mahouts bear all responsibility for keeping elephants healthy and happy. Ravi Saroj, the NTNC veterinary technician, felt that mahout–elephant bonds are getting stronger over time. He felt that mahouts 'love elephant [*sic*] better now than before', and have realized that when it comes to elephants, if 'you treat them better, they will treat you better' (Saroj interviews, 2019). However, this discourse does not always align with current practices.

UEOC gate assignments

What may surprise some visitors to CNP is that each elephant is assigned to a gate depending upon the level of danger/difficulty that may be faced by guests (Vachan interviews, 2019). 'Reliable' elephants are sent to Gate C, where they are ridden by people with physical difficulties, the very young, and the elderly. Gate B is assigned to elephants labelled as 'medium' difficulty. Those elephants deemed troublesome, dangerous, or hard to control go to Gate A, where guests in 'good health' are loaded. Some elephants are sent to Gate A because there is 'a lot of motion' when they walk, and guests might be shaken up (Vachan interviews, 2019). Several of these unevenly gaited elephants suffer from foot, hip, and other joint deformities or injuries (see Chapters 5 and 9.2, this volume). According to Vachan, the reason this distribution of elephants is not publicized is because he felt guests would all demand to be taken to Gate A to experience the more exciting elephants.

Former cooperative leadership

'Dahal' is the immediate past president of the elephant owners' cooperative, and current president of the Sauraha Regional Hotel Association. During his tenure in the UEOC, Dahal claims he changed '90%' of the things they were doing. In his opinion, owners were too focused on money, and elephants forced to participate in safaris up to nine times daily. He felt that since there were people, including animal rights activists, concerned about the number of safaris undertaken each day, the UEOC should cut back to twice a day, morning and evening – with a maximum of four people on each elephant. Unless, he added, there were a lot of tourists. Then the elephants should be limited to twice in the morning and twice in the evening. Unless, he says, there is a festival, and then more rides should be allowed. He admits that during the busy times of year, elephants are still required to perform up to nine safaris per day (mahout group and Vachan interviews, 2019; personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019).

Dahal brings up a logistical issue with limiting elephants to two riders at a time – the cost for each rider would have to go up significantly. Park entrance fees are charged per elephant and cutting down on the number

of riders per safari increases the number of elephants needed, and likewise the number of entrance fees due. Raising safari ticket prices would then be necessary to ensure owners generate enough income to cover their expenses. One of these expenses is appropriate shelter, which Dahal – like Rao before him – claims was a requirement added during his presidency (Dahal and Rao interviews, 2019).

According to Dahal, many of the owners say they are open to cutting back on safari rides, but things will not change if the high safari income continues. He publicly challenged those who wish to change the riding culture to come up with alternative income opportunities for locals (Putatunda, 2017). Dahal claims that he is working with INGO6 to create chain-free enclosures for the cooperative's elephants and is looking for donors to fund a private corral for his elephant.

Dahal explains that during his term, the UEOC decided that it needed to hire its own veterinarian, and now allegedly pays Dr Vidanta to perform weekly checks, maintain records, and prescribe any needed medications. According to Dahal, the cooperative also retains the services of retired government veterinarian, Dr Gairhe. According to Vidanta, he does receive a salary from the cooperative, but there are no 'scheduled' weekly checks; health care is simply provided as needed (Vidanta interviews, 2019). When I pushed Dahal about these visits, he told me they might be more likely monthly checks, or simply as-needed visits (Dahal interviews, 2019).

Dahal was vocal about his claims of improving elephant treatment during his tenure as vice-president and president of the UEOC and was cited in numerous news and travel articles speaking about the cooperative (Ways, 2016; Straits Times, 2020). One article claims that all the female elephants in Sauraha are chain-free during the day, living 'as freely as humans', and that questionable calf-breaking techniques are no longer used in the area (Putatunda, 2017, n.p.). This training, however, is regularly observed by outsiders at the breeding centre (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Locke, 2011b; participant observations, 2017, 2019 and 2021).

Dahal, like other past presidents, claims to have discontinued use of the metal bull hook, and says that all the captive cooperative elephants are 'healthy'. Older elephants are said to be retired and allegedly spend

their days grazing or resting in their stables with mahouts. However, neither myself nor any interlocutors in the current study could find any of these private, retired elephants in Sauraha (Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019; personal observations, 2014, 2017 and 2019). When asked, Dahal explained that these elephants are 'sometimes' 'sold to India' instead (Dahal interview, 2019).

When asked about his public claim that all female elephants are chain-free during the day (Putatunda, 2017, n.p.), Dahal tells me that they have 'only a small chain', 'a normal chain they could break', which is 'not really a chain' at all. Some, he says, are tied with only a rope. When I mention the fact that every elephant but two that I have visited has been chained, he says he simply can't enforce the rules – and he can't afford to build a chain-free corral for them all. He also suggested people take up issues with the government, claiming that the government is ultimately responsible for implementing change (Ways, 2016) – despite his claims to the contrary regarding the power of the UEOC during his interviews with the author (2019). Dahal is quoted as saying:

> The animal rights groups constantly accuse private elephant owners of cruelty. Yet it is us who have made elephants chain-free and have introduced cruelty free elephant training. The government elephants are still chained and use traditional breaking in methods. We challenge them to deal with the government directly. But they don't, because the government refuse [*sic*] to deal with them directly. So they keep coming back to us.
>
> (Ways, 2016, n.p.)

Dahal's statement was echoed in interviews with other owners. They feel that the government should be required to offer access to more parts of the buffer zone and national park to support private owners (Vachan interviews, 2019). Some go as far as claiming that if the government really loved elephants, it would grant access, or move the elephant entry gates closer to the main hotels (Vachan interviews, 2019). Others felt that one of the major issues was the corrupt government not letting the money made on park entry fees trickle down to where it is most needed (Kipu and Saroj interviews, 2019).

The UEOC today

‘Mr Soti’ ascended to the UEOC presidency in early 2019, after serving in numerous other UEOC roles. He describes himself as ‘different’ from other owners who are ‘rich’ men, in that he has had to struggle to send his three children to school. He explains that having an elephant is important if one wants to have ‘power’ in the hotel business and remain competitive and describes himself as a ‘lucky man’ since he has been able to ‘work with’ elephants for the last 15 years (Soti interviews, 2019). Soti feels that he ‘understands elephants’ and wants to make a difference in the way tourist safari rides are conducted. Elephants, he explains, are individuals like people and should be treated as such. Some are friendlier than others, but they all have their own ‘habits’. Some elephants are ‘honest’ and can be left unchained, while some are ‘naughty’ and need to be restrained (Soti interviews, 2019). Soti freely expresses his ‘love’ for his elephants and explains that they are ‘sentient’ ‘family’ members, just like his parents. This family-type relationship, according to Soti, is the reason elephants are so deeply tied to his culture and why he takes such good care of them (Soti interviews, 2019). This sense of interspecies kinship has been well described in academic literature from around the globe (Charles and Davies, 2011; Harris Interactive, 2011; Tipper, 2011; Charles, 2014), even between humans and sacrificial animals (Govindrajan, 2015). Interspecies kinship is based on ‘affinity, not consanguinity’ (Sahlins, 2013, p. 11), and results from a sense of belonging to one another (Edwards and Strathern, 2000, p. 149). These kinships do not always result in lasting positive welfare for animals (e.g. Govindrajan’s (2015) sacrificial kin), as will be demonstrated in this and following chapters of this volume.

Soti has plans to protect his kin and wants to make changes within the owners’ cooperative. He would like to see what he calls a ‘proper doctor’ (veterinarian) hired exclusively by the elephant owners’ cooperative; one without ties to the NTNC or government (Soti interviews, 2019). In addition, Soti acknowledges that there are mahouts who continue to beat and mistreat elephants and says he would like to end this practice. Like other presidents interviewed for the current study, Soti claims to desire an improvement in the lives of elephants through a reduction of the number of safaris offered each day and by implementing a weight limit for riders.

In addition, Soti feels that good nutrition is key to longevity, and because the government owns all the good elephant-grazing areas, it needs to offer up some land for riding and grazing. Provisioned nutrition could also be improved, and Soti wants to add more rice to elephant diets and better access to fresh water. Life insurance on elephants is another key 'desire' on his list of goals, as is the oft-repeated desire to relocate stables closer to the tourist gates. This would decrease the elephant rush hour traffic following the last safari of the day, and the number of cars elephants must face (Raja, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Of course, these same goals have been proclaimed by previous presidents and Soti may simply be listing items which he thinks I would appreciate hearing as someone interested in elephant welfare.

Soti has implemented several changes since my last visit to Sauraha. He has installed closed-circuit cameras in the loading gate office, and there are now signs at the safari gates with clearly stated prices. These prices are dependent upon one's nationality: Nepalis pay 1250 Nepalese rupees (Nrs), nations in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) pay 1750 Nrs, and other nationalities pay up to 5000 Nrs (around US$50). Placing these signs at the entrance gate ensures that drivers – or owners – don't attempt to charge more for their safari and is meant to create a feeling of trust for tourists. But, Soti adds, if 'you don't check the price that is your fault' (Soti interview, 2019).

Owners' thoughts on the future

Owners and veterinary staff seem divided on the future of elephants in the Sauraha area. A commonly heard refrain was that if elephant rides stopped, tourism would also (Rao, Pabin, Saroj and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Others worried that without elephants, there would be nowhere for older generations to visit and pay respects to these representations of Ganesha (Vidanta interviews, 2019). Some liked the idea of Sauraha as a 'destination' area for elephant-free tourism, explaining that the area was getting a 'bad reputation' for the rides, but early in my research none were willing to commit to stopping them (Raja, Rajesh and Vachan interviews, 2019; see Chapter 10, this volume). The first step, said one, is

to sustain the business while improving elephant nutrition, mahout training (to decrease beatings), and the use of wooden instead of metal training tools. Another suggested earlier ages for elephant retirement and subsequent moves to a sanctuary situation (Vachan interview, 2019).

One of the issues impacting communication between the cooperative and welfare advocates is the large gap in perspective – perhaps owing to their very different definitions of what constitutes appropriate care for elephants and mahouts (see below). Owners felt that they were better understood by representatives from larger international organizations but stated that everyone is welcome in the area if they do not cause trouble which impacts tourism (Rao, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019). One of the complaints owners voiced towards safari-ending advocates was that these advocates did not offer a viable alternative which would ensure continued income (Rajesh, Rao, Sama, Vachan and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Owners felt that without safari rides, they would be unable to afford to feed elephants and pay mahouts (Pabin, Rajesh and Vidanta interviews, 2019).

The UEOC and COVID-19

As touched upon in Chapter 6 (this volume), when COVID-19 spread across the globe, some activists jumped in to take advantage of the perfect opportunity for fundraising, bringing in thousands of dollars in the name of feeding starving, privately owned elephants in Sauraha. In March and April of 2020, Dahal and Soti took to the press to decry a shortage of grain and other nutritious food for elephants due to the lack of tourists during the COVID outbreak and its subsequent lockdowns (Acharya, 2020; Online Khabar, 2020). According to the report, elephants do not have access to fresh grasses since there are no tourist rides through the buffer zone of the national forest. It is during these rides, according to Bhattarai, that the elephants would typically graze, and Bhattarai was worried that elephants would begin to starve without them (Online Khabar, 2020). The government of Nepal opened sections of the community forest to these elephants at the request of private owners, but quickly reversed this decision (Soti PC, 2020), citing a

concern for disease transmission from captive to wild populations, among other reasons (Online Khabar, 2020).

The cooperative then requested that it be allowed to have grasses collected from the national park and claimed that the national park management was harvesting and disposing of grass rather than offering it to elephant owners (Acharya, 2020; Online Khabar, 2020). When contacted in June of 2020, these owners denied any need for assistance, reporting in emails that while income was severely reduced due to a lack of tourists, elephants were now free throughout the day, and able to graze and consume browse for longer periods of time (Bhattarai, Gautam and Soti PCs, 2020). They were still hoping that forest grazing would be reinstituted to provide a better variety of fresh browsing opportunities for their elephants (Soti PC, 2020). According to the chief conservation officer of CNP, it is the responsibility of the private elephant owners to provide food, but in an emergency, he claims the government will step in to help (Online Khabar, 2020).

According to Gautam (interview, 2020), INGO6 reached out to elephant owners in Sauraha to offer help during the pandemic but was told that there was no need. The staff at Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge, however, accepted help from INGO6 to purchase food and supplies during the pandemic (Gautam interview, 2020).

Citing a lack of tourist income, ten of the elephants rented from foreign owners were returned in the spring of 2020, and at least eight elephants subsequently left the area during summer and autumn – many heading for sale in India (Chitwan Post Daily, 2020; Brown, Randy and Thomas PCs, 2020). Numbers are difficult to confirm with owners, given the illegality of these sales (CITES, 1973). In addition, one NTNC elephant died of a vaginal prolapse, and two government elephants died of tuberculosis (TB) (Brown, Gairhe and Vidanta PCs, 2020). While parts of Sauraha and CNP reopened to tourism in July of 2020 (Taraswin and Thomas PCs, 2020), tourism numbers have not returned to normal.

Perspectives on the elephant cooperative

Some elephant owners and non-owners report that the care of elephants has improved since the inception of the cooperative, including a change from focusing exclusively on money-making to an increased concern for elephant husbandry (Rao, Bandhu and Vidanta interviews, 2019). In addition, they felt that the elephants get more of a rest now between safari rides and have shelters which provide a break from direct sun (Bandhu, Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Veterinary staff felt that the formation of the cooperative helped spread the load around, so that the hotel's elephants don't have to carry every guest (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019).

While the husbandry of elephants may have been improved since the inception of the UEOC, the welfare of those humans concerned with elephant health and welfare has not. Outsiders described the UOEC as a 'mafia' organization run by a 'bunch of thugs' (Randy and Smith interviews, 2019). One young activist who spoke out against the use of elephants in tourism told me he was threatened with death (Taraswin interview, 2019), and the head of an international non-governmental organization (INGO) says he was 'scared for my life and my staffs life [*sic*]' (Smith PC, 2019). Nepalese leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that members of INGOs have been targeted for beatings or death, and NTNC staff were instructed not to associate with certain INGO employees, or they would also face abuse (Gwala interviews, 2019 and 2020). To non-Nepalese, I am certain these descriptions create a sense of concern for the 'unethical' behaviour of Nepalese elephant owners. However, could this be a case of people inhabiting a 'different moral world' (Laidlaw, 2010, p. 158)? While the interlocutors above felt that any behaviour which kept them from advocating for elephants was the result of mafia-like behaviour, to the elephant owners who are facing the loss of a very profitable income stream (one which is intimately tied to their religious icons; see Ramanathapillai 2009, p. 29 and 31), it may seem as though their belief system is under attack by outsiders (Vidanta interview, 2019). While a sense of cultural relativity is, for some, a questionable anthropological practice (Brown, 2008; Paleček and Risjord, 2013; Jarvie, 2015; Kohn, 2015; Baghramian, 2019), some perspective-taking of the beliefs of others is needed to find a common

language through which to positively impact change. One option may be to embrace Haraway's (1988) 'situated knowledges', in which one accepts that objective disengagement is impossible. Rather than seeking an objective, stable truth and deriving power from 'being right', we might strive instead to accept that knowledge, truth, and reality are all being actively constructed and co-constructed. Critical reflection of one's vantage point is vital, as is finding others willing to share their 'partial perspective' (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). After all, Haraway (1988) explains, reality is born of these community interactions.

Community responses to the UEOC

The Chitwan National Park Nature Guide Cooperative has now withdrawn any support of elephant tourism and explains that private elephants are under a 'lot of stress' (Aadita, Naresh, Raj and Paudel interviews, 2019). Guides and local community members would like to see all riding activities ceased, and alternative (non-elephant based) money-making opportunities and sustainable development initiatives brought into the area instead (Aadita, Brown, Naresh, Pabin, Paudel, Taraswin and Thomas interviews, 2019). Guides felt that their voices were not being heard by the elephant cooperative and have publicized their city-wide decision not to support elephant rides; some are demanding an immediate end to safaris (Naresh, Paudel and Raj interviews, 2019). Others took a more moderate approach, acknowledging that things are changing, but must proceed slowly or elephants will find themselves suddenly out of work and in worse conditions (Paudel interviews, 2019). Some guides expressed concern for what they called 'torture' endured by elephants on safari, and a desire for elephants to have a choice in how they spend their days (Aadita and Baideni interviews, 2019). They felt that if people really 'understood' elephants and their importance in nature conservation, there would be no riding (Aadita and Baideni interviews, 2019).

The UEOC is connected to the national park in an important way – most of the funding for CNP comes from tourist entry fees, and elephant safaris are a big money-maker for the park (GoN, 2015; see Chapter 4, this volume). For this reason, some people see elephant-backed safari and

the associated tourist attractions, such as the breeding centre discussed in prior chapters of this book, as important 'conservation activities', feeling that this income greatly benefits wildlife in the area (Yadav, 2003; Gairhe, 2012; Rao interviews, 2019). In fact, one group which regularly visits the area admits that they still ride elephants while publicly promoting wild elephant conservation (Jones interviews, 2019 and 2020). However, some interlocutors expressed concern that the hotel owners benefit more from the community elephant rides than the community does (Kipu and Raja interviews, 2019). They felt that funds from admission tickets to protected areas do not make it back to the community they purport to fund, an impression supported by academic literature (Bookbinder *et al.*, 1998; Sullivan, 2006; Puri, 2019).

Other issues

Some interlocutors explained that elephant owners do their best towards keeping elephants in 'good health', since these elephants are an 'investment' and 'if elephant dead, no money [*sic*]' (Raj interview, 2019). However, the true cost of feeding and caring for these elephants is a well-guarded secret among Nepalese owners (Brown, Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019; Gwala interviews, 2019 and 2020). Some non-Nepalese participants in the current study – elephant rescuers or NGOs – calculated a minimum of at least US$6500 annually per elephant for high-quality food, on top of mahout salaries, mahout housing, health insurance, etc. Total maintenance costs may run upwards of US$19,000 annually (Bames, Brown and Thomas interviews, 2019; Bames, Brown and Thomas PCs, 2020). The few owners who will speak publicly on the matter have stated that they pay between US$8000 and US$12,000 per year, per elephant (Kumar, Randy, Rao and Thomas interviews, 2019; Mandal, 2020). As noted in Chapter 6 (this volume), these costs do not include mahout insurance, and mahouts at these facilities are paid peon wages while performing nearly triple the workload of other peon-level employees (the lowest income tier in Nepal) (Yadav, 2003, p. 28).

Safari *income* is another closely guarded secret. Some owners claim that they make US$2000 per month for three elephants, and others around US$1000 per elephant per month (Kumar, Rao and Vachan

interviews, 2019). According to a 2014 report, each elephant was bringing in US$1250 monthly (de Vries, 2014). While the actual amount varies depending upon who is speaking, there seems to be agreement that the income from elephants appears to be dropping while the cost of purchasing elephants rises.

Part of the reason for this secrecy lies in preserving the value of this 'lively capital' (Haraway, 2008, p. 46; Rajan, 2012). Businessmen are keen to protect their investment, and one way to do so is to ensure no one really knows how much income is derived from tourist safari. Those owners who are willing to discuss elephant sales prices often ask the same amount they paid to acquire the elephant, even if decades have passed since the initial purchase (Rao and Vidanta interviews, 2019). The NTNC veterinarian attempted to explain the owners' practice of pricing any elephant higher than her original cost; he explained that it is simply a matter of cultural perspective. An owner with a non-working elephant does not see it as money 'not coming in', but rather as 'money lost'. This difference in Western and Nepalese perspective has been a stumbling block for several NGOs interested in retiring elephants in the area. According to Vidanta, Nepali owners may simply not want to sell, but rather than just saying no, they will put forth an exorbitant price when asked. Another stumbling block has been a lack of experience among Westerners surrounding the need to negotiate prices. Vidanta explains that it is customary to haggle, especially on 'items' like elephants, for quite some time before coming to an agreement. Instead, the Western NGOs simply asked for a price and walked away when it was too expensive. Vidanta suggests that NGOs should continue to request lower prices, even if it means returning frequently to a stable over a long period. Eventually, he says, the price will go down.

Public relations

An additional problem affecting perceptions of the UEOC is that of the annual elephant festival in Sauraha each December. This festival includes a beauty pageant, races, polo, and football matches (Brown, Vachan and Vidanta, interviews, 2019). While even the cooperative leadership team admits that the festival doesn't bring in the numbers of guests that are

cited in marketing for the festival, there are still many members who want to see the practice continue (Vachan interviews, 2019). Some owners admit that festival times are hard on elephants, with a rise in the number of public safaris per day, elevated stress levels resulting in more beatings, and government officials demanding rides for themselves and their families (Rajesh interviews, 2019). The annual protest over the festival gained international attention in 2019, as more than 50 international organizations signed a petition asking that the festival end. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) released a video showing cruelty to elephants, and at least ten companies ended their sponsorship of the event, while protestors led by Nepalese activists carried signs and marched against the event (PETA, 2002; MyRepublica, 2020; Straits Times, 2020; Paudel and Taraswin PCs, 2020). NGOs offered to provide an extra picnic for the elephants in place of the football games, but their offer was declined (Bames interviews, 2019).

Creating adversarial relationships is not the way to solve conflicts over elephant treatment, explains one of the non-violent protesters (Taraswin interviews, 2019; see also Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). Typically, organizations use social media and word of mouth over outright protest, as they believe that building communication and focusing on smaller positive changes to improve welfare for elephants is the way forward (Paudel and Taraswin interviews, 2019). One activist explained that they would like to find a solution that will be beneficial for the owners, while protecting the elephants (Taraswin interviews, 2019). However, protesting at the annual festival is necessary to bring international attention to ongoing cruel practices (Paudel and Taraswin interviews, 2019).

‘Rudra Raja’, Independent Owner[2]

Rudra Raja is the unique elephant owner mentioned in the previous section – the solitary holdout from membership of the Sauraha elephant owners’ cooperative. Raja explained that he ‘likes to make his own decisions’ and doesn’t want to be a small part of a big group, but rather

make a name for himself. The current president of the cooperative offered Raja a post in the UEOC to get him to join. Raja refused, but reports feeling repeatedly pressured to join when he first began buying elephants. Now, the cooperative lets him do his own thing.

Interested in expanding from his handicrafts and canoe businesses more than a decade ago, Raja decided to purchase an elephant and chose a young bull named 'Dhonu Gaj' (see Chapter 9.2, this volume). According to Raja, he had no elephant experience and did not realize that a bull elephant might require different handling from a female. He purchased the bull and began participating in the tourist safari business. Raja continued to expand his herd and purchased several female elephants. According to Dr Vidanta, NTNC veterinarian, these elephants did not do well. Unclear on proper elephant husbandry, Raja explains that 'big animal' can result in 'big mistake'. He explains that he had no idea how to care for them, and three of his elephants died. Dr Vidanta felt that Raja kept his elephants too thin – Raja thought that a thin elephant is a quick elephant who would provide a better safari ride. NTNC veterinary staff attempted to get involved in the care of these elephants, but their advice was unwelcome. In addition, Raja opted to treat a wounded elephant without veterinary assistance, and according to veterinary staff the elephant's wounds never healed. One of Raja's elephants became dehydrated after not drinking for 3 days, and intravenous fluids were prescribed. These fluids were declined, but some medication was accepted. The elephant perished.

One of Raja's female elephants became pregnant and gave birth to a female calf, Sita. This calf is one of only two juvenile elephants in the area born from a captive male – all others are offspring of wild bulls (Kharel, 2002; Gairhe, 2012; see Chapter 1, this volume). Sadly, Sita's mother Ana Kali died while Sita was still a calf. According to interlocutors, her death can be attributed to being restrained by all four feet immediately after giving birth, and then being returned to work too quickly (anonymous interviews, 2019).

Perspectives on Raja

Raja was described as a novice businessman, but an honest person (Vachan interviews, 2019). However, this same individual explains that he made an offer for one of Raja's elephants and was told the elephant was not for sale; at the same time another interlocutor was involved in negotiations to buy the same elephant (Vachan interviews, 2019), casting doubts on these claims. While one local described him as 'the worst person in town' (Vidanta interview, 2019), it seems to me that Raja could be viewed as both the hero and the villain of the elephant story in Sauraha. While his inexperience cost numerous elephants their lives, Raja admits his mistakes, and is the only owner able and willing to allow outside groups to rent his elephants off safari. He also allows other locals to sell activities with elephants at his facility (Bames, Lamb and Vidanta interviews, 2019). He appears willing to work with outside groups interested in improving elephant welfare, but whether he will embrace this help and make changes remains to be seen.

Raja has allowed INGO5, INGO3, and others to assist in the care of his elephants, but at the end of the day, he prefers to make his own decisions (Raja interviews, 2019). Raja claims he is open to communication with locals and foreigners to improve elephant care at his stable and allows visitation to any interested parties. Raja also stated that he is interested in switching to chain-free tourism, as he feels it is better for elephants (Raja interviews, 2019). Raja feels that elephants in Sauraha are 'suffering' from being kept on concrete and chained in place. He says, 'big animal gets big infections' from this practice, and sometimes owners make big mistakes. Raja would like to see all the parties interested in building a sanctuary-type facility work together, since he feels they all 'love' animals and a sanctuary would be good for both the animals and the organizations.

Raja admits that he was a novice when he started buying elephants, but says he is committed and will do whatever it takes to financially support his herd. He is currently one of the parties discussing the development of a non-riding facility with non-Nepalese advocates (Thomas and Randy interviews, 2019). Raja has since improved his elephants' nutrition and has reached out to the author and some INGOs in Sauraha for suggestions on improving the lives of his elephants (Raja PC, 2020).

Update

In 2020, Raja moved his herd of eight elephants (which included an adult female and her two female offspring whom he purchased from another part of Nepal) to a chain-free facility closer to the tourist riding gates (see Szydlowski, 2023). The family matriarch soon gave birth to a male calf sired by a wild bull, 'Saru'. Saru continues to create conflict by entering human-dominated landscapes on his way to the corral to 'be with' his family. Saru has 'released' the family several times from their corral and led them into the protected areas for grazing and socialization, and once mahouts were unable to locate the herd for several weeks. An in-depth discussion of this situation can be found in Szydlowski (2023).

Conclusions

The advent of the UEOC in Sauraha raised the living standards of captive elephants by providing them with covered stables, and those of the owners by providing steady income whether their elephant was working or not (Rajesh, Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019). It also ensured the continuation of the owners' cooperative's relationship with the NTNC through Dr Vidanta and Saroj, the veterinary technician who treats all of the privately held elephants in the area. While membership in this organization is not mandatory, most elephant owners choose to join (Rajesh, Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019). All the owners interviewed for the current study stated that they love and care for their elephant family members, but their treatment does not equate with the definitions of love and practices of care desired by welfare advocates. The following chapters will further examine this problem with the language between caregivers, owners, and advocates.

Other local stables will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10 (this volume). The next chapter (Chapter 8) is an introduction to my search for a common language of elephant care, and introduces smaller organizations interested in captive elephant care in Nepal. While not all of these organizations have been entirely successful in their efforts to

change the lives of captive elephants, two have been able to transition working female elephants into retirement at chain-free facilities.

Notes

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[2] Information in this section comes from interviews with Rudra Raja, Prakesh Vidanta and Ravi Saroj, unless otherwise noted. The potential implications of using positions and names were discussed with each, and the decision was made to pseudonymize.

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8 Non-Governmental Agencies and Their Effects on Elephant Care

© Michelle Szydlowski 2024. *Elephant Tourism in Nepal* (M. Szydlowski)
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Abstract

Numerous smaller organizations are active in elephant care and welfare in Sauraha, Nepal. Biographies of a few of these organizations will be given in this chapter to paint a clearer picture of the wide variety of groups operating within Nepal, many of whom have origins in international locations. The many differing ways in which these groups perceive themselves as caring for animals, as well as the ways these efforts are perceived by local people and other organizations, will lead to a discussion of the difficulties in getting these organizations to work together in an efficient way, and the need for a common language of care. Through an examination of promotional materials, face-to-face interviews, and participant observations, this chapter will paint a picture of several non-governmental organizations focused on elephant welfare, endangered species' conservation, and sustainable development.

The Nepalese government and the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) have already been introduced to readers, but there are several smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs) interested in the lives of Sauraha's elephants. Along with organizational biographies, the following chapters will illustrate many of the issues faced not only by captive elephants in Nepal and their caregivers, but also the organizations that focus on the welfare of these pachyderms. Individual captive elephants, the humans who work with them, and those who 'own' these endangered species are often in conflict not only with one another, but with conservation and welfare organizations. The story of the parties involved will continue through the next chapters.

The future of elephants in tourism activities is unclear, and this chapter will examine how changing the culture of elephant ownership is fraught with potential pitfalls. It will also explore why some organizations refuse to work together despite espousing common goals and (occasionally) sharing common definitions of words like 'sanctuary', 'welfare', and 'appropriate care'. By examining their stated goals, relationships with captive elephants, and the ways in which they interact with one another, this chapter demonstrates the complexity of the elephant situation in Nepal.

INGO4 and INGO6[1]

As I conducted interviews[2] and wandered around Sauraha during fieldwork, one name kept coming up in conversations with owners and NGOs in the area. 'Rohan Shrestha' was alternatingly referred to as the main agent for an unnamed animal rights group, an employee of INGO6, and a representative of US financial investors with big money to spend. I reached out to Shrestha, and he described his hope of changing the riding culture of Nepal into something 'beautiful and brilliant and win–win'. Shrestha was, during initial fieldwork for this book, the executive director of INGO4.

INGO4 is interested in 'a compassionate change to traditional practices' within Nepal (INGO4, n.d.). It is predominantly involved in lobbying to stop animal sacrifice during the Gadhimai festival – an event occurring every 5 years and resulting in the death of up to 500,000 animals, but Shrestha is also interested in elephants (Gadhimai Temple Trust, 2015; INGO4, 2020). Following a trip to Sauraha, Shrestha realized that elephant tourism could be easily transformed from safari rides to 'something better' and decided to get INGO4 involved. Shrestha says he met and built trust with the elephant owners' cooperative and was able to 'share crucial information with them' without having to 'rat out' mahouts, and the owners appreciated his input. The elephant owners could tell, he says, that changes to elephant-backed tourism were on the horizon.

These owners expressed to Shrestha that they were tired of accusations of animal cruelty from international and local welfare organizations, and Shrestha felt they wanted to make a statement against advocates by refusing to change their practices. In this way, organizations active in the area had a negative impact on the welfare of elephants by creating an adversarial relationship with owners (see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). Shrestha reached out to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) looking for support for his plan to cease elephant riding. But he was largely unsuccessful, due to the strong pushback from elephant owners to continue safaris. One international organization went so far as to tell Shrestha that Nepal was a 'lost cause'.

Shrestha continued to press the elephant owners to embrace higher standards of care, and soon felt he had made enough progress to again seek out international partners. Shrestha wanted an organization which might be interested in changing the face of tourism in Sauraha and reached out to veterinarian and research head 'Dr Argent' of INGO6. INGO6 is a UK-based NGO with offices in 14 countries (INGO6, 2020 a). Throughout its history, INGO6 has provided aid to more than seven million animals globally (INGO6, 2017). INGO6 has been involved in Nepal for several years, and one of its focus areas includes animals in tourism. According to its website, INGO6's mission is to 'create a better world for animals' through ending their suffering, influencing policy makers, inspiring people to action, and demonstrating the importance of animals to human lives (INGO6, 2020 a).

According to Shrestha, when he first approached INGO6 about Sauraha, it was not interested. But after meeting key stakeholders, INGO6's opinion changed. The relatively small size of Sauraha, the small number of privately owned elephants (relative to Thailand, for example), and the proximity to the national park made Dr Argent rethink his options. Argent began to realize that the Sauraha area was ripe for building a:

> high-profile, high-welfare sanctuary [that] will generate the urgently needed momentum to re-brand the community as an elephant-friendly destination and become a key tourism magnet for the Chitwan region, as well as Nepal as a whole.
>
> (INGO6, 2018, n.p.)

INGO6 worked in conjunction with the Intrepid Travel Group, Shrestha, and INGO4 to undertake a study on the viability of creating a ride-free community in Sauraha. That report used both literature review and interviews with 20 stakeholders such as elephant owners and hotel owners, municipal leaders, and tour operators, as well as interviews with more than 240 tourists in the Sauraha area (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). The study was aimed at improving the welfare of captive elephants, creating funding for conservation, and supporting sustainable tourism (INGO6, 2018, n.p.).

In the report, INGO6 states that more than 190 travel companies have stopped selling elephant-riding excursions in the last decade (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). While INGO6 would like to see an end to elephant-backed safari in Sauraha, it acknowledges that it cannot succeed without a model in place ensuring sustained income for owners to pay for elephant care, ongoing employment opportunities for mahouts, alternative income for community forest users' groups which rely on income from elephant-based tourism, and safety for nearby communities.[3]

According to the summary of the report, it is feasible that Sauraha could become 'the first internationally recognized elephant-friendly destination in Asia' (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). In the study, 97% of tourists wanted to see elephants in their natural habitat, and 64% of them were willing to pay up to 5000 Nepalese rupees (Nrs) (around US$50) for the opportunity (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). Twenty per cent of the respondents stated that they were willing to pay up to 10,000 Nrs (around US$100) (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). The authors of the INGO6 study claim that data from Thailand support the idea that non-riding tourism is in high demand (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). The ethnicity of the tourists interviewed is not given, and these data would need to be considered given the changing face of tourists in Nepal. If most respondents were white, the data may not adequately reflect the current reality of tourism in Sauraha (Wen and Ximing, 2008; Long, 2013; Aadita, Bames, Gwala, Pabin and Vachan interviews, 2019 and 2020).

The INGO6 plan outlined four phases of implementation for the transition of Sauraha into an ethical destination (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). Phase one included the development of a business plan leading to

emotional and financial buy-in of stakeholders. Initially, says Shrestha, individual owners were excited at the prospect of a sanctuary, and asked how to make it happen. A memorandum of understanding and collaboration agreement between the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC), INGO6, and INGO4 was created and signed by participants. However, once face-to-face meetings involving all the owners began, the group could never come to any agreements.

Phase two included building business leadership and concern for elephant welfare among key owners in Sauraha. INGO6 hired a consultant with experience in Burma and Nepal to assist with its plans. Data collection meetings between INGO6, INGO4, and owners began to discuss the prospects for a sanctuary. There was much reluctance among owners to share financial data, and Shrestha says he was 'frustrated'. Phase two also included training selected mahouts on elephant welfare and safe handling (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). I asked Shrestha for a copy of the business plan for elephant owners mentioned in INGO6's viability study, and he explained that it was confidential. He suggested I contact INGO6, because he felt that they would be comfortable sharing this business plan with me as a researcher. Instead, I was told that the plan would remain confidential because INGO6 had invested a lot into it but was having difficulty getting the owners to buy in (INGO6 PC, 2020).

In August of 2018, INGO6 took 16 prominent owners to Thailand to visit several elephant camps in Chiang Mai – one small, one medium, and one large facility – in the hopes these owners would then embrace a sanctuary model upon returning home (see Chapter 7, this volume). While the owners paid their own airfare, INGO6 footed the bill for all else, and offered what Shrestha called 'huge hospitality' (Kumar, Ra and Vachan interviews, 2019; Shrestha interviews, 2020). Nepalese informants saw Chiang Mai as the ideal situation for elephants and owners, combining chain-free enclosures with heavy tourist traffic (Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019; Shrestha interviews, 2020). Mahouts at the conservation centre received free housing, medical care, educational support, and a salary more than triple the monthly average of 1500 Thai bahts (THB) (about US$48), as well as tips (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020, p. 58). The centre also boasted a free-of-charge mobile elephant veterinary team and an on-site hospital

(Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020; Thailand, 2020, n.p.). Unfortunately, Shrestha says, the trip 'backfired in a lot of ways'. Instead of inspiring owners to embrace a chain-free facility, Shrestha says, the owners now all wanted 'their own little heaven' and personal issues such as jealousy arose. Some owners didn't think the Thailand stables were as good as those in Nepal, and several complained that the elephants there were too thin (Rao interview, 2019). Others saw the trip more as an opportunity to 'learn about elephants' and share information about Nepalese stables with Thai owners (Kumar interview, 2019). The NTNC veterinary staff, those with the most intimate knowledge of all privately held elephants in the Sauraha area, were not invited on this trip. In fact, when I mentioned the INGO6 viability study to Dr Vidanta, he had never heard of INGO6 nor spoken to them and was shocked that they had not contacted him or the veterinary technician (Vidanta interviews, 2019). Shrestha explained that as only owners can make the necessary changes, the NTNC veterinary staff was left out of the discussion (Shrestha interview, 2020).

Phase three is still in the works. This phase calls for the planning and construction of an elephant-friendly sanctuary facility and specifies the need for collaboration with mahouts in planning the styles of caretaking which will be used in the new facility. Plans also call for a state-of-the-art visitor centre (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). Phase four is the relocation of elephants to the sanctuary facility. The plan called for elephant behavioural specialists to be on site to facilitate the transfer (INGO6, 2018, n.p.). Transitioning all the privately owned elephants at one time makes sense on paper, as this would effectively end the majority of elephant-backed tourism in the area (Shrestha interviews, 2020). With buy-in from every cooperative member, and agreements that no new elephants would enter Sauraha, this sanctuary plan could change the face of Chitwan National Park into a globally recognized ethical sanctuary. However, according to Argent, construction of this sanctuary will be left up to the owners themselves (see below).

Around the same time as the Thailand trip, interest from international 'rescuers' was building in Sauraha, and several people began attempting to create smaller, individual sanctuaries (Bames, Brown, Plummer and Kumar interviews, 2019; Shrestha interviews, 2020). Shrestha says the

owners changed focus to personal projects instead of thinking and acting collectively. Infighting, jealousy, money, and power dynamics were damaging what should have otherwise been a very tight community. As readers will see in the following chapters of this book, these issues continue to plague Sauraha.

Some feel that these smaller NGOs may be causing further delay with the sanctuary plan. Shrestha, for example, feels that Westerners who purchase or lease elephants, especially older or sick elephants, are creating a commodity market. His fear is that owners will sell off sickly elephants for high profits, and then bring in more elephants from India to replace them. This may deter owners from buying into the larger plan and may cause further delays. The sanctuary plan remains on the shelf, for now. According to Argent, the engagement with elephant owners needs to be 'rekindled' before anything else can happen (Argent PC, 2020). Discussion of this plan continues in the following chapters of this book.

INGO6 published a follow-up report on elephants in tourism venues, which includes a very brief section about Nepal (INGO6, 2020b, p. 8). The INGO6 study examined factors similar to the welfare metrics used by Veasey as well as those in the current study (see Veasey, 2017; Veasey, 2020; Chapter 10, this volume). INGO6 found a slight (6%) decrease in the number of elephants living in 'severely inadequate conditions' but found no increase in elephants in 'best possible under captive conditions', despite the fact that several elephants have been moved to private sanctuaries (INGO6, 2020b, p. 36). INGO6 did acknowledge the existence of six observation-only facilities housing 13 elephants (including Tiger Tops), but incorrectly reported the name of one facility and completely disregarded another (INGO6, 2020b, p. 37).

How INGO4 and INGO6 are perceived

There appeared to be a great deal of confusion among elephant owners regarding who, exactly, was sponsoring the sanctuary plan presented by Shrestha to the elephant owners' cooperative. One owner reported that Shrestha was bringing in American investors to buy elephants (Vachan

interview, 2019). Other interlocutors reported hearing that the US government was planning to purchase every private elephant in Sauraha (Vachan PC, 2020). Some thought that it was a British charity building a sanctuary, and staff at the NTNC had never heard of the study.

None of the owners interviewed wanted to provide land for the above-mentioned sanctuary (Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019). They didn't feel ownership of the plan and saw it largely as outsiders trying to influence local practices. Instead, they saw an opportunity to expand their business. These owners wanted INGO4, INGO6, or the unnamed 'US agency' they had heard about to purchase the land along with all the captive elephants. According to Shrestha, negotiations are ongoing, as the cooperative is hesitant to offer an adequate percentage of its future profits from the sanctuary to an outside investor. INGO6/INGO4 refuses to proceed with planning until every owner and every elephant are involved, even though several years have now passed (Shrestha interview and PC, 2020; INGO6 PC, 2020). It appears this plan remains at a standstill (see Chapter 10, this volume).

Welfare activists, Western NGOs, and elephant owners express frustration at the lack of movement in instituting this sanctuary plan (Bames, Brown and Randy interviews, 2019). Shrestha is actively discouraging other entities interested in building sanctuaries in Sauraha. He feels that the smaller groups purchasing or leasing elephants in the area will cause the owners to wait for a better deal. This continues to create tension among elephant groups in the area, who want to see elephants removed from chains and transitioned to better facilities more quickly. Many argue that there will never be 100% agreement by the owners, and so the wait, and the suffering, will continue (Brown, Bames and Randy interviews, 2019). These advocates feel that forcing elephants to remain in chains just so that INGO6/INGO4 sanctuary can get 100% participation is perpetuating cruelty. Communications with Shrestha and INGO6 continued throughout the writing of this volume, and a discussion of their role in the sanctuary plan continues later in this chapter.

Part of the issue likely lies in the lack of a common definition of the words sanctuary and welfare. Local advocates desire a sanctuary where elephants wander freely, with the ability to avoid tourist exposure at will.

These advocates want the import of elephants from India to cease, and the eventual end to elephant tourism. The owners, in contrast, describe a sanctuary where elephants are available for viewing and riding, but are allowed to be without chains at least part of the day. Owners desire continued income, continued breeding and import of elephants, and long-term continuation of elephant tourism. The inability to find common ground (such as described in the INGO6 plan) means that elephants remain in their current situations.

Hotel1 and INGO2[4]

When walking down the main street in Sauraha during my fieldwork in 2019, I happened to see a new sign touting 'ethical elephant activities' outside a shop and was intrigued. I stopped in to speak with the young Nepalese woman inside, 'Mia', and she explained that she is a banking student in nearby Thandi but is interested in learning new things –and needed income in an area where good jobs are hard to come by – so she took a position at the shop. The shop features handicrafts and other goods, some of which are sent to the USA for sale at fundraising events. In addition, the store provides information on Hotel1's facility, an upscale resort, and the home of INGO2's leased elephants. For 2500 Nrs, guests can walk with Hotel1's elephants and observe them bathing in the river. During these activities, no physical contact with elephants is allowed, and the elephants are given the choice whether to be near the guests or to wander off. Profits are used to help defer the cost of elephant care.

My conversation with Mia led fortuitously to an introduction to 'Tika Kumar', the owner of Hotel1. I set up an interview and tour with Kumar and was impressed by the lush surroundings and beautiful hotel. I asked Kumar how he got started as a hotelier; he told me the key is to think big. He started his career as a waiter, and at 17 he met a Dutch group visiting Nepal. They got to talking and Tika shared his dream of making money to start a community school for the poor. They asked how much he needed, and said they weren't rich but hoped he wouldn't give up his dreams. Years later, the equivalent of US$5000 arrived from these Dutch

visitors, with a note that said he could either have a great party or follow his dreams. He went to the Netherlands for training, then rented a small hotel in Nepal. Whenever land prices dropped, Kumar bought up connected parcels. When he was finally able to create his 'dream village' at Hotel1, he paid back his sponsors, and they keep in touch. Hotel1 now boasts 30 rooms, a spa, and a vegetable garden. This hotel and surrounding property are the most expansive (and expensive) in the area.

Kumar explains that he was born into the Hotel1 community (a neighbourhood in Sauraha) and sees the need for changes. He wants to protect the traditional culture, while also educating people and generating development. In addition to hotel ownership, Kumar offers microloans to members of the marginalized Chepang community via a European family fund. He assists with the 'Hotel1 School', which he hopes will be a positive example for the area. To that end, INGO2 also supports the school, offering 6% of its profits from tourist walks with elephants. Kumar sponsors wildlife guide training, especially for women, and chairs a waste management cooperative. Kumar explains that he 'is giving women power'. Kumar says the key to his success in developing his community is involving the local government in his plans.

Kumar explains that the idea for a chain-free facility at Hotel1 started when he first met a pregnant female elephant in distress. Ana Kali's owner couldn't support her and planned to sell her to India, but Kumar says he 'fell in love'. Ana gave birth to Deepak Gaj, who contracted the often-fatal elephant endotheliotropic herpesvirus (EEHV) when he was about 1½ years old (see Chapter 4, this volume). Deepak eventually recovered and became a healthy, happy juvenile. Worried about the difficulties surrounding ownership of a male elephant, Kumar considered selling Deepak. Enter 'John Cox', an American businessperson visiting Nepal to assist with building chain-free corrals with INGO3. Cox developed a business relationship with Kumar, and after some negotiation, Cox was able to 'rent' Deepak Gaj and some land from Kumar upon which to keep Deepak. Cox continued this support for a year, until Kumar felt he could again take on Deepak's care. Because Kumar supports a business model where elephants live chain-free lives in a humane facility, Cox explained, he was comfortable creating a non-profit and building chain-free corrals at Hotel1.

While INGO2 was financing the care of some of Hotel1's elephants, Kumar was still using two for tourist safari and retained his membership in the elephant cooperative. Kumar explains that he needed to keep a few elephants involved 'with the cooperative to survive' while paying for their upkeep, which seems counter to INGO2's mission. Kumar has only partial ownership of one of these elephants, leaving him stuck using this elephant, at least, for safari. During our conversations, Kumar explains that his dream is to have all of his elephants off chains. He hopes to find a foundation to completely cover the cost of all his elephants, which he says is about US$700 per month per elephant.

Kumar suggests that if people want to see riding stop, they will need to support a solution, and he is trying to set an example for other owners. He plans to continue offering walks with elephants, kuchi-making (see Chapter 6, this volume), and other activities. While he waits to transition the rest of his herd, he is fighting to keep private tourist rides (run by the cooperative) down to twice per day. While 'big money' used to come from safari rides, Kumar says it has steadily decreased over the years and profits now equal about US$1000 per elephant, per month. But Kumar (among other interlocutors) admits that owners will always say they are losing money on their elephants, because they don't want outsiders to know how profitable the elephant business can be.

Hotel1 and INGO2: the elephants

Cox leases the elephants who live at Hotel1, out of what he describes as concern for the illegality of elephant ownership in Nepal. In addition, he doesn't want to create a commodity market through elephant purchases. In his view, leasing provides a steady income to owners, and a Nepalese person is included on to the lease contract to ensure it is accepted by the community. Cox feels that Westerners who buy elephants are risking someone just showing up and taking them away, as ownership relies only upon community acknowledgment. Cox explains that INGO2 uses legally reviewed, tight contracts for leases, which state that the owner can't buy, lease, or otherwise engage elephants while under contract with INGO2.

This agreement also relies on community members and town pride to ensure compliance, according to Cox.

Cox feels that since Kumar publicly uses the chain-free corrals and humane treatment as a marketing strategy, it offers insurance that he can't go back to chaining elephants. When asked why Hotel1 has managed to maintain chain-free corrals when others have not, Kumar explains that others just need to 'believe'. He is trying to set a good example for other owners to convert to chain-free facilities and thinks the NTNC could salvage theirs if they tried. Kumar explains that his 'elephants used to look sad', but now 'they look excited' when heading for their chain-free area.

I asked Cox if he was concerned that leasing elephants might create a commodity market for elephants in Nepal, and he said no. He feels the leases prevent that from happening by offering standardized prices. Kumar describes foreigners becoming involved with elephants in Sauraha as a 'tricky thing – white skin in Nepal say sorry to elephant, owners see opportunity' (Kumar interviews, 2019). Cox agrees, saying that when locals see him coming, they often just want his money. That is why he chose to enter a business relationship with only one owner instead of approaching the cooperative (see Chapter 7, this volume).

During the initial stages of working with Hotel1, Cox was approached by a European expat about an elephant in poor health. 'Renee' wanted to lease an elephant, 'Heena', in the hope that she could stop Heena's sale to an Indian temple. Cox helped Renee with the process, and Heena joined the chain-free herd at Hotel1. During the writing of this volume, INGO2 was able to lease Hotel1's remaining two elephants, removing them from tourist rides.

As of 2020, INGO2, 50% of which is funded by a family foundation, now pays for 100% of the care for six resident elephants, has built a kitchen for mahouts, and employs a cook exclusively for them. INGO2 pays for management staff, and Cox says that he will exclusively hire Nepalese to work there. The Subba and 12 mahouts oversee daily elephant care, and Cox feels that having Nepalese people in control makes the programme more powerful. The mahouts provide the know-how for determining diets and elephant care and have incorporated information Kumar collected on his trip to Thailand (see section 'INGO4

and INGO6' above). According to Kumar, the mahouts have expressed 'happiness' at their training, and a better understanding of how to feed and care for elephants. Cox is trying to stem the use of large quantities of rice with leased elephants, asking staff members to re-educate mahouts about using other foods. It has been a challenge since rice is so deeply engrained as elephant food in Nepal (see Chapter 5, this volume).

Elephant staff at Hotel1, says Cox, are offered health insurance, shower facilities, pension fund matching, Internet access, housing, and such items as phones. In return, Cox asks that the mahouts take part in community-building activities such as growing vegetables, raising chickens, growing fodder grass, etc.. Everyone is equal and does equal work, and he tells them they can acknowledge the caste system only outside, not in the stable. Cox explained that he pays appropriate mahout wages, and is 'kind to them, proud of them'. Because Deepak's mahouts deal with a young male elephant, they are paid more than typical mahouts due to the inherent danger. The mahouts – two for each elephant – at Hotel1 are not allowed to yell at or hit elephants and are asked to provide quality care. Cox says that the mahouts love him, and 'love the journey' they are on, referring to Cox as a parent when he visits.

Cox feels that his elephants are in paradise, given the opportunity to spend the day grazing and visiting the river twice daily. He feels that he has been successful in implementing chain-free corrals where others have failed, because he approached the situation as a businessperson. He understands that Kumar sees elephants first as a business and approached from that angle rather than as an activist. Cox says Kumar has experienced 'evolution as an enlightened human' since joining forces with Cox and describes Kumar as an intelligent man who now has 'the perfect place; [*sic*] and the perfect partner'.

Changes

Twenty-three-year-old Daxa has some form of undiagnosed leg deformity which causes her to appear 'knock-kneed'; her rear legs form an 'x'. This elephant has participated in previous studies by the author (see Chapter 10, this volume), and was listed on the 'most concerning' list provided by

INGO founders in preparation for the current study. Daxa has now joined the herd at Hotel1, and Cox says he had to pay very little to acquire her. He feels that owners are getting the message that Cox isn't going to increase lease prices. However, Daxa's leasing and moving process faced some hiccups. Daxa broke free on the first day and headed 'home', right through the electric fence. Hotel and INGO staff decided to allow for a longer adjustment time away from her former stable mate, and for ten days took her back and forth to the old stable. The staff at Hotel1 would have liked to extend the process longer but were concerned about getting her off chains to assist with her legs. INGO2 did try to lease Daxa's stable mate and keep the pair together, but she had already been sold. Daxa now shares a corral with two other elephants and has been observed lying down near them. This is a sign of developing positive social bonds (Kurt and Garai, 2006; Evison *et al.*, 2020, p. 402; see Chapter 5, this volume). According to Cox, Daxa is undergoing water exercise twice daily now, and foot soaks to treat abscesses.

If Hotel1 is as successful as Tiger Tops at becoming a high-end destination, that may encourage others to engage with a chain-free mentality. There are new Nepalese-run non-profits on the horizon, says Cox, which he hopes will take over leasing or purchasing elephants for retirement. His view is that if you love the elephants and the people, you will want locals to take over, but Cox says he will continue to serve as an advisor for Hotel1. He hasn't decided how to handle veterinary care for the growing herd and doesn't feel the current NTNC veterinary staff is able to be objective in their care, as he feels they misdiagnosed and downplayed a foot issue which turned out to be serious. Cox sees the need for a 24 hour animal hospital and thinks INGO2 may need to build one.

Perspectives on INGO2

Many of Cox's statements above appear quite neocolonial in nature, implying that by involving himself in Kumar's life the hotel owner is somehow made a better human being (Philip, 2001; Street, 2016). In addition, INGO2 appears to promote neocolonial attitudes by indicating that people from the Global North are needed to best institute positive

changes in elephant care. These attitudes may undermine local organizations who seek to solve problems, and create conflict among local communities (Sankore, 2005; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2007; Lorimer, 2010; Larsen, 2018; Shrestha interviews, 2020).

While it might be argued that transferring several elephants to a chain-free, ride-free facility is a major achievement, it has also created ripples within the community. By aligning with only one owner, INGO2 has given Kumar elite status and may be reproducing inequalities and creating barriers against greater cooperation among owners and other NGOs (Schuller, 2009; Larsen, 2018; Shrestha interviews, 2020). Elephant owners throughout Sauraha report being unhappy with Cox and Kumar (Rajesh and Vachan interviews, 2019). Some owners expressed concern about INGO2's stated goals, feeling that if it wanted to help, INGO2 would have contacted numerous owners and tried to spread the business around instead of contracting only with Kumar (Rajesh and Vachan interviews, 2019). One explained that if Westerners truly wanted to help, they would choose to support larger numbers of elephants (Rajesh interview, 2019). In addition, some questioned the motives of organizations that approach individual owners without the knowledge of the elephant cooperative (Rajesh and Vachan interviews, 2019). Others were concerned that if Cox's funding dried up, the elephants would be sold (but there is no evidence of this). There may be a degree of jealousy responsible for these concerns, since Kumar managed to hook a big donor when others did not. Kumar is described by other owners as 'very rich' and 'secretive' about his dealings with INGO2, but he was quite open with me during my research, even with the knowledge that his story would be made 'public'. One owner felt that Kumar was getting away with something by belonging to the cooperative, but still using his elephants for activities outside of safari (in this case, walks with tourists). Other issues may stem from Cox being open about his dislike of other elephant owners and his refusal to communicate with them. It may be that a lack of open communication between Kumar, Cox, and the cooperative is leading to the perpetuation of rumours. Perhaps opening lines of communication could result in the growth of positive relationships which could counteract these negative feelings.

INGO4 and INGO6 worry that in bypassing the efforts of others who are trying to create a local-run sanctuary, Hotel1 is undermining the welfare of the rest of the captive elephants in the area (Shrestha interviews, 2020; INGO6 PC, 2020). Some elephant welfare organizations are slower to criticize, feeling that getting any elephants out of their current situation is a good thing. They feel that each elephant needs to be seen as an individual, and removing even one from private ownership is a success (Brown, Crane, Randy and Thomas interviews, 2019).

Another concern is that the Hotel1 elephants, like most in the area, are not being tested for tuberculosis (TB) (see Chapter 4, this volume). Cox explained that the treatment is too hard to arrange and stated that for now they will delay testing and simply keep guests from close contact with the elephants (which is already the standard at the facility). By not testing, however, there is some concern that the health of mahouts is being put at risk, while keeping (foreign) guests safe.

One major point of contention arose when Deepak Gaj, Hotel1's male calf, was around 2 years old. Kumar wasn't sure how to handle his training and sent Deepak off to be 'broken' at the government breeding centre (see Chapter 6, this volume). Sending an elephant for breaking from a facility that claims 'ethical elephant activities' and humane care has created concern as to the validity of these claims (anonymous interviews, 2019). Cox explains that Deepak was sent for breaking without Cox's consent, and that Deepak's mother had a mental breakdown seeing the process and has never recovered.

Like most of the ethical elephant activities in town, tourists booking events at Hotel1 have been, with only one exception, exclusively white and Western (Bames, Kumar and Mia interviews, 2019). Sauraha's nature guides are hesitant to send interested tourists to these types of activities until they understand more about them, and many view any use of elephants for tourism as inherently unethical (Naresh, Paudel and Raj interviews, 2019). As mentioned above, the nature guide association has declared that it will not promote elephant-backed safari. Promoting communication between Hotel1 and the nature guide association may be key to the continued success of Hotel1's programme.

Working together?

According to Cox, Lewis of INGO3 is a regular friend and invaluable consultant, and other welfare organizations regularly communicate with INGO2. Cox says he has no problems with the other INGOs involved in Sauraha, explaining that they have different plans but successfully communicate towards common goals. They can work in the same community but choose not to combine projects. However, some NGOs in town say they have zero contact with Cox or have been banned from Hotel1's facility (Brown and Randy PCs, 2020). Some expressed concern with INGO2's reliance on 'video foot trims' (which are performed by untrained mahouts under the guidance of Lewis via phone), when local, experienced foot-care providers are available and willing to help (Brown, Randy and Thomas PCs, 2020).

When asked about potential plans for a city-wide sanctuary, Cox says he would not join in or transfer INGO2's elephants to a larger facility. He doesn't like the idea of a big (foreign) organization coming in and taking over but will support future Nepalese NGOs interested in running sanctuaries. Cox says his desire is to build the infrastructure needed to see this happen and agrees that the number of captive elephants in Sauraha is small enough to change the culture of riding forever.

A reflexive note

While completing this volume, I gave a conference talk on the complexities of NGO involvement in the elephant situation in Nepal (Szydlowski, 2020). When I was finished, I reached out to stakeholders to get their opinion on my presentation. While the feedback was generally very encouraging, one interlocutor felt that I came across as not entirely supportive of INGO2. This is not the case, but sadly my short presentation did not allow for a great deal of elaboration on any participating organizations. My desire is to see all the privately owned tourism elephants of Nepal transitioned into chain-free facilities. While I would describe the attitudes of INGO2's founders as largely neocolonial

(see 'Perspectives on INGO2' section above), I am supportive of their efforts, if not all their methods. INGO2 has successfully transitioned a large percentage (seven females and one male at the time of writing) of Sauraha's elephants to a chain-free facility, while contractually obligating their owners to refrain from purchasing new elephants. Cox is interested in building a library for the community and ensuring the success of a local businessman who is very active in sustainable development and community-building. While INGO2 chooses not to be directly involved with the larger group of sanctuary-seekers in Nepal, it has made an impact on the lives of many captive elephants and has created one successful business model which may serve as an example for others. More time and research are needed to see if this business model can survive major catastrophes, such as COVID-19, and if the owners respect the terms of their leases. I do have lingering concerns about INGO2's refusal to work with the owners' cooperative, the NTNC veterinary staff, or the other organizations in the area, as I believe cooperation is the only way forward. At the end of my presentation, the above-mentioned interlocutor suggested that her own perspective on my talk might have been coloured instead by her own previous disagreements with organizations in the area.

Conclusions

This chapter highlighted how the numerous organizations involved in the lives of elephants are often in conflict with one another. Even when I/NGO personnel agreed on desired outcomes for captive elephants, their personal and organizational procedures got in the way of cooperation.

The following chapter (Chapter 9.1) introduces INGO5, the only NGO whose founders are permanent residents of Nepal. It includes an examination of their discourses and current practices, and the ways in which INGO5 attempts to identify and address the needs of both mahouts and elephants.

Notes

[1] Information in this section comes from a series of 2020 interviews and communications with the director of INGO4 and the INGO4 website, along with e-mail communications with Dr Argent of INGO6 (a pseudonym) unless otherwise cited. These materials are cited in the text using an alphanumeric pseudonym and date but have been removed from the reference list for anonymity.

[2] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[3] Perhaps the practices used by INGO5, which are discussed in the following chapters, can serve as a model for this type of facility.

[4] All information in this section comes from interviews with Mia, an INGO2 employee; Tika Kumar; and INGO2's founder, John Cox. All names are pseudonymized.

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9.1 An International Non-Governmental Organization Case Study

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Abstract

This chapter examines the discourses and practices of INGO5, the only international non-governmental organization (INGO) whose founders are permanent residents of Nepal. Using more than three years of interviews and communications, this chapter offers a detailed biography of this organization, its practices, and the ways in which it is impacting elephant care in Sauraha. INGO5 welcomed the first elephant residents to its facility in 2019, and this chapter examines the ways in which this organization identifies and addresses the needs of both elephants and mahouts. INGO5 may be able to act as a model for future sanctuary-style elephant venues and demonstrate new ways for elephant owners to preserve income while improving elephant health and welfare.

My first contact with INGO5 came before I left for Nepal. I was doing research on elephant welfare when its website popped up. Via e-mail I requested information about the organization and asked if we could meet when I returned to Sauraha. They agreed but were hesitant to discuss their operations prior to seeing me in person. Our first visit felt extremely tense, and I wanted to discover why. As interviews continued, it came to light that there was a great deal of mistrust due to my seemingly random initial contact with INGO5 and the number of questions I was asking. According to interlocutors, many people arrive in Sauraha with one of two plans, either to 'save elephants' which often leads to negative

interactions with elephant owners, or to promote an agenda aimed at ending elephant-riding immediately without consideration for the consequences of such an action. Before agreeing to participant observations and access to its facility, a relationship of trust needed to be established. I offered participant forms, information sheets, and letters from my university as proof of my intent – but simply spending time discussing each other's objectives and getting to know one another was key to establishing a good working relationship. We needed time to become-with one another to facilitate our work together (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Haraway, 2008). This was my first experience being viewed with suspicion while doing research, but it was certainly not my last. I had not considered that organizations might feel the need to be careful with whom they shared information, and after this experience I approached further contacts with more sensitivity to their concerns.

INGO5 Biographical Information[1]

In 2014, 'Chloe Brown', an elephant keeper from France, hoped to learn more about the natural history of her charges by working with elephants in Asia. She found a small non-governmental organization (NGO) orphanage/elephant combination programme located in Sauraha, Nepal, signed on with it, and was sent to work with mahouts. Originally, she says, she thought the mahouts owned the elephants as no other explanation was given to her. After sharing long hours of hard work with mahouts each day, Brown began to realize that their lives were not easy, and their boss was not kind (Brown interviews, 2019).[2] The longer she stayed, the more she discovered about the elephants and mahouts – including who really owned the elephants. In the five months she was there, she learned a great deal and offered to return the following year to conduct elephant foot care, undertake wound treatment, and teach husbandry in return for food or payment. Only one owner, Raja, was interested and offered her 10,000 Nepalese rupees (Nrs) per month for her service (approximately US$100) – at the high end of the normal salary for a mahout.

When Brown returned the following year, she spent 2 weeks working with the seven elephants in Raja's stable. She completed foot and wound care training with mahouts, and Raja was so impressed that he offered to continue paying her and introduce her to other owners who might need her help. Over the next four months, she saw almost every elephant in town, and more owners were starting to notice that wounds were healing more quickly under her care and allowed her to expand treatments. Brown maintains records on every elephant she contacts, some of the only records which exist for the captive elephants in Sauraha.[3]

Brown returned to Nepal for six months each year but began to get frustrated that chronic overwork and lack of consistent foot care would take their toll every time she left. This return to 'traditional ways' once foreigners depart has been documented by a variety of researchers regarding animal handling in Nepal and Thailand (see Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Varma and Ganguly, 2011; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). In addition, Brown became concerned about opening abscesses to drain on elephants who would have to stand in urine, faeces, or mud all day (see Chapter 5, this volume). She started to worry that her foot treatments might instead make things worse and suggested that owners provide clean concrete for treated elephants with abscesses or allow for daily follow-up care. These did not materialize. Brown was feeling 'fed up and useless' with her current situation when she met up with a lawyer from Belgium who was also drawn to Nepal.

'Liza Jakman' had been regularly visiting children whom she sponsored in Kathmandu when someone suggested she visit Chitwan. She headed to Sauraha, and checked out several organizations purporting to help animals, then decided that her plans fit well with Brown's. Around the same time, 'Mitch Bames' was looking for a warm place to retire. Nepal was on the top of his list for exploration, so he also headed to Sauraha. On his last day, a chance encounter led him to meet Brown and his first elephant, and Bames explains he was 'smitten' by both.

These three decided to connect and form INGO5, the first permanent ethical elephant organization in Sauraha. Registered as a non-profit organization in Belgium (due to the nationality of one founder), INGO5

receives funding from several sources, including the Brigitte Bardot Foundation, private donations, and Foundation Le Pal Nature. Other income is raised by selling local handicrafts and T-shirts. INGO5 founders are aware of the discourse surrounding neocolonial critique, and that forming an NGO in an underdeveloped country with the intention of 'helping' its human and non-human residents might seem like an inherently neocolonial pursuit. Any pay-to-save animal programmes should be carefully examined to ensure they do not further marginalize populations (Lorimer, 2010, p. 320; Ganti, 2014) or exhibit a sense of 'cultural superiority' (Liu and Leung, 2019, p. 125). As mentioned in Chapter 3 (this volume), criticizing practices which community members see as good or helpful to their society can create a rift between elephant welfare advocates and local people, especially if those 'traditional' practices are labelled as violent (Lambek, 2010; Malchrowicz-Mośko *et al.*, 2020, p. 27). INGO5 founders have attempted to counteract these neocolonial attitudes and behaviours in a variety of ways, such as moving permanently to Sauraha and involving local stakeholders in decision making, facility development, and community activities.

INGO5 is the only NGO with administrative staff present year-round in Sauraha, and the founders stress how important being members of the local community is to them. They have invested with a local family to open a restaurant and note that due to their desire to work towards elephant and community welfare, they are careful not to alienate anyone or any belief system. The restaurant is not simply a way to secure income – to reside in Nepal permanently, one must obtain a business visa through a partnership with a Nepali citizen. According to INGO5 staff, when they arrived in Sauraha the government required an investment of approximately US$5000. This low number resulted in numerous Western animal welfare activists to buy into businesses with Nepalese partners. In July of 2017, out of what informants describe as concern about Chinese and Indian investments in Nepal, the government raised the number to 67 million Nrs (around US$500,000) for a new business, or 26 million Nrs (US$200,000) for investment in an existing business (GoN, 2017). Obviously, this new amount makes it more difficult for elephant advocates interested in relocating permanently to Nepal.

As locals, the founders and staff attempt to maintain positive relationships with the community. In studies of NGOs and local communities, Forbes (1999, pp. 323–324) found that the differing ways in which people identified as 'local' made a difference in the ability of NGOs to meet their goals. Labelling a view as reflective of 'local' desires is tricky (Forbes, 1999, p. 323). 'Local' nature guides, young Nepalese welfare advocates, and community members wish to see an end to elephant-backed safari but feel that their voices are not being heard (Naresh, Paudel and Taraswin interviews, 2019). Local elephant owners want to see safaris continue and earn a steady income (Rajesh, Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019). INGO5 faces challenges maintaining a balance between its founders' and staffs' own identity as locals, that of non-riding advocates, and business owners. Finding a common language which supports all locals and works towards finding common ground for elephant care is key to both this volume and the operation of INGO5 (Forbes, 1999, p. 320).

INGO5's Mission and Practices

INGO5's mission statement and primary objective are listed as:

> To improve the lives of captive elephants, their caretakers and the community in which they live … and … to achieve better living conditions for the captive Asian elephants of Nepal.
> (INGO5.org, 2019)

To fulfil these objectives, INGO5 provides support to elephants and mahouts through various activities which are listed below (INGO5.org, 2019). In addition to its primary objective, INGO5 describes its approach as 'progressive and ethically responsible' in that it works with the community and includes regular communication with elephant owners in its action plan. In addition, INGO5 is concerned about creating a commodity culture where owners try to make a huge profit from would-be rescuers. INGO5 appears to be one of the few NGOs (along with INGO2) interested in supporting both elephants and mahouts both individually and as co-workers, which Desai (2008, pp. 55–62) sees as necessary for reducing stress on elephants. Both elephants and mahouts

are marginalized communities within Nepal and recognizing that there are structures in place which actively oppress both (Coulter, 2016) is important. While the work done by these individuals varies dependent upon their species, their lives are intertwined in work which is primarily aimed at raising the economic status of someone other than themselves (Coulter, 2016). Therefore, any organization purporting to help these interspecies co-workers should be careful that its employment doesn't serve to simply reinforce the dominance of one over another (Coulter, 2016).

The success of any NGO attempting to improve 'welfare' in a country not its own must bear in mind the history of local communities with these types of organizations. Along with successful NGO programmes, many communities in Nepal have been the recipients of NGO projects which were mismanaged, delayed, or abandoned (Forbes, 1999; Roka, 2012). In addition, these projects are often undertaken without the input of local people (Forbes, 1999). Local people worried that income from NGO projects would be hidden from them, that NGO staff would act dishonestly, and feared that if they didn't appear to support NGOs then future funding would be withheld (Roka, 2012, p. 139). Another concern is that NGOs will not understand local ways of doing things or try to implement programmes with no hope of success (Roka, 2012). How INGO5 addresses these concerns in its programmes is discussed in the remainder of this section, which is divided programmatically.

INGO5 – Elephant Happy Hour

Elephant Happy Hour[4] started to give working safari elephants a break from their workday. INGO5 rents the elephant from its owner, removes her howdah, and allows her to wander. Guests offer fruit when the elephant first arrives but have no contact with the elephant after this initial offering. The paying guests then follow at a distance as the elephant goes about 'being an elephant' in the jungle. Breaking branches, digging, and throwing dirt are discouraged while on safari; but

during her Happy Hour the elephant is allowed to exhibit all these natural behaviours.

To best observe this activity, I accompanied a group of guests to Happy Hour. These guests paid 2000 Nrs (around US$20) to spend the morning visiting an elephant. I met up with other guests at the local coffee shop for a pre-tour primer. One of INGO5's staff gave a short description of elephant natural history and behaviour. A small amount of the provided information, such as the statement that elephants in Sauraha are over-bathed, is debated in scientific research (Mellen and MacPhee, 2001; Mikota, 2006; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010). Next, we discussed safety rules, signed waivers, and received a description of appropriate human behaviour in the jungle, hopped in a jeep to pick up fruit, and headed to the safari-ride gate.

When we arrived and positioned ourselves to wait for 'our' elephant, we watched the other pachyderms returning from their morning safari. One of the mahouts jumped off and headed for the restroom. As soon as his back was turned, his elephant took off running towards us. We were slightly alarmed at the several-ton individual heading straight for us, until INGO5 staff explained that that was Rupa Kali – the other participant in Happy Hours. However, it was not her day to attend, and soon her mahout discovered the error and came to collect her. It was amazing to see that she understood what was happening and took it upon herself to head our way in search of treats and breaktime. I was truly heart-broken at her expression as she was led away from us.

Shanti Kali, the elephant scheduled for today's walk, soon arrived with her mahout. We offered the fruit, but she was so eager to go into the jungle that she left much of it uneaten. The guests followed about 9 metres (30 feet) behind, and we observed her digging mud and scratching with broken branches as her mahout gleefully pointed out spiders and plants. My use of these words is quite purposeful – as in my numerous trips to Nepal I would say that I have never experienced a gleeful mahout. I do not believe that this is a cultural difference, as I have spent much time in the company of joyful people while in the country. However, even when I spent a month embedded with mahouts in 2017 it was rare to see a smile, much less laughter. I pointed this out to INGO5 staff and was told that changing the attitude of the mahout was

infinitely harder than changing the behaviour of the elephant. Mahouts spend the entirety of a safari 'controlling' their elephant – where she goes, what she does, yelling when she tries to stop, eat, or drink (de Vries, 2014; Bradshaw, 2015; Szydlowski, 2022; participant observations, 2014, 2017 and 2019). When INGO5 first started the Happy Hours, the mahouts tried to direct the elephant into standing still so visitors could get close. When INGO5 asked the mahouts to let the elephants do as they pleased in the jungle, the mahouts were concerned. They had a hard time not constantly offering commands, and allowing the elephant to exhibit behaviours that they have been told were unacceptable on safari.

There were 'incidents' in the beginning. One guide told me a story about a group of tourists who stopped in after a Happy Hour event. They were upset that for the first 30 min of the walk, the mahout beat the ground with a stick and yelled at the elephant. After that, the experience improved, but it left the guide office with concerns about Happy Hour activities. He suggested that it might be a good idea to conduct exit interviews with participants to get a better idea of the overall picture before deciding whether to support INGO5 or not. As explained above, INGO5 faced an uphill battle training mahouts to let the elephant make her own choices, and perhaps this group of tourists was one of the earlier groups.

It is important to consider that while offering the elephant a Happy Hour break, her human co-worker is not really given the choice whether to participate. While he was visibly more relaxed once out of sight of the tourist gate, this mahout must remain on duty, watchful, and in control of his elephant. This is a unique issue; Coulter describes how animal co-workers often have less agency in their activities while their humans take breaks, move around at will, etc. (Coulter, 2016, p. 143). In the case of elephant–human pairs, the opposite occurs. While the elephant is 'on break', her mahout is still tasked with her safety and the safety of guests.

This also ties into the discussion earlier in this book regarding social facts (Durkheim, 1982; see Chapter 2, this volume) and the perceived need to dominate elephants. In this case, mahouts and owners state that elephants must be dominated and submissive in the presence of tourists in order to maintain tourist safety (Cheetri, Larina and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Mahouts also believe that guests want 'clean

elephants' and do not typically allow dust-bathing, scratching on trees, or digging (mahout group interviews, 2017 and 2019). This reflects one of the key issues between those who want to institute humane management programmes in the area and existing beliefs.

During my visit, the mahout remained silent while guests offered fruit to 'his' elephant and reached for cameras to act as photographer. This mahout became a nature guide for guests in the forest, laughing and smiling as the elephant did as she pleased – which included falling asleep twice. When it was time to go, the INGO5 staff gave the mahout a 500 Nrs tip (about US$5). They provide the same amount for each mahout each time, to show them that money can be made from alternative elephant activities. In addition, guests offered tips of their own.

While this activity is certainly not without danger – for example, if the elephant got spooked and ran – I felt safer on the walk than I did (prior to my career in anthrozoology, see Note) when in a howdah.[5] Being an average-sized American, I felt quite trapped in the howdah, and felt that I would be unable to get out quickly if the elephant fell or bolted. When other guests were asked, they responded that they felt the howdah offered more protection from the danger of running into wild tiger or rhino in the jungle (Zed interview, 2019).

It is worth noting that every guest taking part in this Happy Hour was white. As discussed in previous chapters of this volume, there has been a change in the ethnicity of tourists participating in elephant activities (Aadita, Bandhu and Vidanta interviews, 2019). I asked the organizers if they noticed a higher percentage of Westerners participating in Happy Hour, and they estimate that 50% of their business is from the Netherlands and France, and 50% from other European nations and the USA. In contrast, they estimate that 90% of the tourism for elephant-backed safari is Indian, Nepali, or Chinese. One reason for this might be Chinese tourists' comfort with nature which has been intensely managed or influenced by humans (Wen and Ximing, 2008, p. 567; Long, 2013, p. 48). Chinese tourists, according to Long (2013, p. 49), have a more anthropocentric traditional philosophy. Wen and Ximing (2008, p. 567) ascribe the differences to 'western' views of humanity as separate from nature in contrast to Chinese views of human and natural 'unity'.

'Westerners' prefer to visit wilderness areas away from large human populations (Wen and Ximing, 2008, p. 577; Long, 2013, p. 48).

When asked if its business is 'taking away' from owners' safari income, INGO5 stated that most, if not all, of their guests are people who had no intention of riding an elephant when they came to Nepal. Instead of taking money away from safaris, they are serving an untapped market, and want to make that clear to elephant owners who might feel they are a threat to safari earning potential. INGO5 has done 250 Happy Hour events with 1582 guests since its inception. Sadly, this is the same as the average number of guests who ride an elephant in 3 days in Sauraha. Happy Hour may not be a big impactor of population-level elephant welfare at this point but offers instead a needed break for individual working elephants and a way to raise awareness for captive wildlife. One should consider that this has provided 250 hours that these two elephants have been allowed to remove their howdah and remain unridden, which may sound small to some, but I would guess has made a big difference to these two individuals and their human co-workers.

The impact of small changes on tourist and local behaviour shouldn't be dismissed. Einarsson (2009) found that making a change from whale-hunting to whale-watching came about slowly but organically in Icelandic villages following the buy-outs of small family fishing operations by larger corporations (p. 132). Of course, this transformation also led to the reconstruction of dead capital (in the form of fish) to 'lively capital' in the form of whales to watch (Haraway, 2008, p. 46; Rajan, 2012, p. 2). This lively capital created a new drive within the community to educate tourists (Einarsson, 2009, p. 134), thanks to the realization that whale-watching contributed to the culture and identity of the region (Einarsson, 2009, p. 135). Perhaps this type of successful adaptation of activities into an existing culture might be a model which INGO5 can use to assist in the transition of Sauraha to a ride-free destination (Einarsson, 2009, p. 136).

Other studies have shown that animal-watching activities are a valid way to influence tourism venues. Thresher (1981, n.p.) found that a live wild lion was worth much more as a safari-sighting opportunity (US$515,000) than as a hunting trophy (US$8500). Hughes, 2001, p. 328) discovered that animal rights and animal welfare lobbies

successfully influenced tourism spending and can act as a watchdog towards tourism operators. Attitudes towards and outcomes of species conservation have been positively influenced by ecotourism activities (Oglethorpe and Crandall, 2010, p. 8; Waylen *et al.*, 2009, pp. 348–349; Newsome and Hughes, 2016, p. 295; Sedhain and Adhikary, 2016, p. 58). By incorporating animal-watching, especially in less anthropogenic settings such as the jungle, INGO5 may be able to change attitudes within the local community. INGO5 is gaining a foothold as a tourist destination, and according to Tripadvisor (2023) Elephant Happy Hour has become the #1 thing to do in Sauraha.

Money from Elephant Happy Hours is kept separate from other income, so that these funds can be reinvested in items such as tips for mahouts, buying lighter howdahs for working elephants, improvements to mahout and elephant housing, supplemental food for elephants, as well as clothing, shoes, blankets, medicine, and haircuts for mahouts, etc. (Brown interview, 2019). Because Raja (see Chapter 7, this volume) provides the elephants for Happy Hour, many of the improvements at his facility come from Happy Hour income.

INGO5 – Elephant HOME

This sanctuary was built in the hope that owners would gift or sell older or injured elephants to INGO5. The home consists of a large stable surrounded by pasture in the Kumroj section of Chitwan. The staff of INGO5 has publicly committed to using only positive reinforcement techniques with elephants.[6] The stable features training walls made of metal bars, to ensure staff safety when performing health-care tasks that are not traditionally trained for in Nepal – such as treating painful foot abscesses. This is a learning experience for mahouts and elephants alike, and the training walls offer a chance for them to safely rebuild their relationship without using dominance techniques. Creating opportunities for mahouts to learn new ways to work with their elephants is a key part of the INGO5 organizational plan.

The Elephant HOME is surrounded by a double row of electric fencing, with banana trees as an extra barrier to ensure elephants stay in designated areas and protect against accidental incursion by wildlife. An agreement has been reached with neighbours, which allows resident elephants the ability to freely browse in the community forest. This allows for the elephants to eat a more natural variety of food items. In addition, the Elephant HOME includes elevated mahout housing, a kitchen for staff, dry toilets which are used to create compost, showers, and hot water. The facility is intended to function with minimal impact on the environment and demonstrate environmental stewardship. Elephant waste at the home is being used to create environmentally friendly paper products.

Mahout housing is particularly important because many mahouts in Nepal do not live with their families. Instead, they 'live' with their elephant, and often their housing is open-air and/or substandard (see Chapter 10, this volume). Mahouts working for INGO5 are provided with private rooms so that their families can visit, built several feet off the ground to ensure a safer monsoon season. As a marginalized group, mahouts are often uneducated, mistreated, and very low in the caste system (Yadav, 2003, p. 29; Hart, 2005; Hart and Locke, 2007; Varma, 2008; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020; Lipton and Bhattarai, 2014). INGO5 wanted to ensure that mahout welfare is addressed along with elephant welfare, as these jobs are dangerous and generally poorly paid (Hart and Sundar, 2000; Brown and Randy interviews, 2019). Treating mahouts with respect and offering fair wages and better housing alternatives is key to INGO5's philosophy (and is supported by academic literature; Kharel, 2002; Desai, 2008). The organization employees three full-time mahouts, one part-time mahout in training, and a local Nepalese project manager; all of whom are paid more than the standard mahout salary of 8,000–10,000 Nrs per month (approximately US$65–81). INGO5 also provides health insurance to mahouts and school fee assistance for their children, along with haircut/shave vouchers, and over 300 kg of donated clothing, so far.

Elephants who are moved to the Elephant HOME will not be used for Happy Hour or other activities but will be retired. The home is a sanctuary, with no lodge or restaurant attached to the property to solicit

visitors. People interested in visiting the facility are, however, welcome daily at no charge. When I was initially collecting data for this volume, the elephant stable was under construction, and plans were being made to identify the three female elephants most in need of assistance. In considering each elephant, INGO5 looked at her health, her living conditions, her history, and her prospects. The hope was to identify which elephants most needed rescue and could be helped at a reasonable price. Finished in autumn of 2019, the home received its first resident elephant, Idha Kali. Idha will serve as a case study in the following chapter for an examination of the National Trust for Nature Conservation's (NTNC), INGO5's, elephant owners', and elephant welfare individuals' best practices, ethics, and care (Chapter 9.2, this volume).

INGO5 – volunteer programme

This programme is aimed at animal care professionals already working in the field who wish to supplement their knowledge with hands-on experience at an inexpensive rate. Zoo professionals often visit to increase their experience or expand their knowledge of animals that they have only seen in zoos. Researchers are also welcome, but no more than two visitors can stay on site at any given time, to ensure experiences are 'rich and meaningful' (INGO5, 2020). These volunteers participate in ethology, analysis of closed-circuit TV video from the stable, daily animal care and facility maintenance, grass collection, and visitor education. Most of the researchers and volunteers so far have been French, according to INGO5 staff. This is because, as Brown's home country, that is where most of INGO5's connections exist and where its advertising has been targeted. Volunteers/researchers stay in the newly completed elevated rooms at the Elephant HOME and use the shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. These participants are asked for a donation of 900 Euros per month which includes full room and board as well as transportation.

INGO5 – work with elephant owners

One of the key differences in the way INGO5 practises in Nepal is its approach to change. Understanding that any social change takes time (Einarsson, 2009, p. 132), INGO5 approaches its mission with the understanding that working towards change in the perception of elephants, mahouts, and the use of captive animals in tourism is a gradual and ongoing process. Initially, INGO5 attempted to work with mahouts and owners to improve elephant welfare at the owners' stables. While this did temporarily increase the health and welfare of certain elephants, unfortunately these individuals were put back on safari as soon as their health improved.

Brown and Bames consider themselves part of the Sauraha community. Because they plan to remain, it is important to them to sustain a working relationship with elephant owners in the area. They feel that this relationship is only possible if they refrain from using their social media platform to spread negative news about elephants in Sauraha or show photos of chains or bull hooks. Instead, social media posts reflect the construction of the elephant home and training/treatment of their new resident elephant (see biography of Liswini/Idha Kali, Chapter 9.2, this volume), in addition to highlighting the work of staff members.

INGO5 – the future of elephant-back safari

While trying to improve the welfare of elephants and mahouts through fair wages and respectful treatment, INGO5 acknowledges that what it is doing is not a large-scale solution to the problem of animals in tourism. While it would like to see an end to elephant-back safari in the Sauraha area, it realizes the need for cessation to happen gradually. If rides were to suddenly stop, it explains, then large numbers of mahouts and their families – already a low-caste, underemployed group – would be left without any income or job prospects. Until elephant owners stop buying new elephants, and until some alternative way is widely accepted through which owners can earn money from their current captive elephants, little will change. INGO5 hopes that through the

demonstration of alternative methods for tourist interaction with elephants, chain-free housing options, tourist education, and mahout support, small changes will have lasting effects throughout the community.

Limitations and Perceptions of INGO5

When Rohan Shrestha of the INGO4 found out about INGO5's plan to build a sanctuary in the Sauraha area, he admits to trying to frighten them away (Shrestha interviews, 2020). He was concerned that if they successfully retired elephants, they would not want to give up their facility if a larger, community-wide sanctuary was built. As part of the team trying to create a single sanctuary via talks with the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC), Shrestha felt that other organizations were a threat to its success. Shrestha admits that he essentially told INGO5 that he would pull every string possible to bring trouble down upon them if they got in the way. Luckily, the founders of INGO5 are supportive of efforts towards a community-wide facility, and willing to collaborate with any interested organizations in the area. Like any organization, especially an international non-governmental organization (INGO), there are issues surrounding practice within a county not its own. For example, its status as a foreign NGO meant that INGO5 could not technically 'own' elephants, and it relied upon the community to support its right to house and care for 'purchased' elephants (see 'Update' section below).

Leasing elephants from owners

INGO5 doesn't see the leasing of elephants as a long-term solution to the situation in Nepal. INGO5, along with individuals and other NGOs, have publicly expressed concern that leasing elephants will create a commodity market relying on outside forces. Even with a contract there is the possibility that previous owners will claim rights and return the

elephant to work. In addition, if an injured elephants is leased by an organization and rehabilitated, the owner may then decide that once the elephant is healthy, she is again worth money and insist on cancelling the lease. However, other elephant welfare organizations share the same concerns about *purchasing* elephants, citing the illegality, lack of ownership documents, and ease with which a Nepalese owner could demand the return of his property.

Some Nepalese elephant owners worry that leasing elephants puts them at risk. If an owner is dependent upon the lease for income, what happens if the organization leaves Nepal? 'It is a temporary solution', says one, who explains that in his view, leasing an elephant and offering tourist activities is the same as offering rides. It may be 'more friendly' for the elephant but is still making money from their use (Pabin and Rao interviews, 2019). This sentiment was also expressed by several nature guides (Naresh, Raj and Paudel interviews, 2019).

INGO5 describes itself not as a sanctuary, but as a facility trying to demonstrate to owners that there are alternatives to elephant-backed safari; and show mahouts how to work with elephants in alternative environments or activities, while demonstrating respect for their skills. The nature guides and animal rights groups in the area have varying opinions on whether INGO5's activities are ethical (Paudel, Pabin and Raj interviews, 2019). Every Chitwan park guide interviewed, as well as some animal welfare and rights interlocutors, felt that any use of elephants for profit is the same as using elephants on safari. One guide mentioned that the only activity he would support was elephants in sanctuary that people could pay to view but not touch, so that they didn't 'suffer' (which is the model used by both INGO2 and INGO5). Other guides explained that since they hadn't had a lot of contact or experience with the alternative elephant groups in the area, they were refraining from sending any guests to them unless the guests 'insist' (Raj interviews, 2019).

Of course, this abolitionist approach to elephants' forced labour is not as simple as it seems. The complete and immediate cessation of animal use in tourism seems at first the 'moral' choice, and many animal rights advocates will tolerate only a policy of zero animal use (Regan, 1983, p. 394). Because these individuals are not legally allowed to be released into

the wilds of Nepal, and due to the fact that after decades of human involvement they may be unable to feed or defend themselves (Kleiman, 1989; Beck *et al.*, 1994, p. 278; Mathews *et al.*, 2005), there is no option to simply return these elephants to a natural state. Nor, except for one owner, is there a desire among owners to do so. In addition, there is only a single zoo within Nepal available for elephant care, and it has chosen to house only a single, retired elephant (Pokharel interviews, 2019); at this point no sanctuary exists beyond those mentioned in this volume. There is, therefore, a need to balance the interests of these animals (regarding being fed, housed, offered freedom to move around, and kept free of pain and disease) with the needs of the involved humans (regarding the need for continued employment of marginalized groups of mahouts, paying the costs of animal fodder, and housing). Elephant owners expressed concern that without elephant safaris, there would be no tourists and therefore no impetus to keep their 'property' in Nepal, feed, or care for it (Rao and Vachan interviews, 2019).

INGO5 understands that any use of elephants is viewed negatively by nature guides and local welfare advocates (Naresh and Taraswin interviews, 2019), and is working hard to change the opinions of locals, offering open visitation to its facility to any interested party at no charge. They are hoping that local attitudes will change once people see how the facility operates, with a no elephant–human contact policy. They have also been visiting local businesses to introduce themselves and offered to share their financial reports with interested parties upon request.

Some community members felt that organizations like INGO5 and INGO2 are the logical choices during the time it takes for changing societal attitudes to impact the riding culture (Cheetri, Paudel and Taraswin interviews, 2019). There are ways in which to better ensure animal welfare while allowing for use in activities. One way to do this is to allow the animal to break off the encounter at will (Acampora, 2005; Fennell, 2012), as is the case at INGO5. This and other considerations will be discussed in Chapter 10 (this volume).

Former NTNC head Rao thinks that programmes like INGO5's are a good idea but feels that it is not a self-sustaining venture since Happy Hours can't happen as often as safari rides (Rao interview, 2019). Elephant cooperative president Soti shared concerns over the safety of

humans walking with elephants in the event wildlife approaches the group. Not all those participating in these events are 'young and healthy', he says, and might not be able to escape a wild rhino. For this reason, he prefers having visitors on top of an elephant (Soti interview, 2019).

Other organizations in the area credit INGO5 founders in their desire to be a permanent part of the community, and their commitment to living in Sauraha year-round. Some other Westerners admit to being leery of INGO5 at first, worrying that they were being too nice to certain owners who had records of elephant mistreatment. It has become clearer over time how INGO5 is building these relationships to further assist elephants in the area. Working relationships with owners seem to be necessary if welfare organizations hope to purchase or lease elephants in Sauraha (see Chapter 8, this volume).

Another self-defined problem is the lack of a permanent facility. The land on which the home currently stands is used via a 5 year, renewable lease, which could one day be cancelled by the owner. In addition, there is limited space on this land, which means that INGO5 can only house a total of three elephants in its current sanctuary. It does have a plan in place to purchase a larger piece of land on which to establish a permanent sanctuary, further outside town. The current stable and housing were designed and built with the ability for disassembly and relocation, which is a benefit as it decreases funding needs or lost investment upon moving.

Update

Being registered as a foreign NGO initially presented problems. Even though Brown and Bames had a business visa which allowed them to stay in the country for unlimited periods of time, their NGO initially had no legal standing in Nepal. They relied upon the relationships built with community members to offer them protection against political or community concerns until a Nepalese NGO could be registered. The staff of INGO5 understood that they could not technically 'own' an elephant in Nepal, and ensured their residents received continuity of care from the

NTNC veterinarian. Likewise, they had to consult an elephant broker as they undertook negotiations. They have now registered as a Nepalese NGO (with a Nepalese board) and have filed elephant registration paperwork.

Prior to winter of 2019, Raja supplied elephant rentals to INGO5 for Happy Hour activities and had been a reliable partner. Unfortunately, at the end of 2019, Happy Hours were suspended, due to Raja deciding to go his own way. INGO5 continues to discuss participation in Happy Hours with other owners, but they refrained from naming these owners out of an abundance of caution. Sauraha is a very small town, and as such rumours spread quickly (Bames, Brown, Thomas and Vidanta, interviews, 2019).[7] Thanks to COVID-19 related lockdowns and the subsequent decrease in tourism, Happy Hours never resumed. Staff continues to welcome guests to the Elephant HOME (see 'INGO5 – Elephant HOME' section above).

Conclusions

This chapter examined how one INGO navigated the complex landscape of elephant care in Nepal. Through careful relationship-building, consideration for the welfare of both elephants and mahouts, and a year-round presence in the area, INGO5 has avoided some of the pitfalls faced by other organizations. While this INGO still faces challenges due to a lack of permanent land, among other factors, it is an example of a successful sanctuary-style option which might provide a blueprint for other operations.

The following chapter (Chapter 9.2) presents three biographies focused on residents of different stables under different styles of management. These biographies offer glimpses into the complex lives of captive elephants in Nepal. The first individual, Sanani Gaj, was born at the government breeding centre and now resides at the government patrol stable, where he has gained a unique reputation. Next is the story of Dhonu Gaj, the young male purchased by Rudra Raja and imported from India, who has become infamous among both mahouts and advocates in

Sauraha. Lastly, readers will meet Idha Kali. Idha's story is important as it represents a typical captive elephant life in Nepal: capture in India, sale to Nepal, use, injury, and potential for return to India. However, Idha's story ends in an unexpected way thanks to the involvement of numerous individuals and organizations including INGO5.

Notes

[1] This information comes from interviews with group founders Chloe Brown, Mitch Bames, and Liza Jakman which took place in spring of 2019. Additional information comes from the INGO's website, promotional materials, and continuing correspondence with the founders. While permission was given to use names, the author made the decision to pseudonymize all INGO5 participants. INGOs have been pseudonymized using an alphanumeric code. While references to their materials are given within the text, the references have been removed from the reference list to retain anonymity.

[2] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[3] The NTNC maintains very basic records, but these records are not regularly updated (Brown and Vidanta interviews, 2019).

[4] The term 'elephant happy hour' was coined by another visitor to Nepal. The name was used with permission, according to INGO5.

[5] I am not proud of my elephant-riding activities, which took place on my first trip to Nepal, when I was naïve to the issues surrounding elephant-based tourism. I regret my actions and have apologized to the elephants of the NTNC and those residing in private hattisars.

[6] See Appendix I (this volume) for a discussion of these techniques.

[7] The rapid spread of both information and rumours regarding INGOs, researchers, owners, and mahouts concerned me as I conducted fieldwork.

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9.2 Biographies of Captive Hatti (Elephants)

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Abstract

This chapter presents three biographies focused on residents of different stables under different styles of management. These biographies offer glimpses into the complex lives of captive elephants in Nepal. The first individual, Sanani Gaj, was born at the government breeding centre and now resides at the government patrol stable, where he has gained a unique reputation. Next is the story of Dhonu Gaj, the young male purchased by Rudra Raja and imported from India, who has become infamous among both mahouts and advocates in Sauraha. Lastly, readers will meet Idha Kali. Idha's story is important as it represents a typical captive elephant life in Nepal: capture in India, sale to Nepal, use, injury, and the potential for return to India. However, Idha's story ends in an unexpected way thanks to the involvement of numerous individuals and organizations including INGO5.

Hatti Biography One: 'Sanani Gaj'

In April of 2017 I was working alongside another researcher focused on elephant–mahout relationships.[1] I wanted to introduce her to my colleagues at the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), including 'Mr Larina', a wildlife technician. Once Larina heard that we were interested in mahouts and elephants, he excitedly said he had something special to show us. He walked us to the government elephant stable, where patrol elephants are housed. There we spotted a man walking towards the shower room. Behind him trailed a young elephant, who appeared to mimic the human's movements. Everywhere the man went, the elephant followed, including into the shower house. Larina

called the pair over and introduced them as 'Mr Gurju' and 'Sanani Gaj'.[2] Gurju instructed us to sit in a chair in one of the stables, which we did. He then handed Sanani a flower lei, and Sanani came quickly towards us. I was more than a bit disconcerted by the large tusks heading directly for my head, but soon laughed as the elephant placed the lei gently over my head and 'blessed' me by heavily dropping the tip of his trunk on me. During this event, there was no yelling or beating. There was no traditional stick or hook in sight, and Gurju used only a whistle to ask Sanani for human-desired behaviours. I was in shock, as it appeared we had found the only elephant in Nepal trained via positive reinforcement. Claiming not to speak much English, Gurju had Larina and the mahout supervisor act as translators as we sat down to talk. Gurju explained that Sanani's training came about in a very unexpected way.

Sanani is one of Nepal's famous twin male elephants, born on two separate days in November 2008 at the breeding centre near Chitwan (Thapa, 2009; Gurju interviews, 2017 and 2019). Twins are rare in elephants, and after Ram Gaj was born late on 6 November, handlers thought they were finished with the process. However, 4 hours later, Sanani made his entrance, arriving on 7 November (Thapa, 2009). The twins, named for Hindu gods, created quite a stir with tourists, and their arrival led to their mother Devi Kali being treated with great reverence and special 'care' (Thapa, 2009). Like most elephants in Nepal, Devi was imported from India, and was bred by the dominant wild male of the period, Romeo (Thapa, 2009; Gurju interviews, 2017 and 2019; see Chapter 6, this volume).

In 2020, the Nepal Rastra Bank changed the elephant photo on Nepal's 1000-rupee note. Instead of the African elephant which has been gracing the note since 1982, Sanani and Ram became the new faces of the bill (Aryal, 2020; Friedberg, 2020). Eight years in the works, the new note is part of an effort to update photos and replace foreign animals with native species (Aryal, 2020; Friedberg, 2020).[3]

Male elephants born at the breeding centre facility are destined to become government patrol elephants, and Sanani would typically have begun his training around the age of 3½ years. Due to a lack of breeding centre staff, his breaking (using 'traditional' methods; see Chapter 6, this

volume) and training were delayed until he was 7 years old and paired with Gurju. Gurju had been working with the other twin but had to leave the stable and return home for a time due to the death of a relative. When he returned, Ram had been assigned another mahout and so Gurju was paired with Sanani.

Sanani's training with positive reinforcement happened quite by accident. There was another elephant in the stable, Sundramala Kali, who violently disliked Gurju. If Sundramala heard his voice, she would attack, throw things, or try to destroy the stable. As Gurju explains, it was a case of, 'I hate you, so I hate your whole family, too.' She soon began to go after Sanani, and Gurju had to stop speaking entirely while in her presence. Trying to find new ways to pass information to Sanani, Gurju found that the calf easily responded to cues such as clapping. Gurju decided to explore other methods and began using a whistle to give commands and offering rewards (such as affection) when Sanani followed instructions. When I told Gurju that this method was commonly used in Western countries, he was shocked. Gurju had not realized that this was a method at all, he and Sanani had simply responded to the situation and adapted in the only way they could. I spent some time describing the operant conditioning methods used at zoos in the USA, and offered to connect Gurju with some elephant keeper friends once I returned home.

When our interview officially ended, Larina and the supervisor left. Gurju stayed back and motioned to my friend and I to stay. Apparently, the supervisor is uncomfortable with public communication by government mahouts and has in the past tried to limit Gurju from speaking to guests. He informed us (in excellent English) that the other mahouts teased him about his training methods. The others are convinced that dominance and beating is the only acceptable way to train, but for the most part their taunts don't bother Gurju. He explains that he and Sanani work just as hard as any other pair, and so he refuses to let it get to him.

While I do not receive much communication from Sanani himself while I am at home in the USA, his co-worker Gurju has been kind enough to keep me updated on Sanani's adventures and growth over the last 6 years. When I returned to Nepal during my 2019 research trip, I

visited them both. We sat on the grass and Sanani turned out to be an excellent conversationalist. He chuffed, blew, and rumbled while I sat chatting with Gurju, at one point making me stop to instinctually gasp as I felt a deep rumble in my chest – his answer to my interview questions.

Gurju and Sanani still rely on positive reinforcement training (PRT). Not much has changed, Gurju says, but I see that the now massive Sanani is chained by a foot in the stable. I ask if Sanani still has the freedom to follow Gurju around, and he says that when Sanani is 'off work' he can, but it is now the middle of the day. Gurju and Sanani still get teased by the other mahouts, but they continue to work as hard as other teams and have added vocal commands to their training now. Gurju explains that he 'talks sweet, talks lovely' to Sanani, and gets the same treatment in return. Gurju says Sanani's behaviour hasn't changed much over the last few years, he is still very easy to work with. Visitors have been supportive of the pair's methods, which creates jealousy among the other mahouts. NTNC staff often bring guests to show off Sanani, and these guests offer tips; this is not an opportunity afforded to other government elephant drivers.

Gurju feels that government elephants have it significantly better than other owned elephants in Nepal. They work in the forest, where fresh browse is available to them for 6 hours each day, they have regular access to the river for drinking and bathing, and are given days off. On these days off, they can spend unlimited time in the forest grazing. Government mahouts are allowed to regularly collect grass from within the park, and this grass is much greener and fresher than what was offered in privately owned stables.

Sanani is still very young, and likely won't experience musth for several years, but I ask Gurju if anything will change when he does. The mahout says that they will continue working with vocal commands, in the hope that their bond functions equally well during the eventual surge of hormones. Some adult males at the stable continue to function much as normal throughout musth, he says, while others are very dangerous and uncontrollable. I assume he is talking about the elephants, and not the mahouts. He is hoping Sanani will be one of the former, but Larina reminds me that Sanani started training very late, years after normal training typically begins, so his future behaviour is hard to predict.

I ask Gurju if he will stay with Sanani, and he says he would like them to work together for life. It is ultimately up to his superiors, however. What happens if Gurju is assigned to another elephant, I ask. Will he use the same training methods? Gurju laughs and explains that training an elephant is 'very difficult'. Positive reinforcement worked with Sanani because of his personality, Gurju explains, and is unlikely to work with another elephant. I admit to feeling a bit disappointed as Gurju described that he would train any future elephants using the traditional method of beating and dominance; he doesn't think other elephants have whatever it is that makes Sanani special.

Gurju is an excellent example of a mahout who not only cares for his elephant co-worker, but cares about him (Schrader, 2015, p. 668). Watching Sanani and Gurju it is clear their relationship differs from that of many other government mahouts and elephants. Sanani is afforded more agency (at least while he is young) to explore the camp with Gurju and to express his emotions via vocalizations and actions. His freedom of movement allows Sanani to experience a variety of substrates, foods, and experiences. It also frees Gurju from the stress of needing to be constantly 'dominant' and he appears much calmer and relaxed than the mahouts around him.

Assessing Sanani's health and welfare

Sanani, as an individual, appears to have better health and more positive welfare than most other captive elephants in Nepal. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that he is not managed using dominance-based methods (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Desai, 2008; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019; see Chapter 5, this volume). Perhaps it is because mahouts who share strong bonds with their elephant also recognize illness or injury more quickly and require less forceful methods of daily control, leading to healthier elephants (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020, p. 55). Positive bonds may also help reduce mahout injury, as those familiar with their elephant's behaviour are able to quickly respond to changes in emotional state (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020, p. 55). Job stability – keeping mahouts 'happy' and in long-term relationships like Gurju and Sanani's

– increases the welfare of both elephant and mahout (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020, p. 57).

However, interlocutors in the current study were divided in their opinions of the health and welfare of elephants housed at this government stable. Some reported that they thought the government elephants lacked access to fresh grass and free time, while others believed government elephants had long periods of grazing, and thus had more balanced diets than privately owned individuals. Perhaps this disconnect is due in part to recent changes at the government stables, where diets had evolved since my last visit. Instead of the dry grass which I saw served in 2014–2017, the elephant grass and kuchis seen on this visit were fresh, green, and plentiful.

For the most part, government patrol elephants are male. Larger than females, bulls are used in anti-poaching patrols, collecting wood and grass, translocation efforts, defence of village areas against encroaching wild elephants, and census activities. The tusks of working males are trimmed, for reasons which vary depending upon who is speaking. Some say they are cut for the safety of mahouts and other elephants. Others explain that tusks may be damaged during digging (a natural behaviour; see Chapter 5, this volume) or during work. However, three females have been moved to the hattisar due to a shortage of patrol elephants and will continue to serve on patrol until impregnated by wild bull Renaldo on one of his visits. Once they are approximately a year and a half along, they will be sent back to the breeding centre for rest and parturition.

Other stable considerations

Elephants in this stable have the added benefit of not wearing howdahs (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; de Vries, 2014; Magda *et al.*, 2015), as they are ridden by a single mahout at a time. They do not have to traverse the main street of town to enter the national park, but rather simply cross the river from their stables. These stables are the standard Nepal style seen at the breeding centre and army posts, consisting of long rows of tall wooden posts with metal roofs. Such roofs can retain heat and may cause discomfort to elephants during hot periods, creating concern (de

Vries, 2014). Elephants at this stable are kept within olfactory and sight distance of each other, and are taken out in groups to browse, thus allowing for further social bonding. During musth, which may last up to four months, government males who are challenging to control are chained in a special corral. They retain visual and olfactory contact with others during this time. While the musth corral is encircled by an electric fence and occupied by a large bull in musth, it was not turned on during any of my visits over the last decade.

Many elephants at the government hattisar had wounds on their foreheads, which according to the NTNC vet are due to 'rubbing on trees'. These injuries also occur, says Vidanta, when elephants try to follow their mahouts around and occasionally try to kill them (Vidanta interviews, 2019).[4] During visits to other stables, Vidanta called such damage 'sunburn' or a 'chronic skin' condition (Vidanta interviews, 2019). Head wounds are common among elephants in Nepal and are often human-derived (see Chapter 5, this volume). Mahouts at this facility also had many of their own wounds. During one visit, I was greeted by a mahout using a walker, who had been thrown from his elephant and sustained multiple broken bones. Many others had casts, limps, slings, and a variety of other, apparently common, injuries (Cheetri and Larina interviews, 2017; personal observations, 2017 and 2019). Because of this inherent danger, government mahouts are paid significantly more than the 8000–10,000 Nepalese rupees (Nrs) earned by private mahouts; around 16,000 Nrs monthly (~US$160) (Bames, Thomas and Vidanta interviews, 2019). Mahouts that work with male elephants explain that striking male elephants is necessary to maintain human safety (Cheetri, Larina and Vidanta interviews, 2019), yet it appears that they are hardly 'safe', given the large number of mahout injuries.

Lehnhardt and Galloway (2008, p, 169) argue that only positive reinforcement can truly keep handlers 'safe', as it does not create aggressive elephants to begin with. They examined handlers in Myanmar and India who used positive bonds to build co-worker relationships with elephants and compared them to mahouts in Sri Lanka using dominance methods (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). Even though their elephants

had undergone a breaking ceremony, the 'humane' handlers reported no deaths. This group of elephants was allowed to range the forest at night and interact with wild individuals but returned to camps in the morning thanks to their bonds (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). In contrast, elephants with zero contact with wild individuals and living in dominance-based management regularly tried to kill their handlers (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). This information suggests that positive interactions with mahouts, as well as other elephant herds, is key to prevent human injury, but more studies are needed to identify which relationship is more important.

Mahout housing

Many government mahouts live in raised wooden houses adjacent to the hattisar. Gurju has a house off-site, where he lives with his wife and children. Some nights, when wild males are nearby, he is required to sleep at the hattisar. This is because Renaldo – the now-dominant wild bull – dislikes 'Ala' Prasad, the extremely large, well-tusked government bull. Renaldo is known for destroying mahout housing and grain stores throughout Sauraha, and picks fights with the older bulls in the government hattisar. He is responsible for a variety of wounds during an incursion in 2018.

Summary of Biography One

Sanani is in a truly unique situation, as the only elephant in Sauraha managed using PRT. While the use of this method arose organically, it has proven successful at garnering Sanani a bit more fame and Gurju extra tips. Gurju and Sanani appear to respect each other both as kin and co-workers. Gurju's definition of 'necessary care' involved finding a way to communicate with his elephant co-worker which ensured they both remained safe from attack. In addition, Sanani's status as a government elephant means that he is provided with different provisions and legal requirements than privately owned individuals. Perhaps as the face of

the 1000-rupee note, Sanani will be offered greater protection than less well-known individuals.

Hatti Biography Two: 'Dhonu Gaj'

As I walk on to Rudra Raja's property, I am struck by the differences in this stable from many others I have seen.[5] The mahout housing consists of long, brick shacks which I would describe as ramshackle. The bricks are wavy from settling, and there is an air of neglect about the stable. A thin wire with danger signs (in English, among other languages) runs around the perimeter. A large male elephant is chained under a high-roofed shelter and is wildly waving his trunk – this is Dhonu Gaj. Dhonu stands in an unnatural spread-eagle position, unable to pull his legs in due to the chains on all four limbs. He drips fluid from his temporal glands, indicating musth. Dhonu is surrounded by plastic strips tied to poles; I imagine meant to act as caution tape to keep visitors from getting too close. He is vocal and pulling at the tape. No one can approach without being threatened, so water is offered from a large hose sprayed by a mahout standing 4.5 metres (15 feet) away. Mahouts throw corn to Dhonu, and Dhonu throws everything he can grab back at the mahouts.

Mahouts' children are running around, terribly close to Dhonu. Nine mahouts live on the property, some who still practise polygamy, so there are a lot of children. Dr Vidanta leans to me and says that he thinks the mahout housing should not be so close to Dhonu's stable (see Fig. 9.2.1), and that he thinks Dhonu should be sold to a buyer in India.

I meet Dhonu's owner, Rudra Raja, and we sit about 12 metres (40 feet) away; I face Dhonu, as I instinctually do not want to turn my back on him. I am told that Dhonu had two mahouts, but they were both 'drunkards' and left. The mahout of another elephant is trying to care for Dhonu, but the bull will not let him get close. As we talk, Dhonu picks up corn stalks and throws them at us as he vocalizes. When he starts picking up heavier objects, Raja suggests we move further away.

Raja purchased Dhonu when he decided to extend his elephant safari operations, simply because 'he looked healthy' and Raja, as mentioned in

Chapter 7 (this volume), was inexperienced. According to Raja, all was well until Dhonu hit 20 years old, and his musth became 'very strong'. Dhonu became uncontrollable for 42 days at a time, several times a year, and at one point destroyed his stable. After spending a year chained by all four legs in a field with no shelter from the sun, Dhonu had had enough. He broke free and escaped into the forest, where he went on what interlocuters called a 'rampage'. The veterinarian was consulted, and he had to tranquilize Dhonu with a dart to calm him enough to regain control. Dhonu was returned to Raja's field, but due to the perceived danger, many mahouts now simply refused to work with him. During the next elephant festival, the veterinarian again received an emergency call. Dhonu had been taken to a crowded festival during musth and was wreaking havoc. Interlocutors feel that these early traumatic experiences have led to Dhonu's heightened aggression, inability to control his affective states, and his prolonged periods of musth.

'Saving' Dhonu

Raja openly discusses his love for Dhonu, as well as his refusal to sell him because of their strong attachment. Most local owners only purchase females due to the difficulties inherent in housing males, which would make Dhonu more difficult to place. Raja described being torn. He wanted to keep Dhonu but felt he might have to sell him to India. He also toyed with the idea of simply letting him go into the national park (which is not allowed at this time). Whether freed captive elephants can survive on their own is a matter of local and academic debate but has been practised in Nepal in the past (see Chapter 4, this volume). Raja voiced concerns that if he simply released Dhonu, the elephant might return to the village and damage property or injure humans.

Since Raja had previously contracted with INGO5[6] (see Chapter 9.1, this volume) for foot care and training, this international non-governmental organization (INGO) stepped in and offered to cover Dhonu's expenses for 1 year to allow Raja time to make decisions. INGO5 built Dhonu a tall, large, roofed shelter on Raja's property. Providing

physical improvements on other people's property is something INGO5 tries to limit to items which more directly impact mahout and elephant welfare, but in this case INGO5 felt it was the best way to improve Dhonu's conditions, especially during his difficult musth periods (see Chapter 5, this volume). They made an agreement with Raja that if Dhonu ended up being sold, the shelter would be removed from the hattisar. INGO5 staff began spending time at the hattisar daily, holding barbeques for mahouts and their families, and offering professional and social support. INGO5 explains that they, along with some other community members, have agreed to support several of the mahouts' children as 'unofficial' aunts and uncles. Sadly, one of these mahouts was killed by a tiger while grazing the elephants during the autumn of 2020 (Rimal, 2020; Bames PC, 2020).



Fig. 9.2.1. Dhonu Gaj, chained in his former stable, Sauraha, Nepal. Mahout housing can be seen in the background. (Photo taken by the author, 1 April 2019.)

Financial impacts

Raja is losing money on Dhonu since the elephant can't participate in safari rides. To make extra cash, Raja has been 'renting' out his female elephants for other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or private entrepreneurs to take on tourist walks through the community forest (see Chapter 9.1, this volume). In addition, Raja decided to pilot a programme accepting volunteers who pay a fee for the experience of 'working' in an elephant stable. His first volunteers are in town while I am visiting, and Raja feels the programme is a success, but is still entertaining the idea of selling Dhonu to Indian buyers for between 50 and 80 lakh.[7] The concern remains that if kept in his current situation, Dhonu may again escape and 'rampage'.

While in negotiations with Raja, INGO5 held a fundraising drive with the aim of purchasing Dhonu and transferring him to a sanctuary. When talks with Raja fell through, staff at INGO5 contacted all the donors and offered to return their money. They report that most donors left their money in place for other elephant-focused projects. Negotiations for Dhonu continued, but INGO5 explained that his price tag remains more than they can afford.

Assessing Dhonu's stable and welfare

Dhonu's living conditions are far from ideal. While Dhonu is becoming more handleable during his musth, he still spends significant time chained in place on hard-packed dirt, which can cause joint damage (Csuti *et al.*, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2016). Due to his youth, this damage could have life-long consequences. The spread-legged position in which Dhonu is forced to stand may also impact his joint health. Furthermore, standing in faeces and urine may lead to infections and further joint problems, and Dhonu's staff can't get close enough to clean (Roocroft

and Oosterhuis, 2001; West, 2001; Sarma *et al.*, 2012). These care issues might be addressed with changes in husbandry, such as using long leg chains to allow for more agency during musth (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2016). Ideally, male elephants should be provided specific enclosures where they can be maintained without chaining or beating (Desai, 2008).

Dominance methods of elephant management are used at Raja's hattisar, like in most other stables in the area. These management techniques often include the use of a bull hook or stick and result in negative welfare outcomes, which may lead to an inability to fight off infection or other lingering health issues (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). The lack of agency in any aspect of his life means that Dhonu is in a constant struggle against his mahouts, which has led to stress for both humans and elephant, and ongoing staff turnover.

Other reasons for Dhonu's stress level and difficult musth may include his separation from his maternal herd at a young age. His early separation and subsequent isolation may have caused lingering issues from improper brain development (Bradshaw, 2009). Dhonu's continuous vocalizations and aggression are clearly signs of poor welfare (Veasey, 2006). In addition, the ability to lie down for rest is essential to health, especially for young elephants, and Dhonu has had no such option for more than a year (Asher *et al.*, 2015; Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018). Dhonu's corral is open-sided, with four corner posts, and he can't reach them for leaning due to the short length of his rear chains (see Chapter 5, this volume). The lack of appropriate leaning or recumbent rest may be partially responsible for Dhonu's increased aggression and prolonged musth periods (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kurt and Garai, 2006; DEFRA, 2012; Gairhe, 2012).

The stable does house numerous female elephants, so some of Dhonu's social needs may be met (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Vidya and Sukumar, 2005; Varma, 2008). Dhonu is kept within olfactory and visual distance of captive females, which is important to the welfare of each (Clubb and Mason, 2002; AZA, 2012). As already noted, some natural breeding activities have been allowed, which may also promote some aspects of positive welfare (Desai, 2008). However, elephants in Raja's stable were

purchased individually from India and therefore faced their own breaking of bonds and exposure to the Phajaan ritual – both of which are major impactors of health and welfare (see Chapter 6, this volume).

Additional issues

Because of the stable's location, there is little 'natural' elephant habitat available within the property, meaning Dhonu cannot wander and graze without travelling to the community forest. However, he is allowed to make the trek while not in musth and has more access to browsing during monsoon season when there are fewer tourists around. While a small grassy meadow lies behind the stable, it is instead made available for carthorses who are allowed to relax here with their owners.

The stable itself lies on Sauraha's main thoroughfare, where tourist jeeps and safari elephants turn on their way into town, to the NTNC, and to the Kumroj elephant-safari gates. Almost directly across from the stable lies one of the busiest spots in Sauraha, often referred to simply as 'riverside'. At dusk, tourists and locals gather en masse in this area to watch the sun set and catch a glimpse of wildlife crossing the Rapti River. Riverside is also the launch point for tourists crossing the river via canoe to participate in jeep safaris or river tours, creating further chaos throughout the day.

Raja's elephants work out of the Kumroj tourist gate, which means that these elephants walk long distances before beginning their daily duties and must pass along the very busy road just mentioned. Coupled with a diet lacking adequate nutrition or appropriate quantity, this added work may lead to continuing health problems or death, as was the case for three of Raja's elephants (see Chapter 6, this volume).

Mahout housing at this stable is also inadequate. This housing is located only 5 metres (16 feet) from Dhonu's shelter, well within throwing distance (see Fig. 9.2.1 and description above) and appears to be collapsing. Offering appropriate shelter, medical care, and training for mahouts is key to improving the welfare of both humans and elephants (GoN, 2015; AERSM, 2017; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020).

Update

Raja reached out in the autumn of 2020. He had purchased several new elephants, and wondered if I might offer some suggestions as to how to navigate managing this larger herd. I sent him suggestions on diet changes during musth, and recommended he have Chloe Brown of INGO5 and veterinary technician Saroj look at the new arrivals. Raja moved his entire herd (eight elephants) to the Kumroj area, closer to the tourist safari-ride gates, and is encouraging newer mahouts to try PRT with younger elephants (see Chapter 7, this volume). However, these mahouts have little experience or training in PRT, and have struggled.

Raja regularly consults with INGO5 and has created chain-free enclosures on the property. Dhonu came out of this period of musth and was very briefly allowed to socialize with other elephants. Raja posted pictures on social media of the elephants playing in the river or trunk-wrestling. However, Dhonu soon returned to a musth state, and has spent the last 2 years in a small stable enclosed by hastily applied metal bars (see Fig. 9.2.2). Further information and updates on the herd can be found in a recent article by the author (Szydlowski, 2023).

Summary of Biography Two

Dhonu's situation remains one of the most concerning in Sauraha, due to his inadequate housing, constant restraint, and the lack of suitable housing for Raja's other elephants and mahouts. Raja's definition of 'appropriate care' does not mesh with that of the veterinary staff, mahouts, other elephant owners, or advocates in the area, and he admits that his methods have led to issues with several elephants' health and welfare. Raja, for the most part, chooses to ignore veterinary advice from the NTNC, and continues to obtain more elephants despite issues keeping them healthy.

Perhaps it is strange, therefore, that Raja may represent the key to improving elephant health throughout Sauraha (Szydlowski, 2023). As an independent owner, Raja has developed a reputation as someone who fails to provide 'positive welfare' for his elephants. However, Raja is open

to advice from several parties, and says he remains interested in a non-riding facility, which he feels would be better for all his elephants. He has shown a commitment to making financial investments in the stable and has sought advice from a variety of sources. With the continued support of INGO5 and local community advocates, perhaps Raja can successfully create a 'more ethical' tourism practice which meets the perceived needs of the community and its elephants. If Raja is successful, other owners may follow suit, especially if Raja can garner financial support from outside parties.



Fig. 9.2.2. Dhonu in his metal box, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author, January 2022.)

Hatti Biography Three: ‘Liswini (Idha) Kali’

Liswini Kali (see Fig. 9.2.3) arrived from India in 2010 at around 20 years of age. Her history up to that point is unknown, as are the circumstances surrounding her birth. According to veterinary staff and her caregivers, she was likely wild-caught, ‘broken’ in India (see Chapter 6, this volume), and imported to Sauraha. Because she arrived from Assam with visible leg injuries of the type observed in other wild-caught individuals, veterinary staff suspected that she was captured using the illegal pit method – using a hole covered with sticks for camouflage and waiting for an elephant to fall in (Münster, 2016, p. 433). This method is dangerous for both mahouts and wild elephants, as the former are often injured in the attempt to rope these elephants, and the latter often suffer broken body parts or death in the fall (Münster, 2016, p. 433). After undergoing a breaking process, Liswini was purchased by a Nepalese businessman and (illegally) imported to Sauraha, Nepal, to serve as a tourist conveyance.



Fig. 9.2.3. Liswini Kali in her former stable, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author, 31 March 2019.)

Liswini Kali's is the final biography which will serve as a cynosure for a discussion of the complex issues surrounding captive elephant care and ethics in Nepal. Prior to the present study, I had only seen Liswini Kali in video form, but our first meeting in Nepal created a feeling of kinship. Sharing physical ailments and the very real struggles of middle age, I saw her addressing the same challenges we all face – a fight for control of our bodies and our lives.

The number of Westerners involved in her situation, the passion she ignited, the mishandling of her narrative, and the anger surrounding her perceived mistreatment may have led to an initial decrease in her welfare.

Liswini's story is a bit autoethnography and a bit biography, based upon my interactions with her, participant observations, and face-to-face interviews with the founders of INGO5. My contact with both Liswini Kali and her caregivers continues via videos, video calls, and emails. The following includes information and assessments drawn from the above contacts along with an intuitive analysis of the INGO5 website and social media accounts, as well as interviews with community members and veterinary staff at the NTNC.

Liswini's story

After serving as a privately owned safari elephant in Nepal for 7 years, Liswini Kali developed deep wounds and swelling on the sides of her body from the constant rubbing of howdah straps, a common injury in captive elephants throughout Asia (Magda *et al.*, 2015; see Chapter 5, this volume). Antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medications were provided by veterinary staff, but Liswini was unable to lie down to rest for months due to pain from these wounds.

Liswini's involvement with human foreigners began in 2017, when Brown (prior to forming INGO5) offered to assist Liswini by massaging the area around the saddle wounds. Brown worked in conjunction with veterinary staff to treat these injuries and make Liswini more comfortable. Later that year, Liswini's right front leg suddenly began to swell. Liswini's mahouts said she had fallen, while other mahouts claimed she was attacked by another female; the NTNC vet blames an overgrown toenail for the swelling. The leg ended up four times its normal size, and vet staff repeatedly tried to bring down the swelling with antibiotic injections. Brown became involved again, offering to massage the leg to offer pain relief as well as a comforting touch.

Liswini continued to ferry guests on safari despite the swelling and obvious pain, and made her feeling known by becoming 'naughty' and 'aggressive' towards her handlers. Finally, NTNC veterinary staff requested that the owner offer her time off. As the medical providers of privately owned captive elephants in Sauraha, it is up to the NTNC veterinarian to decide when an elephant is too old or too injured to

continue riding, and to suggest a length of time she should be kept off work. From the time she was removed from duty, Liswini was chained in her stable for long periods each day for rest, but Liswini refused to lie down, which means she was unable to experience REM sleep (see Chapter 5, this volume). Sleep deprivation, an inadequate diet, the inability to relieve her pain by altering her standing position, and increasing frustration led Liswini to act out more aggressively. She was trying to communicate her needs, and no one was listening.

On a 2018 trip to Nepal to assist an elephant organization with foot trimming and corral building, European expat Renee spotted a weary Liswini struggling to walk as her mahout gently encouraged her. After attempting to contact the owner about Liswini's health problems and receiving no response, Renee took matters into her own hands and hired a veterinarian unaffiliated with elephant care in Sauraha. This veterinarian treated Liswini without contacting her owner to obtain permission. Concerned with Liswini's chronic health problems, Renee took to social media (INGO1 founder, 2018), but failed to ask permission from the elephant's owner to use Liswini's image in her posts (Vidanta interviews, 2019). The video post showed an obviously slow, pained elephant walking alongside a dirt road. The tagline read: 'PLEASE look, share and donate! Let's do everything we can to help this elephant. You can donate through our website. Thank you!' (INGO1, 2018).

The NTNC veterinarian, Liswini's owner, and the elephant cooperative quickly found out about this post and sent police to confront Renee. The police ordered her to remove the social media posts due to their inflammatory nature. The veterinarian and owner felt these posts were damaging to the image of Sauraha and seemed to imply that Renee had dedicated some financial support to Liswini Kali. They informed Renee that since she was in Nepal on a tourist visa, and had not come as part of an organization, she was not legally allowed to perform care of any kind on elephants. The use of tourist visas is fairly common practice in Nepal, and all the NGOs interviewed for the current study used tourist visas to enter the country, except for INGO5 founders, who live year-round in Sauraha on a business visa (Shirley and Thomas interviews, 2019).

Renee, who has no veterinary training nor experience with elephants outside a certification course offered by the non-profit INGO3 (see

Chapter 7, this volume), contacted a Nepalese news outlet and stated that Liswini was terminally ill and needed immediate assistance. The article and above-mentioned videos, which until 2020 remained on You Tube and Facebook, along with current comments and running donations, continued to anger veterinary staff and elephant owners throughout Sauraha. Liswini's owner never received any funds raised for this elephant, nor did the NTNC veterinary staff. The amount of money raised, and how it was used, are still unknown.

Renee was not, in fact, alone in her attempts to assist Nepalese elephants, nor did she remain in Nepal despite these posts. She returned to Thailand, but visited Nepal several more times and has continued to post pictures of elephants without the permission of owners. Each time she faced similar outcomes, including being taken to the tourist police and threatened with deportation. In response, Renee often resorted to contacting newspapers to publicly defend her actions.

Other people concerned with elephant welfare are familiar with Renee and expressed their concern over her methods. While some activists regularly take to social media to publicize poor animal treatment, these posts can be damaging to relationships between organizations active in the area who are working in the country legally and have garnered some cooperation from elephant owners to create lasting change (see Chapter 3, this volume). Many of these other organizations have asked Renee to attempt a quieter approach to her activism. These organizations explain that they experienced prejudice and distrust from locals due to the local tendency to perceive the actions of one Westerner as representative of all Westerners.

Meeting Liswini

I meet Liswini at her small stable, chained by a front and a back foot on a hard-packed dirt floor, but with remnants of blue dye across her forehead, likely from the recent Holi celebration.[8] Even though she doesn't leave the stable, her mahout clearly cares enough to include her in the celebration. Her right foreleg is visibly swollen, and it is this leg

that carries double metal chains which attach to a sunken concrete slab. Her back leg is also encircled by a metal chain but attached to a small rope tied to a post. As I approach her, she initially acts disinterested – trunk hanging limply and relaxed ears – as the veterinarian instructs me to stay back from this 'very dangerous' elephant with a history of killing humans (although when and how many were never shared). I notice her feet immediately – and it is hard not to automatically react, not only as a veterinary nurse and someone experienced with pachyderm feet, but as someone who understands chronic pain. Her front toenails are gnarled and overgrown, and there is a red, raw spot between her toes. Her back toenails are overgrown and malformed, concave instead of convex. Due to her chains, Liswini Kali is forced to stand in an unnatural position (see Fig. 9.2.4). While Liswini could not describe in English words her feelings, she made them clear by constantly shifting her weight back and forth, painfully, and uncomfortably. She has been 'relieved' of her tourist safari duties for a year, due to swelling, pain, and obvious difficulty in walking, and now remains chained in place under a metal roof for up to 24 hours per day.

Liswini's stable stands only a few feet away from another elephant (a 'nice' elephant, I'm told), and small ponds from the unseasonal rains have encouraged ducks to swim right behind her. Liswini has a pile of used hay and faeces behind her, but her hard-packed dirt floor is clean, which I take as a sign of mahout care and an important thing, given the suspected infection under Liswini's nails. Dirty substrate is a key contributor to these types of infections and can cause long-term joint issues (see Chapter 5, this volume). Trash litters the area surrounding the stable, as it does in most of Sauraha. Waste management typically consists of sweeping trash into a pile and burning it, along with elephant dung, or more often, ignoring it. While not standing in urine or faeces, Liswini's rear legs have urine stains running down them, and the stains encircle one foot.



Fig. 9.2.4. A close-up of Liswini Kali's feet showing nail problems and swelling, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author, 31 March 2019.)

Liswini's mahout comes out to say hello; he is a friendly Tharu man who looks about my age, and is the same mahout seen in the videos circulated on social media. He welcomes us and chats with the vet staff about Liswini. His home, next to Liswini's, is of traditional mud and stick Tharu construction (see Chapter 10, this volume).

Liswini continues to shift her weight uncomfortably, raising one foot to rest, then the other. Forward, backward, and side to side she sways and steadily makes a variety of noises. She waves her trunk around unpredictably as the vet explains that Liswini's current problems began, in his opinion, with an overgrown toenail. Because she would not allow anyone to touch her feet, the mahouts and veterinary staff were unable to provide care beyond the anti-inflammatory injections mentioned above, but her leg continued to swell. Without the equipment for radiographs (see Chapter 8, this volume) there was no way to tell how far the infection had progressed, or what interventions might help. Pain medication was provided for a while but has been discontinued. Vidanta tells me that the foot and leg are not 'painful', but it is obvious from

Liswini's body language that they are. Other treatments were attempted, says Vidanta, and with toenail trimming to redistribute her weight off the affected toes, her feet looked better for a little while. Sadly, they soon returned to their now-normal state of agony. Unable to place equal weight on her painful front foot, Liswini began to shift as much weight as possible to the other leg, resulting in the loss of two toenails and the twisting of her other nails. Things have got so bad that any treatments require Liswini be chained to posts by all four limbs, which is painful for her and traumatic both for her and the vets.

At one point, the vet staff tried using xylazine, a sedative, to calm her enough to treat her foot issues, but (not unexpectedly) it made her unable to raise her legs enough to allow any procedures. I ask if it was possible to 'knock her down', the veterinary term for the use of anaesthesia. M-99 is an anaesthetic agent available in Nepal, but the vet team explains that they are hesitant to use it for several reasons. First, it is a narcotic, which means more paperwork for them. Second, they try to limit M-99 use to wild animals in need of rescue. Lastly, they would have to anaesthetise her twice, as once she lies down on one side, they would not be able to roll her over to treat the other.

Dr Vidanta repeatedly argues that there is no infection in the foot, but I doubt these claims as her foot is still swollen and the toenails overgrown, cracked, and ugly. Vidanta would like Liswini permanently removed from safari and sent to a shelter of some kind or sold to India. This owner has been asking approximately US$42,000 for Liswini and has been hesitant to sell even at that price. Vidanta says he wishes INGO5 would purchase her. According to the president of the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC), the cooperative has got involved to put pressure on Liswini's owner to sell her. He feels her condition reflects badly on the rest of the members and feels that the UEOC has a responsibility to get involved (Vachan interviews, 2019).

There is an elephant behaviourist from the USA in town, and she comes to visit Liswini, along with an American vet who spends part of the year in Nepal with her own adopted elephant. The two women offered to train Liswini and build a 'training wall' made of metal bars, to separate the trainer for safety, in the hope that they could train her to voluntarily present her feet. The local vets helped them ask the owner to

pay for supplies, and he responded that he must have a signed contract stating that he is not responsible if anyone gets hurt, and the owner wants assurances that nothing will be posted on social media asking for money. Despite continued efforts by the group, the owner never agreed, and the wall was never built.

I agree to return to the stable later so that I can observe Liswini's foot treatment. I arrive early and am greeted by the neighbouring mahout, who invites me to sit in the shade of his porch and share his fan. He has been in the area for 6 years, trying to support his mother who had throat cancer. He was only 14 when he arrived from a small village outside Chitwan National Park, and started following guides as they took tourists on walks. While he spoke no English or Nepali, he quickly learned that words like 'no problem' and 'yes' went far with tourists who then thought he was part of the tour group. This resulted in tips – which he could send home – and an increase in English proficiency. Elephants were his favourite animal, and so he became a mahout, and now works with Big Punam Kali – the 'nice elephant' who lives next door to Liswini Kali. He likes the mahout housing here; it is nice and cool. During the monsoon season, he enjoys the decrease in safaris so he and Big Punam can relax. During non-festival times, he and Big Punam offer between one and three rides per day. He really likes his job and plans to stay a mahout for the rest of his life. I ask him about Liswini, and he describes the elephant's behaviour as like a bull in musth, pointing to his temples, and says she is constantly eating, eating, eating. According to Dr Vidanta, she has gained weight being off work, but is still underweight for an adult elephant. This may be due to appetite issues from pain, or due to the food offered (see Chapter 5, this volume). I comment that I think she seems like a bored, middle-aged woman, eating to pass the time.

The behaviourist arrives with a bag of produce, and while I feed her, Liswini raises her foot (under the suggestion of her mahout, armed with a beating stick, just in case) and places it in the offered tub in which water has been mixed with turmeric, Epsom salts, and powdered antibiotics. I am shocked at the ease with which this happens, as I expected a fuss, trumpeting, and aggression. Her mahout follows the foot soak with a laser treatment, and Liswini wiggles and waits while he finishes. This dangerous elephant has shown no signs of aggression

towards any of us involved in today's treatment. The soaks continued for several days, but the short duration coupled with the dirt and faeces of Liswini's stable floor mean that the treatment is likely largely ineffective.

A few days later, I stop by to visit the NTNC vet, Dr Vidanta, and meet an American veterinarian turned university professor who is in town visiting. Vidanta is interested in getting this vet's opinion on a few elephants, even though the professor isn't currently practising. We take him to look at one of the elephants who survived endotheliotropic herpesvirus (EEHV) and who is exhibiting strange behaviours with his tongue, then drive over to Liswini's stable, where the American vet recommends pain meds, regular walks, and if nothing works, then euthanasia. This may seem a normal suggestion for non-Nepalese, but euthanasia is not often practised on elephants here, due to their connection to the Hindu god Ganesh, and an overall avoidance of euthanasia in wildlife.

Liswini Kali today

Two years to the day after permanently relocating to Nepal, and following six months of negotiations, INGO5 was able to purchase Liswini Kali in the autumn of 2019 for approximately US$32,000 – a bargain by Sauraha standards. A healthy elephant may cost up to US$80,000 or US$90,000. Because there are no laws governing the care or ownership of privately held elephants, INGO5 involved the UOEC, the NTNC veterinary staff, and the elephant broker in the finalization process. Their involvement means that the local community acknowledges that Liswini is now owned by INGO5 and offers the only protection against someone else claiming to be her owner.

The move to sanctuary life was not easy. Truck transport was not an option in this case, and so Liswini made the painful 4.5 km walk on foot. It took nearly 14 hours and a lot of convincing, but she finally arrived at the INGO5 facility with her two mahouts. Adjusting to her new life was far from automatic, and Idha Kali – her new name to reflect her new beginning – received foot treatments for the infected areas. An initial health assessment was completed when Idha arrived at the Elephant

HOME, and numerous issues were recorded. On top of a poor body condition score (she was still underweight), all her front nails were found to be cracked, overgrown, infected, or missing. She demonstrated a slow, stiff gait, likely due to joint issues. Her right foreleg did not bend. Her head is marked with old wounds from beatings which have not healed, and she suffered from dry skin. Her mental status was described as 'disturbed' by staff and she appeared fearful, painful, and traumatized.

While getting the newly named Idha Kali out of her former situation was important for her long-term health, simply expecting her to quickly adjust to her new surroundings was out of the question. As discussed earlier in this book, elephants are complex beings who are heavily impacted by the events of their past. To make Idha's transition as smooth as possible, she was walked into a large stable, with metal beams supporting open sides and a roof. This enclosure would serve as a safe space for her to explore her new surroundings while ensuring the safety of the humans around her. Idha was started on antibiotics and vitamins, and quickly seemed to settle into her new corral as her feet started to heal with access to clean, dry flooring. Within a week, Idha was starting to respond to positive reinforcement using produce to get her to place her foot up on a bar and allowing staff to gently touch her with a stick, and within 4 weeks she was accepting foot soaks and medication application using only positive reinforcement.

Despite steady progress (see above), for her first eight months at the Elephant HOME, Idha was described as 'aggressive' by her mahouts and staff. She was nervous due to the new sights and sounds of the Elephant HOME and vocalized loudly. She had been accompanied to her new home by her long-term mahout, who liked to spread stories to the other mahouts about the history of this 'dangerous' elephant. Staff feel that this may have had an impact on Idha's adjustment – perhaps she felt the fear the mahouts had towards her thanks to these stories.

Brown and Bames feel that Idha's reported 'aggression' at her old stable was really just the natural response by an elephant to a lack of choices in her life, and in chronic pain. Unable to express herself and stuck in one place all day and night, Idha struck out. Once moved to the INGO5 Elephant HOME, she was initially unsure about her new facility and all the changes in her life, and reacted in the only way she could. In

the last year, Idha has learned that she has the agency to simply leave any situation, and no longer reacts 'aggressively' to stimuli. Brown described Idha as a 'sensitive' being, who wants to express herself, sometimes loudly. Brown describes Idha as juvenile in a lot of ways, such as being fearful of loud noises, and unable to handle stressful situations calmly. This is perhaps due to her early removal from her herd and subsequent violent capture and injury leaving her without the coping mechanisms to deal with change easily (Sukumar, 2003).

Idha was likely exposed to a breaking ceremony (see Chapter 6, this volume), so her life history may have created lasting emotional issues (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011, n.p.; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). In addition, her years of painful foot issues and inadequate stabling may have left her with emotional trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which may manifest as fear, social anxiety, physical aggression or charging at humans, self-injury, or distress vocalizations (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2016, p. 293). Elephants who have experienced trauma or stress in the past may begin to heal if placed in appropriate facilities (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Allowing elephants choice of which human (instead of forcing a specific mahout upon them) with whom to associate may also aid their recovery (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Studies found that mahouts who attempted consistent and caring husbandry, or patient flexibility in timing of response to commands, resulted in calmer elephants (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). In addition, adding non-command related physical touch (such as patting) and conversation aided in elephant emotional recovery (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018).

Closed-circuit TV cameras made it easier to observe Idha's behaviours in the hopes of discovering ways to make her transition easier. What the staff discovered instead was Idha's love of inventing new hat fashions daily. Hay, dirt, burlap – whatever she can find – she places on her head, much to the delight of her caregivers (see Fig. 9.2.5). This behaviour is less about style and more about substance – while elephants are not allowed to cover themselves with dirt and grass while on safari, they would in the wild. As the months passed and Idha continued to settle in, she began to slowly allow foot soaks twice daily, and allowed the application of ointments to her toes.

Making the adjustment was not easy for the mahouts, either. Transitioning from traditional dominance-based training to trust-based training was difficult, as was having the responsibility of a much larger stable to clean. Idha and her mahouts had to learn to trust each other and the INGO5 staff, and that took many months. In addition, these mahouts were accustomed to keeping their elephants 'quiet' and seeing any noise as aggression. Learning that elephants were vocal beings and allowing Idha to express herself took several months of becoming-with their charges (Haraway, 2008, p. 27). There is also, according to interlocutors in the current study, a long-standing rivalry between India-born and Nepal-born mahouts in Sauraha. Having arrived with her solitary Nepalese mahout, other mahouts were employed to help care for her. Nepalese mahouts at the Elephant HOME accused Indian mahouts of drugging Idha during her first few months at the facility, to make her more aggressive and likely to hurt the Nepalese mahouts. Building trust between these men took time.

INGO5 founders report that there is no longer any rivalry between nationalities (at least at this stable), and the mahouts joke and smile. The mahouts maintain clean rooms and common spaces and have decided to beautify the area by planting flowers, which INGO5 founders feel indicates that they are proud of the facility and taking ownership of their roles. When mahouts from other stables visit, INGO5 mahouts take them on tours to 'show off' their kitchen, lodgings, and to share their meals. This sharing of meals has resulted in numerous visits from other local mahouts.

It took three months of patient work by Idha and her carers, but in January 2020 she was released into the larger, open pasture. An electric barrier fence ensures her safety and that of people living near the property. Idha has the choice of where she goes on the property, what she eats, and has a pond for bathing (separate from her drinking water) and plenty of mud during the wet season. She is the only captive elephant in Sauraha with constant, free-choice access to water throughout the day – and she takes full advantage of it. She was soon choosing to associate with the founders at her new home, following them around and touching them with her trunk. INGO5 has introduced enrichment items slowly to prevent stress, but Idha now has a tyre toy. Eight months after her arrival

at her new home, Idha's body and mind were healthy enough to voluntarily allow a complete front-foot treatment including nail care. PRT continues, in the hopes that Idha will eventually be comfortable allowing bloodwork, rear-foot work, and other treatments. In addition, INGO5 has hired a local Nepalese man as project manager, and he oversees cultural relations, language issues and acts as a leader for the HOME team.



Fig. 9.2.5. Idha (Liswini) and her 'hat' at the INGO5 Elephant HOME, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo provided by INGO5, used with permission.)

Idha is now described as 'friendly, and affectionate, and cooperative'. She and INGO5 founder Bames have a mutual love affair, and she has taken to following him around and seeking affection. When she hears his voice, she trumpets and quickly moves to find him. According to Bames, when Idha first arrived, he was unable to even approach the perimeter of her enclosure. Which was fine with the staff, as they had planned to keep their distance and only allow mahouts to have contact with Idha. About

eight months in, he 'got a vibe' that Idha wanted him to come closer, so he joined the mahouts in the pasture. Soon, Idha seemed to know as soon as Bames arrived on the property (he lives elsewhere) and would huff and chuff while reaching his direction with her trunk. If he remained on the outside of the pasture, Idha would act as if she was distressed and 'wanted him really close'. Bames began to take daily walks around the pasture, and Idha would follow, seeking contact. Other days Bames would sit on a stool, and Idha would come over and stand near him. Soon, she began to stand over him and 'nap' (resting in a standing position is common in elephants). Bames simply sat and played games on his phone. He describes feeling 'totally and completely' safe, even if Idha is stressed about something. Idha is very aware of him, even while standing over him, and is careful not to accidently step on him. Bames says, 'I feel more like she is protecting me.' Female elephants follow herd leaders based upon their ability to do what is best for the herd (Poole, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002), and perhaps Idha saw in Bames a protector who made good choices for her welfare. Brown attributes this positive trans-species relationship to Bame's undemanding nature; he is very calm and has 'good energy'. According to Brown, Bames demands nothing – he is not Idha's mahout and so asks for nothing from her, while offering only 'good things' such as companionship (see Fig. 9.2.6).

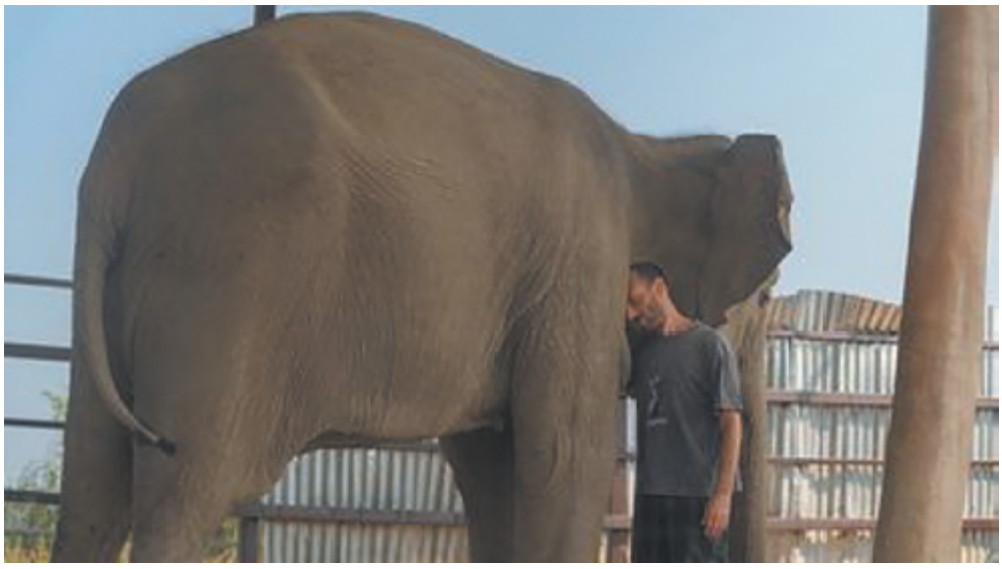


Fig. 9.2.6. Idha (Liswini) and Mitch Bames, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo provided by INGO5, used with permission.)

Perhaps the change in Idha's behaviour is also due to a change in mahouts' understanding of her. Rather than a jeep kept full of the cheapest gas, roughly driven, and given only the most basic care, Idha is now a companion and part of a much larger, more supportive 'herd'. She has been de-commodified and reformed as an individual member of a family.

July 2020 brought with it a major landmark in Idha Kali's rehabilitation. Her long-term injury, years of pain, and distrust had subsided enough for her to attempt resting lying down. Given a large pile of dirt upon which to recline (as often recommended by elephant specialists; see Chapter 5, this volume), Idha was finally comfortable enough in her new surroundings to relax. This recumbent sleep is very important for elephant health and should help reduce Idha's stress levels further (see Chapter 5, this volume).

In October of 2020, a private party purchased Sama Kali – an elephant whom I have considered a friend since 2012, and whom I visit socially at her home every time I am in Nepal – for retirement at INGO5. Sama began her journey to INGO5's Elephant HOME with daily visits to acclimatize to the stable and to Idha. After several weeks, the two were given physical access to each other, and after a few weeks of discomfort became accustomed to being in proximity. Sama returned to her regular stable to visit her co-workers (several kilometres away) at night for several weeks. INGO5 used this time to secure funds to cover Sama's care costs for at least a year. Towards this goal, INGO5 launched a Gofundme campaign and donations arrived from around the world. This campaign used 'Feba', her new name, to offer anonymity to her prior owner. In December 2020, Feba moved into the Elephant HOME permanently (see Fig. 9.2.7). Videos show her rubbing her head against Idha's side, and Idha leaning in to accept the touch. Both elephants spend time with Bames, who is still Idha's favourite human.



Fig. 9.2.7. Idha (Liswini) with her new stablemate at INGO5, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo by Ramlal Tamang, used with permission.)

Idha is less dependent on Bames now, choosing to spend time with Feba instead. Having a larger herd (even when it includes humans) may positively impact Idha's mental well-being (see Clubb and Mason, 2002; also Chapter 5, this volume). While Idha is still excited whenever Bames arrives, she is 'not so desperate' to be with him all the time. The girls both lie down at night now, and Idha tries to get as physically close to Feba as possible at bedtime, lying nearly on top of her as they sleep. This synchronized recumbent (down on their side) sleep is indicative of a high level of social integration and is important for their health and welfare (see Chapter 5, this volume). Idha's behaviour is also indicative of her need for 'adult' companionship. As Brown explained, Idha is still very juvenile in her behaviours, and having an older adult female will aid Idha in her growth process.

Assessing Idha's current stable at the Elephant HOME

Idha Kali's stable resembles the standard hattisar found in Nepal, with a few notable exceptions. Based on the standard metal pole/tin roof design that is found throughout the area, this stable is significantly taller (beyond the reach of Idha's trunk), longer, and wider than standard elephant shelters. This stable has 'training walls', meaning that horizontal metal bars have been spaced in such a way that the elephant or her human counterparts can safely move away at will. The hattisar floor is packed dirt, but Idha can leave the stable and access both a natural pasture with mixed surfaces and a bathing pond.

This stable meets many other welfare needs, thanks to the accessibility of veterinary care (via experienced Nepali mahouts, Western staff, and NTNC veterinary staff), the consideration of mahout welfare and housing, the use of PRT (even when being examined by NTNC veterinary staff), and the ability for expression of natural behaviours such as digging, dirt-bathing, scratching, walking, and decision making (see Chapter 5, this volume).

A potentially negative aspect is the stable roof, which is metal, as is standard in the area. These can get very hot and may affect elephant health (de Vries, 2014), but Idha can leave the stable area to thermoregulate, and the height of the roof may be enough to allow for circulation and prevent heat build-up. This would require further research to assess its effectiveness in dispelling heat.

Assessing Idha's (Liswini's) health and welfare

Several factors positively impact Idha's situation, including plans for her nutrition. Idha has access to the community forest, so has fresh browse which she chooses herself, along with that provided by her caregivers, and her provisioned diet is changed seasonally to replicate wild elephants' eating patterns. Creating more natural eating patterns may be important for positive well-being (Vancuylenberg, 1977; Sukumar, 1989, 2006; Veasey, 2006). Pesticides are a major problem with produce in Nepal, so the use of sustainable, local, organic goods is important for Idha's health (Angkawanish *et al.*, 2009). Rice is included, as it is throughout Nepal. According to INGO5 staff, there is not enough rice

grown in the Sauraha area to meet the demands of local humans and elephants, but they have been lucky to know growers and have been able to continue to offer Idha her 'traditional' unhusked and uncooked rice. According to INGO5, Nepalese owners feed rice since it is easy to store, cheap, and keeps elephants feeling full. INGO5 offers less rice and hay than is standard in the area, and Idha's mahouts offer fresh grass, chickpeas, and vitamins in the winter. Idha's pasture has grass so she can graze at her leisure. Idha also has permission to browse within the community forest, which means her diet is comprised of a larger natural variety than that of many other captive elephants in Sauraha. The unlimited time spent grazing per day and the variety of browse and grasses available meet the standards discussed in Chapter 5 (this volume) and having agency over her eating activities is a contributor to positive welfare (Veasey, 2006; Poole and Granli, 2009; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010; Carlstead *et al.*, 2013, p. 329).

According to INGO5, 'proper care' for an elephant runs upwards of US$19,000 annually. This cost is higher than previously mentioned estimates due to INGO5 offering significantly higher salaries to mahouts, new housing, providing health insurance, the purchase of larger amounts of forest products (compared to other private owners) from local farmers and fresh pesticide-free produce, veterinary care (which is not included because, as non-riding owners, INGO5 does not belong to the elephant owners' cooperative), permits to enter the community forest, and training supplies for PRT (INGO5, 2020b). Because INGO5 relies on donations, like most non-profits, there is always the possibility that money will dry up and rescued elephants faced with another change of ownership. INGO5 is addressing this concern by working with a funding specialist to ensure continued support for Idha, her mahouts, and the facility. The Le Pal Nature Foundation has continued to fund 10,000 Euros annually, and the Belgian Province of Walloon Brabant (where INGO5 is registered) continues to provide 5000 Euros each year. Other funders have also made large contributions, and the Brigitte Bardot Foundation is covering Idha's costs for her first year. It was important to INGO5 that they have enough funding in the bank to cover at least a year's care prior to moving any elephants to their facility.

INGO5 has completed various strength, weakness, and threat assessments. These assessments include the potential impacts of political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental threats to its non-profit, persons, and facility (INGO5, 2020 a). These assessments came in handy when COVID-19 created the necessity to lock down the Sauraha area. The good news is that INGO5 doesn't rely on tourist income in any way, so unforeseen events do not impact the care of elephants or the salaries of staff. According to INGO5, the army was patrolling the streets, and beating anyone not complying with lockdown. Because their mahouts live on site, Feba and Idha's care was not compromised. In addition, having funds in the bank for a year of support meant that INGO5 did not have to compromise care or mahout salaries – in fact, the mahouts received a bonus during lockdown.

INGO5 has, in the past, collaborated with various other NGOs and individuals in the Sauraha area. However, according to INGO5 staff, 'common goals are not enough', and the differences in practices and motivations have proven too great to maintain active partnerships. INGO5 does maintain communication with NTNC staff and has kept veterinary staff involved in Idha's care. These veterinary visits also offer an opportunity for vet staff to observe PRT outcomes.

While visitors are allowed at the facility, they are not permitted physical contact with Idha, nor is she required to be in any one place at a given time for the convenience of visitors. Welcoming these guests is more an effort to demonstrate appropriate housing for elephants and the benefits of PRT.

Update and summary of Biography Three

Problems continue to plague relationships between organizations in Sauraha. In the last several years, more disputes have erupted between INGO2 and Renee. After Renee completed the building of a training wall at Hotel1 for INGO2, she asked INGO5's Brown to begin PRT with Heena Kali, the elephant Renee initially leased and who now resides with the Hotel1 herd. Due to disagreements over the best way to involve mahouts in the training process, the women were asked to discontinue any contact

with the staff at Hotel1. Heena Kali has been fully turned over to INGO2. The debate has settled a bit, and Renee continues to aid elephants within Sauraha (with or without their owner's permission). She has installed pumps in several stables to ensure a fresh water supply for elephants, created enrichment activities, and built a loading platform for an elderly female who has trouble bending down.

While Renee declined to participate officially in the current study due to concerns with the language barrier, she is in contact with the author as well as INGO5. During the lockdown, she began working with other individuals towards the goal of aiding elephants in need. During conversations with her, I explained that the elephant owners were bothered by her social media posts and her complaints to newspapers. I also described my feelings about the presence of her social media posts which remained unedited online and appeared to be asking for financial support nearly a year after Liswini/Idha had been moved to INGO5's facility. In response, Renee has removed the social media posts involving Liswini and her mahout. The existence of open lines of communication between INGOs (even if they are contentious at times) should be seen as encouraging.

Likewise, communication between INGO5, the community forest users' group, local elephant owners, and the NTNC's veterinary staff has been key to improving the lives of captive elephants. Perhaps INGO5's business model can serve as one positive example for other organizations active within Nepal.

Conclusions

Elephant lives in Nepal are defined by a human-imposed system of commodification. Privately owned, non-cooperative member individuals find themselves in precarious positions, which can mean an early death due to inexperienced owners and traditional management styles. Other privately owned elephants survive in a variety of conditions largely dependent upon the whims of their owners, the owners' cooperative, the location of their stable, the interest of NGOs in their welfare, and their

perceived financial value. Government elephants, described by many interlocutors in the present study as being in terrible conditions, find themselves with greater access to fresh grass, browse, and exercise within the national park. While many NGOs/INGOs are focusing on ending elephant use entirely, perhaps greater focus should be placed on improving the conditions of all elephants who find themselves under human control.

What follows in the next chapter (Chapter 10) is a review of 25 of the approximately 40 private stables in Sauraha. Using a welfare needs checklist derived from the data in the elephant health review of this volume, these facilities will be evaluated according to their ability to meet the basic needs of their residents. Standards such as substrate, chaining, and access to veterinary care are considered, along with mahout housing and a variety of other impactors which correlate with the five freedoms.

Notes

[1] Information in this section comes from 2017 and 2019 interviews with 'Mr Larina' and 'Mr Gurju' unless otherwise noted. Names and positions are used with permission. Additional information is provided by Dr Prakesh Vidanta.

[2] Female elephants in Nepal carry the surname Kali to honour the Hindu goddess of the same name. Male names contain Prasad or Gaj, with respect for the elephant-headed god, Ganesh (aka Gaja/Gajah).

[3] I could find no documentation as to why an African elephant was on this bill previously, and none of my informants were able to enlighten me.

[4] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[5] Information in this section was obtained via participant observations of Dhonu and Rudra Raja, and interviews with Saroj, Vidanta, and INGO5 staff, unless otherwise noted. Names have been pseudonymized.

[6] INGOs have been pseudonymized using an alphanumeric code. While references to their materials are given within the text, the references have been removed from the reference list to retain anonymity.

[7] A lakh (or lac) is 100,000 (Nepalese or Indian) rupees and is a term used to discuss large sums of money in India and Nepal.

[8] A Hindu celebration involving lots of decoration and colourful dyes thrown at other humans, placed upon dogs and other free-living domesticates, or painted on elephants'

foreheads.

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10 Hattisar Assessments and the Way Forward

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Abstract

This chapter consolidates the academic data from previous chapters and introduces a novel method for assessing elephant stables surrounding Chitwan National Park, Nepal. The academic information was combined with stakeholder input which focused on current elephant management techniques, perceived needs within the stable (for mahouts and elephants), and availability of veterinary care. The information was then used to create a list of management- and resource-based welfare impactors which combined academic, indigenous, and embodied knowledge. Assessments were undertaken using this checklist, and highlighted several areas where elephant health and welfare were negatively impacted by the limits of current stable structures, management methods, husbandry, etc. These assessments also highlighted several potential changes which could be simply and inexpensively undertaken to (temporarily) improve the health and/or welfare of elephants in Nepal.

As seen in Chapter 5 (this volume), there are several areas of elephant heath and husbandry which are considered important by academics and practitioners. Among the most important factors were the presence of appropriate, clean substrate, which is key to foot and joint health and allows for the exhibition of natural behaviours (Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Gurusamy *et al.*, 2014; Miller *et al.*, 2016). This substrate should be composed of natural materials which are able to be moved or manipulated by resident elephants. In addition, the expression of wallowing and rubbing behaviours is considered vital to both physical and mental health, as is the ability to dig while foraging and to cool off by

dust-bathing, all which depend upon substrate choices (Gurusamy *et al.*, 2014; Miller *et al.*, 2016; Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018). Other key factors impacting health and welfare included protection from the elements (Yadav *et al.*, 2015; Mellor, 2016a), access to fresh water for drinking and bathing (Miller *et al.*, 2015), the availability of a variety of free-choice browse materials, and appropriate nutrition which includes seasonal dietary changes (Gurusamy *et al.*, 2014; Glaeser *et al.*, 2021). Socially bonded and preferably related groups (Gurusamy *et al.*, 2014; Williams *et al.*, 2015; Greco *et al.*, 2016; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016), access to olfactory or visual contact with conspecifics (Williams *et al.*, 2015; Greco *et al.*, 2016; Prado-Oviedo *et al.*, 2016; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016), freedom of movement (Mellor, 2016a), and the ability to make meaningful choices were also described as important factors in promoting positive elephant welfare (Foerder *et al.*, 2011). Other long-term welfare impacts arose from having experienced a dominance- or violence-based breaking ritual (Greco *et al.*, 2016; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2016), the type of management style used in the stable (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019), and the ability to recline or lean for appropriate restful sleep (Mellor, 2016a; Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018). Along with the five freedoms of animal welfare and their associated provisions, consolidated data from the above studies were used to create a list of items and practices that most impact captive elephant health and welfare within Nepalese stables (see Fig. 10.1).

For example, one of the most concerning health concerns in Nepal is pododermatitis, a term used in veterinary literature to indicate any foot infection (Fowler and Mikota, 2006). These foot infections can quickly deteriorate due to poor husbandry, lack of appropriate substrate, an inability to move about, or overwork. Changes in husbandry methods and the addition of appropriate substrates have been shown to positively impact foot health and prevent pododermatitis and foot rot (Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2016; Wendler *et al.*, 2020). If husbandry concerns are uncorrected, they progress to foot rot, resulting in changes to gait patterns and painful joint infections (Panagiotopoulou *et al.*, 2012; Wendler *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, factors impacting foot health, such as composition and cleanliness of substrate, are listed as separate

considerations in the checklist, as are the availability of dirt for digging and the expression of normal self-care behaviours.

Consideration	Available (1)	Unavailable (0)	Unable to assess (N/A)
Shelter[b]			
Appropriate substrate[d]			
Cleanliness of substrate[c]			
Availability of dirt for bathing and digging[d]			
Access to clean water for drinking and bathing[a]			
Availability of browse[c]			
Variety of diet[a,c]			
Social groupings[d]			
Freedom of movement[a,d]			
Non-traditional (non-dominance-based) management[e]			
Structures for rest/sleep[b]			
Prevention of injury[c]			
Access to health care[c]			
Choice in activity/agency[b,d]			
Additional considerations			
Life history/exposed to Phajaan[f]	Yes (0)	No (1)	
Very short distance to tourist gate	Yes (1)	No (0)	
Mahout housing	Concrete (0)	Traditional (1)	Elevated (1)

Fig. 10.1. Positive welfare influencers checklist created for the present study. The five freedoms associated with the above list are: [a]freedom from hunger, thirst, malnutrition; [b]comfort and shelter; [c]prevention or rapid diagnosis of disease and treatment. Also relates to ability to get away from perceived danger and the safety of the stable; [d]freedom to exhibit normal patterns of behaviour; [e]freedom from fear (FAWC, 2009); [f]if the elephant was imported from India, it can be assumed he/she has undergone the Phajaan.

Click to see the long description.

The above-mentioned academic information was paired with data collected during interviews with stakeholders to create a list of factors deemed important for elephant health and welfare by a variety of individuals (those involved in elephant care, keeping, or advocacy).[1] Adding complexity to the creation of this metric is the wide range of stakeholder perspectives on what constitutes good husbandry, and what factors are most important. For example, most owners and mahouts interviewed for the current study expressed their belief that elephants

'deserved' and 'needed' better food, improved stabling options (such as more space, better substrate, more browse), shorter working hours, lighter loads, reduced time spent on chains, and less dominance-based management.[2] The distance travelled to work, protection from the elements, and the need for 'friends' were also mentioned by mahouts, owners, and non-governmental organization (NGO) and veterinary staff. In general, concepts which were listed as important by interlocuters reflected those found in academic literature (see Chapter 5, this volume) and were included on the checklist described below (Szydlowski, 2022b).

During the initial fieldwork for this volume, I visited (or in many cases, re-visited) 25 of the approximately 40 private hattisars in the Sauraha area, as well as the government and National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) stables. I also visited the Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge (TTTL) hattisar on the other side of Chitwan National Park – the only completely chain-free facility at that time. Some of these stables were chosen on the advice of veterinary staff as examples of what they felt were 'good' or 'bad'. Others were chosen after asking local and international welfare advocates which elephants and stables were of 'greatest concern' to them. I wanted to compare the perspectives of NGO personnel and advocates to those of the veterinary staff and my own judgements based on my background in veterinary health, my in-depth study of welfare and health parameters, and my experience with (and embodied knowledge of) captive elephants in US and Nepalese zoos and hattisars. All visits were approved by the NTNC veterinary staff, project management staff, or facility owners, and I was given permission to photograph and interact with elephants, mahouts, and other staff at will.[3] Audio of many of these visits was recorded with permission, and recordings were analysed via discourse analysis (see Chapter 2, this volume).

I was accompanied on many of these visits by the NTNC veterinarian, Dr Vidanta, or the veterinary technician, 'Ravi Saroj', who described elephants as 'nice', 'naughty', or 'dangerous'. They offered insight into what they considered 'good', 'very good', 'bad', or 'very bad' stables. These descriptions were helpful by way of giving me a glimpse into what they considered the most important elephant husbandry factors. Their

vision of a good stable was one with 'quality' rice which was free of insects, rat faeces, or fungus, and a clean, dry floor with no rocks or concrete. In addition, they considered fodder storage methods, distance from the tourist gates (which creates long walks for some elephants before their workday even begins), mahout experience, and mahout housing.

Mahout housing is important for the prevention of injury, and many prefer housing which is easily escapable in case of attack by wild bull elephants. Traditional mud and stick Tharu housing falls into this category, and concrete block housing does not. Mahouts have been trapped inside concrete housing by bulls blocking doors or windows, and some have chosen to sleep in the open rather than risk being trapped or crushed. The dominant bull elephant, Renaldo, destroyed numerous buildings while I was in Nepal, often those where food was stored in or near mahout lodgings. In addition, elevated housing was considered important by interlocuters, due to annual flooding. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that elephant health and welfare are intimately linked to the physical and mental health of their mahout (GoN, 2015; Miller *et al.*, 2015, p. 2; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). For these reasons, mahout lodging is included in the following assessments.

Having visited elephant stables in Nepal on prior visits, I had a good idea of what standard living conditions for tourism safari elephants looked like, and how conditions had changed between 2012 and 2021. I knew that captive elephants in Nepal did not receive the same diets, housing, veterinary care, or enrichment as elephants in US or European facilities (Szydlowski, 2022b). It was not my initial intention to approach these elephants from an advocacy viewpoint or compare them to stables in the Global North. As demonstrated in Chapter 5 of this volume, European and US zoos do not always compare favourably with Asian timber camps, nor do elephants live longer in those zoos (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Clubb *et al.*, 2008). The Nepalese stables I had visited on prior trips and in which I conducted interviews and participant observations were functional spaces which housed mahouts and elephants and were described by informants as typical of the area. Instead, I intended to look for similarities and differences in management- and resource-based welfare impactors as described by both

Nepalese and non-Nepalese interlocutors. Considering these welfare impactors has another facet; some of my non-Nepalese participants (the pachyderm persons) were unable to discuss their situation in words (see Szydlowski, 2022a). To properly consider their position, I needed to use my embodied knowledge of elephants, my experience with animal health, and my liminal position between elephants, owners, mahouts, and advocates in my attempts to identify factors which might impact the health and welfare of stable residents (Szydlowski, 2023b).

One consideration is immediately apparent. According to veterinary staff, there are no privately owned elephants in the Sauraha area who are completely chain-free, including those elephants with chronic or acute injuries, painful wounds, or disabilities.[4] In addition, the practice of restricting injured elephants, such as resting them in one place 24 hours a day, is counterintuitive for healthy joints in large land mammals. Without diagnostic equipment, however, there are few other treatment options. The restricted movement of all elephants coupled with standard stable conditions led several interlocutors in the current study to accuse elephant owners of cruelty or abuse. But accusations of mistreatment of elephants are quite upsetting to other stakeholders (and, of course, owners), and an 'affront' to their Hindu religion, says Vidanta, as elephants are seen as the embodiment of Ganesh. These gods must be treated with respect, and owners feel what he calls a 'moral obligation' to care for elephants properly (Vidanta interviews, 2019).[5] According to Vidanta, the elephants in Sauraha are well-cared for and 'happy', especially compared to the 'horrible' conditions he feels they face in other parts of Nepal (Vidanta interviews, 2019).

I had also been warned by both international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), nature guides, and NTNC staff (i.e. non-Nepalese and Nepalese viewpoints) that some of the stables housed elephants in what they described as dangerous, unhealthy, or 'horrible' conditions (Bames, Brown, Crane, Minsky, Randy, Sama, Taraswin, Thomas and Zed interviews, 2019). I had also been told by elephant owners that most stables could benefit from improvements in nutrition, treatment, and housing; owners stated that they would like to see these improvements implemented, but few were willing to commit to doing so without outside

funding. As someone with a long-term relationship with and knowledge of elephants, I knew it would be hard to assess these stables objectively, but as someone with an animal health background, I initially strove to be clinical, distant, and impartial. In the end, I chose to view these stables reflexively rather than seek (likely impossible) objectivity. For that reason, I created a welfare consideration checklist, based upon the large literature review undertaken for this volume mixed with the concerns of advocates, elephant caregivers, owners, and other stakeholders.

Why Not Use Behavioural Indicators for This Study?

Behavioural indicators (a type of animal-based assessment) are an accepted tool for welfare assessment in captive settings and correlate with physical measurements of elephant health (Mason and Veasey, 2010; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019; Gurusamy and Phillips, 2020; see Chapter 5, this volume). An animal's time usage, avoidance behaviour, and choice of activities or social interactions can all be used to estimate their welfare status. Quantifying the number, type, and length of stereotypic behaviours is also used to assess welfare in captive settings (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Mason and Veasey, 2010; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; Greco *et al.*, 2017). However, quantifying stereotypies in Nepalese hattisars is difficult for several reasons. First, every elephant observed during fieldwork (in private, NTNC, and government stables) exhibited stereotypies. Due to the presence of stereotypies in all elephant participants, the author chose to consider them as part of the life history represented on the checklist (see Greco *et al.*, 2017; Fig. 10.1). In addition, fieldwork for this volume was conducted by a single researcher in collaboration with the two-member NTNC veterinary staff. Documenting the number, type, and length of stereotypies at each stable over the study period was simply impossible without additional personnel. Such studies should, however, be included in future elephant welfare assessments in Nepal.

Likewise, 'the measures and methods utilized in studies of animal welfare need to be well matched to the questions of interest and the context of the investigation' (Meehan *et al.*, 2016, p. 3). The current

study is an ethnographic and biographic examination of interactions between elephants, mahouts, NGOs, and owners; therefore, including a behavioural assessment of welfare was beyond its scope. Instead, methods which matched the study's intent – determining if organizations, owners, and community members could impact the health and welfare of captive elephants – were needed. Therefore, an older (but still practised) style of assessment, that of management- and resource-based evaluation (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Harris *et al.*, 2008; Keeling, 2009; Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Jones *et al.*, 2022) of elephant welfare impactors, was chosen. This type of study has long been used globally to assess the welfare of both farm animals (see Keeling, 2009) and captive wildlife (Clubb and Mason, 2002; AZA, 2012; EAZA, 2020). When only small sample sizes are available, or participants are located across physical distances, epidemiological animal behavioural (animal based-) assessments can be hard to complete (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Hitchens *et al.*, 2017). In these cases, management- and resource-based assessments may be the only available tools (Draper and Harris, 2012).[6]

Management systems and the physical environment play a role in captive animal health in real-world settings (see Chapter 5 and Appendix I, this volume). Studies have highlighted the connections between habitat size, quality, enrichment, injury risk factors, and management practices, which influence animal health and welfare in captive settings (Melfi, 2009; Shepherdson, 2010; Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Grandin, 2013; Meehan *et al.*, 2016; Mellor, 2017; Edwards *et al.*, 2019). Thus, finding simple, easily applied ways to positively impact health and welfare are key. Identifying methods to 'improve animal welfare via changes in housing, handling, breeding, and management' are needed (Meehan *et al.*, 2016, p. 3).

Input from appropriate stakeholders (specialists, caregivers, veterinarians, etc.) is vital to identifying those management and resource factors *most likely* to offer the greatest improvements in health or welfare (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Veasey, 2017, 2020), and allows for immediate identification and/or remediation of problem areas (Hitchens *et al.*, 2017; Veasey, 2020). While some studies have shown management- and resource-based assessments' correlation with behavioural animal-based

observations and assessments (e.g. Hitchens *et al.*, 2017; Kang *et al.*, 2002), more investigation is needed to identify whether correlations between animal-, management-, and resource-based measurements are reliable; current literature suggests their use in conjunction with animal-based studies (Carlstead *et al.*, 2013; Renggaman *et al.*, 2015; Hitchens *et al.*, 2017; Veasey, 2017).

By incorporating the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders, it is possible to better understand the trade-offs between animal use, welfare, health, human livelihood support, and community needs (Mench *et al.*, 2016). This also allows for local knowledge to become part of the 'expert contribution' to research (see following sections). An evaluation of species-specific habitat and husbandry, which includes an assessment of the animal's perspective as found in the current study (see following sections), is vital to establishing environments that promote positive welfare (Melfi, 2009; Mellor, 2017). These evaluations also represent an important first step in bridging the gaps in empirical studies evaluating the effects of habitat and husbandry on welfare (Melfi, 2009; Mellor, 2017). Resource- or management-based studies can then become the basis for evidence-based frameworks and future studies regarding the success (or failure) of resource-based interventions (Melfi, 2009; Mellor, 2017).

Management and resource variables can be easy to modify and can have positive (and predictable) impacts on elephant health, even in settings with limited space or personnel (Melfi, 2009; Coe and Dykstra, 2010; Draper and Harris, 2012; Meehan *et al.*, 2016). Likewise, these variables can be adapted to meet the specific needs of individuals. Therefore, they offer a non-invasive, non-specialized (i.e. easy to see and note by non-professional personnel), and easy-to-record method to measure welfare and welfare impactors at zoos (Draper and Harris, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2022) and Nepalese stables.

Results: Welfare Considerations at Sauraha's Stables

What follows is a discussion of stables in the Sauraha area and an assessment of their ability to provide appropriate environments and opportunities which promote good health and positive welfare. Included are stories about elephant individuals, offering a glimpse of their work and care experiences. Fig. 10.1 contains the assessment checklist, with footnotes linking what I have termed 'positive welfare influencers' to the five freedoms of animal welfare and their associated provisions (FAWC, 1979; Mellor, 2016a, b). Due to a lack of prior data on which influencers should carry the most weight in the specific situations below, equal weight was given to each influencer below.[7] Future studies will be needed to assess which of these items impacts elephant welfare to a greater degree. The initial checklist focused on the outcomes which are most likely to have the greatest positive impact on Nepalese elephants' affective states (Veasey, 2017), according to both academic literature and local knowledge (see previous sections). Because of individual differences in stables, items on this checklist were not applicable to each situation.

For example, at most stables it was impossible to assess the variety of offered browse, or whether any was given that day. Owners and mahouts claimed that the elephants can graze and browse during morning trips out to collect grass or while on safari, but during all observed safaris the elephants were discouraged from browsing, and often beaten if they tried to eat more than a passing branch with guests on their back. According to informants, forest materials are obtained and offered to elephants to varying degrees at private shelters. During my months in Sauraha, I rarely saw privately owned elephants offered anything but kuchis while stabled, but this does not mean it never occurs.[8]

Stable and work descriptions

A typical day for a captive elephant in the area starts at 4 a.m. with kuchis, which are made from uncooked rice, molasses, and salt wrapped in long grasses. At 6 a.m., mahouts drive the elephants to the tourist gate for safaris until 10 a.m. Many elephants simply hang out in meadows during their 10 a.m. break, standing with their mahouts near the tourist

gates instead of making the long walk back to their stable. At 1 p.m., teams return to the safari gates until 5 p.m., or later if there is a multitude of tourists in town. More kuchis follow for dinner, which typically lasts until 10 p.m. Water is accessed at the river on the way to or from safari.

Traditional Nepalese hattisars consisted of four wooden or metal posts (of various heights depending on the facility) which supported metal roofs (Fig. 10.2). Most private hattisars were free-standing and housed a single elephant. In contrast, governmental stables were arranged in rows (Fig. 10.3). Hattisars do not have walls or perimeter fences unless mahout housing has been connected to the stable itself (Fig. 10.4). Stable floors were made of packed dirt or concrete; according to mahouts, these materials were easier to keep clean and prevented elephants from digging holes. Elephant faeces were collected daily, pushed into a pile on the side or rear of the stable, and burned as needed; urine was either left on the substrate, soaked up with grass, or sprayed down with a hose.

Elephants at private stables were kept chained when not giving tourist rides, typically by one front and one back foot to two wooden posts at either end of the hattisar. Others (including those at the NTNC stable) were hobble-chained, wherein both front feet were hooked together and then attached to a post to prevent walking. Some individuals who were described as 'friendly' or 'good' elephants by their owners were instead tied to their posts using ropes attached to ankle chains. Only one privately owned elephant observed for the present study was allowed to remain off-chain in the Sauraha area, and then only while her mahout was present. In contrast, the elephants owned or leased by INGOs spent most of their days unchained and in fenced pastures with a variety of substrates. Captive elephants in the Kawasoti area are similarly chained, except for the ten found at TTTL.

Summary of stables

Twenty-two of the 24 assessed stables provided a shelter with a roof for resident elephants (see Fig. 10.5). This is due to the requirements of membership in the United Elephant Owner's Cooperative (UEOC), the

organization which oversees both elephant safari assignment and the distribution of safari profits. This organization requires that shelter be provided at member stables to offer elephants some protection from the sun and inclement weather. Only one Nepalese elephant owner has thus far refused membership in the cooperative (foreign owners or rescuers are not allowed to join, as they do not participate in safari rides), but he has none the less chosen to provide shelter for his elephants. The only facility not providing regular shelter instead houses its elephants in a chain-free, fenced corral. This corral offers some protection from the elements, thanks to the presence of well-established trees. However, Dr Vidanta expressed concern that there was no way to ensure that resident elephants could find shade at all times of day or escape the monsoon rains if desired (Vidanta PC, 2019).



Fig. 10.2. A typical stable, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author.)

Twenty-one of the 24 assessed stables provided access to health care in the form of the NTNC veterinarian and veterinary technician. Instances of leg, foot, or nail damage (injuries, overgrown nails, cracked nails, swollen feet or legs), wounds, abscesses, eye damage, and a variety of other physical issues were present in every privately owned elephant examined or observed during the present study (Vidanta PC, 2019). As previously mentioned, these two men are tasked with caring for the privately and governmentally held elephants in the area; they received a small stipend from the owners' cooperative for their services. According to Vidanta, those that did not belong to the elephant cooperative still received care from the veterinarian but pay a minimal cost. The reasons behind the remaining stables refusing access to this health care require some explanation. The owner of one of these stables felt that he adequately understands the health needs of his elephants, and therefore has no need to pay for veterinary services. He has declined or acted against medical advice in the past, which resulted in the loss of three adult elephants. Vidanta and staff continue to communicate with this owner, in the hopes that he will one day again be open to medical assistance to ensure the health of his herd. In addition, this owner is now working with several NGOs in the area to improve his facility and the health and well-being of his herd. The additional two stables listed as 'without access to health care' have also declined veterinary advice.



Fig. 10.3. Typical layout for a government/NTNC stable, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author.)

Twenty of the 24 stables demonstrated a high degree of substrate cleanliness, thanks to mahouts who regularly swept, rinsed, and added grass for urine absorption. Faeces were swept into piles and burned as needed (this is the traditional method of disposal). Ten facilities housed elephants within olfactory or visual contact with conspecifics, but none housed related elephants. Only three stables allowed physical contact between elephants while chained. Mahouts explained that these individuals are often 'not friendly' to one another, and therefore are prevented from contact to maintain both their safety and the safety of mahouts.



Fig. 10.4. Stable with attached mahout housing in the rear, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author.)

The welfare influencer least seen at area stables arose from what has been described as a 'traditional practice' by interlocutors (including mahouts, owners, nature guides, veterinary personnel, and NGO staff). While most stables had a well somewhere on property, elephants were not allowed to drink or bathe at will and were not allowed to drink while in their stable at all. Part of the reason for this practice, according to mahouts and owners, arose from the tendency of captive elephants to destroy concrete well caps, metal pumps, or drinking basins. Instead, access to drinking water was limited to the river which is accessed on the way to and from tourist safari rides. Only two facilities offered free-choice access to drinking water at their stables. Elephants assigned to a tourist

bathing session (which is scheduled by the UEOC) can access the river for up to several hours at a time but are required to stay within a designated area. In addition, elephants are required to allow tourists to climb upon and/or scrub them with water, hands, and river rocks.

Only three facilities offered their elephants access to open spaces with loose dirt or natural areas, while the rest housed elephants on packed dirt, packed dirt with gravel, rock or embedded chunks of concrete, or concrete slabs. The facilities which provided access to natural substrates or loose dirt did so by maintaining elephants in chain-free corrals, which further allowed for choice in sleeping area, browse, and substrate. Interlocutors reported that these practices have increased the positive welfare of resident elephants. The lack of chains provided these elephants with the ability to choose their location, seek out different surfaces, forage for natural materials, care for feet and nails via digging, physically contact conspecifics, and thermoregulate. A fourth facility housed a disabled elephant, who often required a strap and post apparatus to keep her from falling. This elephant had a yard containing natural substrate, but due to her disabilities she cannot safely access it on a regular basis.

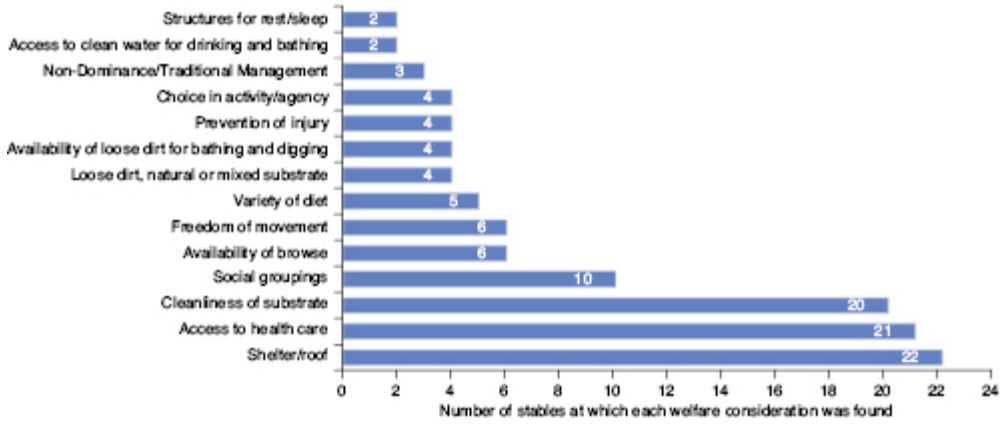


Fig. 10.5. List of welfare influencers and number of stables at which they are found.

Click to see the long description.

Five stables reported (and were observed) offering a seasonally varied diet or allowing elephants to consume a variety of plants within their stables. Six stables offered additional browse materials to supplement

current captive elephant diets of kuchis and cut grass. Only four stables were observed offering elephants any free choice in daily activities or provided areas suitably large and well-maintained for the prevention of injury. These five stables were all owned, funded, or managed by non-Nepalese individuals and maintained their elephants in limited chaining or chain-free enclosures. Because they were not regularly chained during the day, elephants housed at these stables had more time in which to dig, walk on plant materials or in the river, and break off at will from stressful situations (such as when approached by unfamiliar humans, draught animals, or street noise). Freedom of movement was listed separately from choice of activity as it was dependent upon whether the elephant had to remain chained when not working.

Another important welfare influencer commonly missing from Nepalese stables was any structure for leaning or reclining rest, such as a post, wall, tree, or dirt pile/incline. Every stable visited reported that elephants were kept from reclining against the stable support poles, lest they push them over. Some mahouts physically reprimanded elephants who attempted to lean on such posts, while others tied faeces to each post to discourage such leaning.

Results: Stories from Specific Stables

Stable group one

Two of the stables visited for the present study had only one 'positive welfare influencer' in place – access to health care. One of these is the stable owned by Rudra Raja and was discussed earlier (see Dhonu Gaj's biography, Chapter 9.2, in this volume). However, the stable of most concern housed a 58-year-old female named Kasmitha Kali. During the stable assessment Kasmitha stood with her eyes closed, sucking on her trunk, unmoving despite the proximity of unknown humans. Watching how she responded (or failed to respond) to her environment offered insight into her emotional state (de Waal, 2009, 2011), and her story serves to highlight several common issues seen in Nepalese stables.

Kasmitha Kali's stable is in a part of town which lacks many of the improvements obvious on the main street of Sauraha, such as street drainage, and Vidanta explains that the area is home to many landless and poor families. We approach a hotel which appears to be deserted and in disrepair but is, Vidanta tells me, open for business. He says that the hotel, and its elephant, are under the shared ownership of two brothers, neither of whom resides in Sauraha. Following an argument, the brothers failed to come to an agreement on the distribution of property, so the hotel and Kasmitha are in flux. As we approach the stable, we pass a group of mahouts playing poker in front of a small house which appears to be made entirely of tin.

Kasmitha Kali is chained by her front and back legs in a small stable (see Fig. 10.6). She is covered in blotches of red dye, perhaps left over from the celebration of Holi a few days earlier. Kasmitha stands with her eyes closed, sucking on her trunk as we approach (trunk-chewing or -sucking is considered a stereotypic behaviour and a sign of reduced welfare; see Mason and Veasey, 2010; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; Greco *et al.*, 2017). Despite our proximity, she does not move or open her eyes and appears completely disinterested (see Chapter 5, this volume). Even when we step up closer to better see her chains, she doesn't react at all. When she finally partially opens one eye to gaze at us, it seems as if the very effort was too much for her. This elephant is mentally and physically suffering; her toenails are cracked and deformed, her floor is hard packed dirt with large chunks of concrete, she stands in puddles of urine, and to her side are large piles of faeces.



Fig. 10.6. Kasmitha Kali in her stable, Sauraha, Nepal. (Photo taken by the author, 4 April 2019.)

The veterinarian explains that while Kasmitha's diet is 'good', she is not. He seems perplexed that even with what he considers proper nutrition, her 'attitude is not happy', even though he describes her as 'friendly'. Kasmitha seems to be caught in the space between being cared for and cared about (Schrader, 2015, p. 668). Vidanta has deemed her physically fit for safari rides but feels that she would be a prime candidate for retirement given her poor 'attitude' and advanced age (approximately 58). Having no control over her physical surroundings or daily activities, Kasmitha Kali is, in my opinion, demonstrating maladaptive passivity (Peterson and Seligman, 1983, p. 104), which can be fatal without

interventions. The lack of interest in her surroundings, and the ongoing trunk-sucking, are extremely concerning.

I mention to Vidanta that the condition of the stable, her work schedule, and the chains may be having negative mental and physical health impacts. Vidanta agrees that the roof is cause for concern but doesn't seem to connect Kasmitha's 'attitude' to her conditions or work life. This may be another case of social facts getting in the way of objectivity. It appeared that Vidanta was, at a gut level, aware of Kasmitha's suffering, and wanted her in a different situation. But as someone educated and trained in the belief that available food and a lack of visible wounds equals good health, Vidanta's professional viewpoint was that Kasmitha was 'sound'. In addition, Vidanta often cited the difficulty of not having the laboratory facilities to 'prove' when an animal has issues that are not visible to the naked eye. Without these tools, he is hesitant to make any suggestions to owners regarding the elephants' health. Instead, he limits comments to their fitness for work.

I am concerned about Kasmitha at a visceral level and reached out to several NGOs requesting their support for Dr Vidanta and Kasmitha. They agreed to check on Kasmitha but had too many previous obligations to other elephants. The COVID-19 pandemic, and its associated drop in tourism, eventually resulted in her sale to India (see section 'The UEOC and COVID-19', Chapter 7, this volume).

Stable group two

Seven facilities provided at least three positive welfare influencers. Some stables had full tin roofs, metal posts, and offered access to veterinary care; one exhibited extremely clean substrate. Six had concrete mahout housing; the remaining stable had no housing at all – it had been destroyed by the wild bull, Renaldo, and mahouts were sleeping outside.

At the hattisar owned by a UEOC leadership team member, a pair of females, Champa Kali and Aama Kali, benefit from olfactory and visual contact with one another while stabled. It should be noted that these two females reportedly have a multitude of health problems but do receive care from both the veterinary staff and their four mahouts plus the hotel

manager. Champa Kali, who is around 50 years old, has masses of small tumours all over her back, and chronic bedsores because she chooses to lie on only one side. Her caregivers are unsure why, and when I ask Vidanta, he says it may have something to do with injuries sustained in India as a younger elephant.[9] Champa has a nasty reputation, and reportedly killed 15 people before arriving in Nepal, possibly leading to retaliatory beatings. She is considered dangerous, yet her mahouts spread hay to soften a space for her to recline so that the vet can examine her, and we can trim her pads and toenails. As she attempts to lie down, she moves in strange ways – stiffly, and as if she can't quite bend properly. Champa does lie down at night for sleep, I am told, but is chained all night and lacks any soft dirt piles to rest upon. Due to her history as a dangerous elephant, we are told to stay out of trunk's reach (not an easy feat while trimming nails), and as we watch Champa move around her stable, I notice that while the mahout carries a bamboo stick, there is considerably less yelling at the elephants or need to threaten them to encourage compliance.

Champa's stablemate, Aama Kali, has numerous wounds along her trunk and moves gingerly. Her caregivers are busy preparing a natural remedy for digestive issues. Containing garlic, ginger, salt, and a variety of other traditional ingredients whose English names were unknown to the mahouts, this mixture is given a few times per year as a preventive treatment. According to Vidanta, humans also consume it as a digestive aid. The preparation of this tonic is a noisy, chaotic process which includes chopping, pounding, grinding, and a lot of shouting. It involves all five caregivers, dedicated to getting this elephant what she needs. Vidanta offers me a taste of the black salt and a type of garlic, which is so hard and so strong I had to quickly spit it out, which was very amusing to the veterinary and mahout staff.

There is a street dog hanging around this facility, who appears to be attached to a younger mahout and is trying to eat the elephant toenail clippings which we left on the ground. I absentmindedly toss him a scrap, and the hotel manager yells at the dog and removed the clipping. The manager throws a rock at the dog, who refuses to leave and approaches us, tail wagging. This exchange seems strange to me, considering the

large group of men working so diligently to prepare traditional remedies for an elephant whom they describe as a killer, but to whom they offer such affection. Perhaps this is a matter of Aama being a co-worker, whereas the dog is merely an intrusive animal (Coulter, 2016a,b; see Chapter 2, this volume).

Stable group three

Nine stables provided four of the checklist items. Of this group, seven maintained female elephants in some form of social group. These are not traditional herds, as the females are not allowed to regularly interact, but they do have visual, auditory, and olfactory contact. Only one of these stables had the traditional, preferred style of mahout housing. Others provided clean substrate and, in some cases, fresh browse as added variety to the standard kuchis. Touring these stables brought to light the numerous issues with traditional or dominance-based management techniques. Mahouts openly beat elephants in my presence, typically with a stick, sometimes with the flat of an axe, and occasionally with a bull hook. Yelling, kicking, and hitting elephants was typical, and in one case each strike was followed by cooing and patting.

As we approached one stable, a young boy quickly came towards us on an elephant, screaming and yelling, at me it seems (the elephant was non-plussed). Dr Vidanta and Ravi Saroj, the veterinary technician, quickly shouted back in Nepali. There appeared to be an argument happening, while the elephant quickly inched closer and reached out her trunk to me. Her eye was quite milky and appeared non-functional, while her ears were extremely furry, along with her legs. The boy eventually turned his elephant back towards the hattisar and we followed him. When I asked Vidanta about it, he said the child had screamed, 'You are white, white people can't come!' Vidanta told the boy that as a veterinarian, he could bring me into the stable, and suggested the boy check with his father for confirmation. This was the first incidence of overt prejudice I had experienced during my numerous trips to Nepal, and I was quite surprised. According to Vidanta, I shouldn't have been. When white people visited the stables located further from main street, he

explained, it is typically only to complain about 'welfare' and spread 'propaganda' – a word he and I commonly discussed in relation to elephants. He had to reassure the boy that I was a researcher, and that I would be respectful of his family and the elephants.[10] This stable had a 'traditional' family unit of mahouts, with a grandfather, father, brother, and 9-year-old son who cared for a pair of female elephants, Alina Kali and Daxa Kali. This familial care is not often seen at Nepalese stables but can have positive welfare benefits to elephants (see Chapter 7, this volume), and Vidanta explained that the son would like to continue the mahout tradition.

I sought consent from Alina (and her young mahout), by simply standing aside (Szydlowski, 2022a). Alina had already experienced me through sound as she approached; elephants recognize others' voices more than a kilometre away (McComb *et al.*, 2000), and our chatter likely announced our presence before we sighted her. Elephants also have an excellent sense of smell (Rasmussen and Krishnamurthy, 2000), and I allowed Alina to take her time examining me olfactorily from a distance. As I waited, I learned the elephant was 50 years old and blind. Her physical condition has been unchanged 'since she came from India' 7 years ago. Alina's ears showed damage on top, a common wound from bull hook use. As Vidanta headed around the concrete house to find the adults, the young man stood with Alina, arm wrapped around her trunk and chatted with me in Nepalese. Alina inched closer again and held her trunk over different parts of my body, not touching me. I felt like I was being scanned, and she flapped her ears in rhythm with her sniffing. I wondered if she used smell in place of her poor eyesight; her trunk and ears were always in motion, but her body was strangely still. She leaned against the post of her stable as I took photos, then returned to her olfactory exploration of my body. Alina's young mahout apparently decided we were okay and invited us to come closer, as Alina took my hand in her trunk. Elephants are incredibly tactile beings (Balcombe, 2009), using their entire bodily surface to interact with the environment. Their trunks are so sensitive that they can sense a change in object size as miniscule as 0.25 mm (Dehnhardt *et al.*, 1997), and I took Alina's touch

to indicate a form of acceptance and consent to my presence (see Szydlowski, 2022a).

Alina's stablemate, Daxa Kali (see Chapter 8, this volume), was the elephant of 'most concern', according to local welfare groups. As she approached us, I could see why. Her back legs were abnormally long and met in the middle to form an 'x' as she walked. Her hip points stuck out and she rocked wildly from side to side as she approached. She was very friendly and quickly approached to smell my hands. I noticed her toenails are very overgrown – perhaps the longest I had seen, and I asked Vidanta how often they were cut. He at first claimed they try to trim every six months, but this was another common refrain which Vidanta admitted later is not really the case.

The grandfather exited the house, saw us, and yelled. Saroj again translated – 'these people are white' – and we nodded. Reassurances were made to the human residents of the stable, and Ravi shared a story which demonstrated the bond between this mahout and his elephant. One day the grandfather had a feeling that something was a bit off with Daxa Kali. He tried calling Vidanta and Saroj, but both were busy and didn't answer, so he walked Daxa Kali to Saroj's house to wait for him. She was fine, but Saroj laughs as he tells the story. These mahouts appeared to love their elephants and wanted to ensure they got the care they need. To that end, the father regularly arose in the middle of the night, every night, to make kuchis, because he didn't think the younger mahouts did a good enough job.

We returned later to perform foot care on Daxa Kali. Given her disability, Daxa Kali required regular care to balance the distribution of weight equally across her pad surface. This care can prevent nail breaks and pressure sores, but she did not want to take part in the process and required a great deal of yelling and threatening from her mahouts. She was offered rice bags to lie upon, and was instructed to lie down, which she did, awkwardly. It appeared she couldn't bend in the 'normal places' and instead flopped down stiffly. Her mahout, the grandfather, took charge, stood behind Daxa's head, and chirruped in her ear. Daxa pulled her leg back from the vet, and one mahout hit her repeatedly with a bamboo stick until she stopped. He then rubbed the spot and cooed in her ear again. This made me think of van Dooren's (2014, p. 9; 2015)

'violent care', perhaps not in the way he originally intended it,[11] but rather as care which required aggression or the exertion of power to perform necessary tasks. I am reminded of my daughters as children – fighting nose-blowing or diaper changes. While these practices are necessary, they are often not welcome and require some dominance by parents to achieve. In fact, I was a bit uncomfortable touching Daxa Kali without her express consent, but as with other caregiving practices (such as veterinary tasks like vaccinations) I could understand the necessity outweighing her desire. However, if a form of positive reinforcement training (PRT) were an option here (see Appendix I, this volume), perhaps Daxa would have freely participated (Szydlowski, 2022a) or have more options for foot care, such as standing behind a training wall (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Clubb and Mason, 2002; Greco *et al.*, 2016).

After over 2 hours of very intensive 'care work' (Coulter, 2016a, 199) on the part of the NTNC veterinary technician, myself, the mahout, and a visiting technician, we finished her feet, which thanks to the application of betadine looked ghastly. Daxa had been performing her own labour, remaining on the ground against her wishes (which she expressed by repeatedly trying to rise, and getting whacked with a stick in return) and allowing numerous people to touch her in ways she did not want to be touched. Before she got up, I quickly took photos for later comparison.[12] Daxa rose and tested out her feet gingerly, as if expecting them to be sore. They did not appear to bother her, and Daxa returned to her shelter.

The breeding centre

Another hattisar of interest for the present study was the government-owned breeding centre (see Chapter 6, this volume), which remains a popular tourist attraction. This facility housed 17 adult and sub-adult females and a few juveniles and provided four of the 16 listed welfare impactors. The breeding centre continues to supply elephants for government operations and serves as a site for the breaking ritual. The shelters at the breeding centre were arranged very differently from

private stables, with a single long tin roof covering a row of posts to which elephants were chained. The lack of accessible water has been a concern since the inception of the centre (see Yadav, 2003, p. 28 and 30). During fieldwork for the current study, the youngest calves wandered freely throughout the breeding facility, often to the delight of guests who reached out to pat these juveniles as they passed. According to nature guides (women's guide group and Rajesh interviews 2019), tourists of all nationalities have received broken bones or other injuries when they attempted to 'play' with these babies, reportedly associating 'baby' with 'harmless'. These young juveniles had access to grassy areas and loose dirt, a luxury not afforded to the adults and sub-adults, who stood on packed dirt hills, often hobble-chained. These elephants were seen pulling on their chains in attempts to reach their offspring or shelter mates. Juvenile elephants described by stable staff as 'in training' were also hobble-chained. I had not observed hobble-chaining of juveniles on prior visits to Nepal. One of the young, chained elephants attempted to hop into a new position by raising both front feet and shifting to the side before dropping them down. Interlocutors (guests at the facility, including visiting medical personnel) who observed the process expressed concern that this behaviour might be damaging to developing joints. On prior fieldwork visits, hobbling any residents of the centre was uncommon but current interlocutors reported that a wild bull has taken to breaking the smaller restraints of adult females, and has released them into the forest. Whether or not this wild male was involved in the actual breaking of these chains remains to be seen, as females observed during the current study often reacted with fear when the bull arrived at the breeding centre (they trumpeted, stood back-to-back, or circled when possible, and stood between the bull and their calves). Interlocuters felt that the females may have broken loose to escape being mounted, or in efforts to distract him from their offspring. Renaldo successfully destroyed the centre's (human) kitchen in 2017, and during this visit, I notice that electric wire has been haphazardly strung around the perimeter of the mahout housing. The wire is disconnected during the day and restrung each evening to protect both mahouts and their food stores, but resident female elephants are left outside the protective barrier.

Stables with mid-range scores

Three stables provided five or six welfare-impacting items, and several elephants from this group of stables had medical issues of unknown origin. One exhibited significant tearing of her ear tissue, which according to the veterinarian has been present since her arrival from India.[9] Another, Sanji Kali, had a limp of unknown origin, although it may be related to the concrete stable floor (see Chapter 5, this volume). Sanji Kali was chained by both front and back legs and used her trunk to rub the painful joint. The vet asked Sanji's caregiver to have her lie down so he can examine the leg, but she resisted and appeared very stiff. Hay was placed on the ground for her lie upon, and the mahouts beat her repeatedly until she lay down and let Vidanta inject a steroid to aid with inflammation. He asked if the mahouts had been beating her on the legs, and the mahouts denied the accusation. Vidanta explained that he is part detective – he must investigate mysterious injuries while treating them.

Vidanta has tried penicillin to see if it would help with the joint, but it has not worked. Instead, Sanji Kali's mahouts boiled down tree bark to mix with mud and rub on the injured leg, which seemed a gentle expression of care work in contrast to the violent beating witnessed earlier (Coulter, 2016b, p. 199). This Ayurvedic treatment, again with no English name, traditionally helps with inflammation.

Tuli Kali

Another of these middle-scoring stables housed Tuli Kali, another limping elephant. Dr Vidanta described this as a 'bad' stable, due to the large amount of gravel in the dirt and the concrete floor. Tuli's front left leg was twisted and deformed along with her toenails, which were split. Her front legs were two different sizes and had been that way since 'she came from India' at the age of 5 years. Vidanta explained that Tuli moved awkwardly when walking. The veterinary staff requested an appointment to perform foot care on Tuli, and her owner agreed to let us the next day. When we arrived, she was nowhere to be seen. The mahout informed us that she was taken to tourist safari, and Dr Vidanta explained that this is one of the issues faced daily. Tuli attended a prior

health camp and received a foot trimming but had issues walking afterwards. Her owner was 'furious'. However, after noticing a long-term change in her ability to move, the owner requested regular foot care. This owner offered the vet staff live ducks as a 'bonus', but Tuli's mahouts remain unwilling to allow foot treatment.

Even with her walking issues, Tuli seemed more well-adjusted than many other elephants we visited. She played with a garden hose and had free access to a dirt-packed yard daily. She wandered over to eat a few kuchis, one of the few elephants who ate them (according to veterinary staff) without having to be instructed or threatened to do so. However, she quickly unwrapped the dry grasses and picked out the rice. The older mahout grabbed a stick and placed it by the food. She began to eat the entire kuchi. Apparently, the stick alone was enough to remind her who is truly in charge of her food intake.

Stable group four

TTTL

TTTL, Hotel1, and INGO5 were the three highest-scoring stables in the present study. Tiger Tops offered large, chain-free corrals for its socially grouped herds. Resident elephants had some agency in their actions, feeding, and socialization with humans. The corrals at Tiger Tops had a variety of natural surfaces, which is important for foot health, as is the ability to move across these surfaces at will (see Chapter 5, this volume). In addition, these elephants had long periods of free-choice grazing time daily. This herd was not used for elephant-backed safari (but were followed by paying guests on jungle walks), and had a staff of well-respected, uniformed, well-treated, and generally well-experienced mahouts – some of whom had been with the facility for decades. Tiger Tops used a combination of modified handling techniques at its facility. A behaviour was first requested by voice while carrying a stick. If the elephant did not comply, they were sometimes allowed to break off, and other times struck lightly with the stick. Mahouts do not spend the entire day in the corral, or with their elephant, which set their jobs apart from

most mahouts. This also allowed individual elephants to choose whether to socialize with humans or remain with conspecifics.

American interlocutors had mixed feelings about the arrangement at Tiger Tops. While impressed by its ability to achieve what NTNC staffers said was impossible and maintain a chain-free facility, these Americans worried about Tiger Tops' lack of shade, lack of free-choice access to water for drinking or bathing, and reliance on high-end tourism to survive. The lack of water was also a concern for the management staff, who showed me examples of the drinkers they were hoping to install in each corral. However, due to the ease with which elephants destroyed the original concrete drinkers, staff members are now reconsidering their options.

When I mentioned that Tiger Tops was often suggested to me as a place to view 'the best' in chain-free living, Dr Vidanta said, 'I do not think they are best of the best' and that 'chain-free is not a means of happiness'. He worried about the lack of shelter to protect from heat and cold weather, and shared concerns that the ground got very swampy during monsoon season, which made conditions ripe for fungal infections. Vidanta also felt that it was harder to get 'good food supplies' on this side of the park, and that, in general, elephants who do not wear chains are too thin. Other Nepalese interlocutors expressed similar concerns over Tiger Tops, citing past financial issues, problems supplying food, 'unhappy' elephants, and concerns running a 'mini sanctuary' (Gwala interviews and PC, 2020).

The thought that unchained elephants are 'too thin' may be another instance of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) or social facts (Durkheim, 1982) getting in the way of reality. This fact was shared with me by numerous elephant owners, veterinary staff, and mahouts. One owner stated that this is because unchained elephants only want to relax and play instead of eating (Rao interview, 2019). However, as another owner put it, 'We are asking them to eat food they don't want to eat' and then beating them when they refuse (Thomas interview, 2019).

INGO5 and Hotel1/INGO2

Elephants at the INGO5 HOME were managed exclusively with PRT (see Appendix I, this volume) and at the time of my initial study it was the

only stable to offer its elephants free-choice access to water for drinking and bathing. Hotel1 has since added a water tank to allow for free-choice drinking (but not bathing), but Hotel1's NGO-managed elephants did have regular access to the river during the day. Both stables housed elephants in social groups.

Hotel1, the lodge which partnered with INGO2 and housed its elephants, provided 14 out of 16 items from the checklist, but this number may be not reflective of the current situation (see Chapter 8, this volume). At the time of the present study, there were two sets of elephants at Hotel1. One pair was being used for tourist safaris and the other elephants were leased from their owners and allowed to wander with their mahouts during the day. This score applied to the non-working herd only. Hotel1 scored high on the checklist largely due to the free-choice foraging that this herd is offered throughout the day. However, while the non-working herd had access to the river, trees, dirt, and grasslands of the facility, they were still chained for feeding and at night stood on packed dirt. Due to their personal history as safari elephants, it may take time to transition all the elephants to a completely chain-free existence.

Since the time of my visit, the elephant owned by Hotel1's founder has also been removed from duty and joined the herd along with the newest lease, Daxa Kali (see above), bringing the number of non-working elephants at Hotel1 to six. This is a large percentage of the total number of captive elephants in Sauraha and represents great progress in changing the mindsets of owners. Further elevating the score is the fact that Hotel1 mahouts have health insurance, housing (albeit cement), pension matching funds, uniforms, and their own cook. According to INGO2 founder, they treat mahouts at their facility with respect and kindness.

Recommendations

Elephant owners suggested that welfare improvements and policy changes which can be achieved inexpensively and without impacting

their regular income from elephant-backed tourism are more likely to be incorporated into practice (UEOC PC, 2019). Discussions with the UEOC president (2019) led to his stated commitment to improving welfare, decreasing riding, and housing elephants in more appropriate conditions. However, only a few owners interviewed for the current study were willing to commit to making *major* changes, and none stated a willingness to do so using their own funds. Some owners and mahouts explained that if tourists remain willing to ride elephants, there was no impetus for changing the status quo. Others explained that while they wished to upgrade their stables to chain-free facilities, they were unwilling to invest their time or money, and expressed a desire for the NGOs active in Sauraha to assist. Furthermore, owners, NGO personnel, veterinary staff, and mahouts interviewed for the study disagreed about which changes were most important for elephant welfare, and whether such changes were even possible given what they saw as the long history of tourist elephant safari in the area (see Chapter 4, this volume). While most owners and advocates claimed that an 'end to riding' is on the horizon, it appeared that differences in opinion regarding the best way forward will continue to delay large-scale changes to elephant management in the area.

While these debates continue, it is important to find ways to improve the conditions in which these captive elephants reside. What follows is a list of short-term, easy-to-implement, and inexpensive suggestions based upon both the literature review for this volume and interviews with interlocuters (including mahouts, Nepalese and non-Nepalese veterinary or NGO personnel, foreign zookeepers, and local stakeholders) which may serve to improve the health and welfare of captive elephants within Nepal while they await more sweeping changes or an end to elephant-backed safari. It should be noted that the following recommendations are *not* meant to provide long-term improvements to elephant health and welfare and these adaptations should not be seen as an end goal. Likewise, they are not meant to imply support for the continued use of elephants as tourist transportation, but rather acknowledge that thanks to the popularity of such rides, the religious and social significance of elephants in Nepalese culture, and the large amount of income provided

by elephant safaris, elephant use in tourism is unlikely to decrease in the short term.

It is vital to understand that the following recommendations are not long-term solutions, nor do they meet 'best practice' standards as outlined by larger elephant organizations (such as the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) or the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) in the USA) or academic journals (Kane *et al.*, 2005; AZA, 2012; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; EAZA, 2020; see Chapter 5, this volume). For example, the EAZA (2020) recommends elephants are chained no more than 1 hour per 24, while the AZA (2012) sets the maximum at two without administrative review. Ideally, chain-free corrals should be instituted within Nepal; however, with the exceptions noted in previous sections of this chapter, UEOC members have refused to consider such corrals due to perceived cost and space concerns.

While not ideal solutions, the steps below may relieve some of the daily stress experienced by captive elephants in Nepal. They should be viewed only as methods to *temporarily* improve living conditions while owners and NGOs continue to discuss potential elephant retirement or movement to larger stables where they can experience 'real' positive welfare. In the words of one NGO staffer, working with elephants in Nepal is often akin to being 'a nurse in a prison camp', requiring options which offer comfort while awaiting change (anonymous interview, 2019).

It is, of course, difficult to recommend any actions which result in continued elephant restraint or confinement, even for the short term. In fact, some of these suggestions may seem counterintuitive to those working in 'Western' facilities and unfamiliar with the situation in Nepal. However, the current study area is one where change is proceeding slowly, despite community pressures to improve husbandry for elephants and decrease their use in tourism rides. Therefore, the following recommendations are made based upon small, inexpensive changes to existing land and structures, which owners have agreed to consider, or to allow NGOs to undertake on their behalf. These small steps can positively impact elephant health and welfare while they await more sweeping changes.

Any suggested change in husbandry for these captive elephants must consider several important points. First, they must not make the already long and arduous workdays harder on mahouts – not only to prevent making mahout lives more difficult, but also to ensure that the recommendations will be implemented and consistently used. Second, they must be inexpensive or funded by outside parties to create buy-in from owners. Lastly, they should be undertaken with care to not create larger problems. For example, offering natural substrates for digging, foraging, and sleeping upon would solve several issues. It would allow for the expression of natural behaviours, decrease boredom, help maintain foot health, and provide a soft mound upon which to lie for recumbent sleep. However, it is current practice for these elephants to be forced to refrain from dust-bathing, digging, or relaxing, and there is concern that the sudden addition of sand or dirt could result in ingestion (a normal behaviour in the wild, but which can cause impaction in captive individuals) which has been a problem in the past. Therefore, this recommendation should be introduced slowly. In addition, dirt must be provided in a place where it does not prevent mahouts from clearing faeces, where the pile does not raise the elephant closer to the hot stable roof, and somewhere where the elephant will not simply kick it backwards. This behaviour can result in the elephant standing on an uneven mound, potentially creating additional issues from postural changes or distribution of weight, putting unequal pressure on joints, and potentially causing pododermatitis (Panagiotopoulou *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2016).

What follows is a discussion of recommendations which could help address husbandry concerns. Many such concerns could be mitigated by increasing the footprint of existing stables or relocating stables to larger plots (see Kane *et al.*, 2005; AZA, 2012; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; EAZA, 2020). As a simple four-post structure with a tin roof, expansion could provide an inexpensive change with positive welfare benefits. However, many stables are 'land-locked' in small areas behind hotels. Therefore, moving shelters closer to the tourist gates where there is more space may be the best option and would also serve to decrease the long walk for elephants to the tourist gates, where their workday begins. These stables could be built to house more than one owner's elephants, increasing the

sense of belonging to a larger social group, and offering greater opportunity for social interactions between elephants, but care would need to be taken when introducing unrelated females who may not get along. The original poles and roofs could be reused, or stables could be rebuilt from supplies available on-site at hotels. There are a variety of building materials lying around most stables, with more behind larger hotels. Left over from construction projects, they are kept for future use. Moving these stables closer to the tourist gates may also afford opportunities for mahouts to access a variety of browse more easily, resulting in an increase in nutrition and food manipulation options (Angkawanish *et al.*, 2009; Koirala *et al.*, 2016; Glaeser *et al.*, 2021). Owners described a willingness to undertake stable expansions or relocations if costs could be kept low, and several have entered talks with land managers to discuss their options. As this time, however, only one owner has relocated his elephants to a larger plot.

Next, a centre post could replace front and back chaining posts. Centre posts could be located where they would still prevent the elephant from pushing over the stable corner posts while allowing for a single, longer chain (such as those used in other range countries) that could increase opportunities for elephants to walk around, forage, and interact with varieties of substrates. While the only academically accepted welfare standard is the near-complete removal of chains (excepting during medical procedures or emergencies) (Kane *et al.*, 2005; AZA, 2012; Vanitha *et al.*, 2016; EAZA, 2020; mahout, UEOC, and Vidanta interviews, 2017 and UEOC, and 2019), it is important to acknowledge that most Nepalese elephant owners and managers continue to refuse this option. Additionally, mahouts in Nepal are accustomed to using chains in elephant management, and a cessation of their use without further training could be dangerous for both elephants and caregivers. Therefore, it is important to improve conditions to the extent possible under current management methods.

While longer chains might create extra cleaning for mahouts (all faeces would no longer be deposited in one place), it would reduce the risk of pododermatitis or foot rot and the potential progression to joint infections due to standing in waste. Longer chains might increase the sense of free movement and allow elephants to make more choices in

their daily life, experience a variety of substrates which would help with natural foot self-care, thermoregulate by moving to warmer/cooler spots, and choose their preferred sleeping location.

Sand sleeping mounds for recumbent rest and leaning structures for standing rest should be provided (Williams *et al.*, 2015; Mellor, 2016a, b); Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018), as both standing and recumbent sleep are needed for good health (Gonfalone and Jha, 2015). According to interlocutors, sleeping mounds are less likely to be embraced by owners and mahouts thanks to the limited size of private stables and an unwillingness to create piles of loose dirt which elephants might use for dust-bathing or digging. Due to the current (and ongoing) stress levels of captive elephants in Nepal, they may remain unwilling to attempt recumbent sleep even if provided with dirt piles (see above). For this reason, metal rails, walls, or wooden posts could be constructed within the stable to provide leaning rest (see Schiffmann *et al.*, 2018).

In addition, mahout health and well-being must be addressed. Adequate mahout housing which allows for escape in the case of wild elephant attack is needed (see above and Chapter 9.2, this volume). Salaries should be increased to better reflect the time commitment required by the job (Yadav, 2003, p. 29). Education in elephant nutrition should be offered by more experienced mahouts or veterinary staff, as well as foot and skin care which includes the need for digging and dust-bathing to protect feet and skin (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005; Fowler and Mikota, 2006; Sarma *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusions

As discussed in Chapter 5 (this volume), there are several key areas considered important for elephant health and welfare which are consistent among researchers from both range states and non-Asian countries which house elephants. Appropriate – and clean – substrate is key to foot and joint health, and the expression of natural behaviours, which benefits physical and mental health, and cooling via dust-bathing were considered. The ability to rest in a recumbent position, protection

from the elements, access to water, availability of a variety of browse which includes seasonal dietary changes, and the ability to make meaningful choices were also included. Freedom of movement, management style, and the ability to recline or lean for appropriate restful sleep are important elements of positive health and welfare. Being allowed agency is key to trauma recovery for elephants who have been captively held and is included here for that reason. Matriarchal herd structure and the retention of related females in their birth herds are important elements for elephant health, reproduction, and mental well-being. However, because the elephants in the Sauraha area typically arrive singly, providing known family groups is nearly impossible. Because of this, the social groupings below refer to the stabling of elephants in pairs or small herds with visual, olfactory, and auditory contact with conspecifics.

The highest-scoring stables on this checklist were also those stables owned or financed by non-Nepalese: Tiger Tops is owned by a British family; INGO5 has French, Belgian, and Canadian founders; and Hotel1 elephants are funded by American-owned INGO2. This may stem from a variety of reasons, the most likely being that Nepalese owners, veterinary staff, and mahouts felt their care was appropriate and based on traditional practices (see previous chapters, this volume). In contrast, non-Nepalese felt that appropriate care of elephants required a greater degree of agency, the ability to move around larger spaces at will, browse in natural settings, physically touch conspecifics, and be free of tourists in howdahs upon their backs. It is important to consider that each of these high-scoring stables receives funding from international sources and reportedly draw in only 'Western' tourists. This external income may have mitigated some of the risks inherent in changing husbandry and management methods (such as the expense of more infrastructure at stables or training for mahouts). These elephants are, of course, still occasionally ridden by mahouts when needed, such as when walking on roads or being moved long distances. Many of these mahouts have adopted non-dominance-based control methods, but due to the way these elephants were raised, it is often necessary (according to interlocutors for the present study) to allow the continuation of mahouts on elephant back.

The above examination of stables highlights the problems with the language of care when people of varying cultural backgrounds and belief systems intersect. Many mahouts, veterinary staff, and owners stated that they provide the 'best care' for their charges as they engage in daily labour tasks with elephant co-workers. Food, shelter, access to veterinary care, and relationships with co-workers are provided to elephants, but from the viewpoint of some Nepalese and non-Nepalese elephant advocates, this care is inadequate. They point out that, as Schrader (2015, p. 668) discusses, 'caring for' an individual is possible without 'caring about' them, and vice versa. They would like to see elephants considered as members of an endangered species, or as individuals with inherent value, worthy of protection and offered more appropriate care. This type of care would involve the daily tasks needed to not only physically support another being, but mentally and emotionally support them as well.

The following chapter (Chapter 11) includes a summary of the 'elephant situation' in Sauraha through a variety of lenses and offers conclusions and suggestions for those interested in elephant care within Nepal and globally.

Notes

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for a description of these stakeholders. Any quoted material has been pseudonymously attributed.

[2] Dominance-based management here describes the use of yelling, physical contact (hitting with hands or sticks; hitting with the flat side or stabbing with the tip of knives or axes), or physical displays of aggression (rushing towards elephants, using burning torches to intimidate, etc.).

[3] Dr Prakesh Vidanta approved my access to all elephant stables. As the veterinarian with oversight of these stables, he had the authority to approve these visits, as well as the use of photography and video. Names have been pseudonymized. Additional permissions for stable visits were given by the NTNC project manager and the president of the UEOC.

[4] Tiger Tops is on the other side of the park, in another village; Hotel1 was not completely chain-free during this phase of the study but has since changed.

[5] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

[6] Specific health measures of these elephants, such as bloodwork, urinary cortisol levels, and faecal analysis, lie too far afield for a study of this size and type. It was not my original intention to take this volume into the realm of elephant health measures. As a limited, multi-sited study, time did not allow for complete health exams. It was my intention to locate funding for a future health camp in conjunction with, and at the request of, the NTNC. This study was meant to obtain baseline data on the health of individuals in Sauraha (the camp took place in 2022 after COVID-19 related delays; see Szydlowski, 2023a). Further limiting any inclusion of animal-based health data in the current checklist was the lack of available laboratory equipment, staff, experienced personnel, and time to properly assess all these elephants' health (see section 'Why Not Use Behavioural Indicators for This Study?', this chapter, and Chapter 5, this volume). The two-person NTNC veterinary staff was simply too small to allow for a wide-scale study at this juncture, and the NTNC is further impacted by a lack of experienced laboratory technicians (at the time of writing, there was only one).

[7] Gurusamy *et al*. (2014) discuss the relative weight placed on welfare issues by stakeholders from North America, the UK, and India. However, no Nepal-specific information yet exists.

[8] American zoos located in colder climates do not offer browse year-round, either (Harris PC, 2020).

[9] It is important to note that any injury or malformation is often reported as having been there since the elephant arrived from India.

[10] One could argue that his fears were justified. While I was a researcher and treated this young man's family with respect as I observed their practices, I subsequently wrote a PhD thesis and the current volume, both of which argue for an end to many of these practices.

[11] van Dooren (2014, 2015) discusses violent care in the keeping of endangered species for purposes of species preservation. Sacrificing individual animals to diminished captive environments and stressful lives is part of the violent care of conservation.

[12] I returned in a week to see her feet, and they look like normal elephant feet. They were evenly worn, with adequately sized and shaped nails, and a set of 'treads' on the soles.

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11 Conclusions

© Michelle Szydlowski 2024. *Elephant Tourism in Nepal* (M. Szydlowski)
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This volume has followed the trails of captive elephants through the hattisars and forests of Nepal, and into the workspaces of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) interested in their welfare. The elephants encountered within found themselves alternatingly constructed as the embodiments of deities, beloved family members, signs of wealth or power, and lowly slaves in chains (see Chapter 1, this volume). This volume set out not to speak for elephants, but to discover a 'common language' used by those speaking *about* elephants; it sought to discover the ordinary ethics (Lambek, 2010) of elephant ownership and use. This common language is not only expressed in words, but also in social interactions. Using the biographies of both elephants and organizations to examine the motivations, aims, and practices of elephant-focused groups led to the realization that words such as care, work, love, and especially elephant left behind their official definitions and instead became participants in meaning-making with a culturally diverse group of humans.

The elephants of Nepal represent, more than anything, a moral quandary. Thanks to long-standing relationships with elephant owners and mahouts, I approached this volume with a basic understanding of their desire to keep elephants. Logically, operating elephant-based businesses which bring in tourists who in turn support local community members and conservation projects made sense. However, academic literature does not back up claims that tourism practices are the salvation

of communities in areas of conservation focus. Instead, authors called for more interdisciplinary research into the true effects of tourism on societies. Conservation and ecotourism practices are tied up in neoliberalism, and often serve to widen the gap between socio-economic groups and limit access of poor communities to natural resources. In addition, considerably more research is needed into the physical, mental, and emotional needs of animals used in tourism, both as conveyance and objects to view.

Contributions to Knowledge

This volume offered several unique contributions to knowledge. First, it uncovered changing community attitudes towards elephants and elephant-backed safari in Sauraha. I was initially hesitant to judge any practices which appeared to have the backing of the community, lest I be labelled a neocolonialist. It became very clear during the present study, however, that the local community no longer supported the practice of elephant-backed safari. The Nature Guide Association, business owners, educators, National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) officers, young people, professionals, and college students all professed the need to allow elephants to express their agency and release them from service. They desired an end to the use of elephants in tourism, but ending the practice is hardly simple. The situation is far more nuanced and requires the consideration of marginalized communities of mahouts and other community members who rely upon elephants for their survival.

Secondly, this volume articulated the wide range of stakeholder perspectives and the challenges to collaborative welfare efforts. It identified the intractability of the 'elephant situation' in Sauraha, given the reliance of large numbers of community members on tourism. Lastly, it provided a unique tool for assessing welfare in stable facilities and offered suggestions which may improve elephant welfare while decisions are being made regarding the future of these individuals. This volume also demonstrated the usefulness of elephant biography in clarifying the range of experiences faced by captive elephants in Nepal.

Seeing Elephants Through a Variety of Lenses

The introduction to this volume asked, 'can the health and welfare of captive elephants and their caregivers be improved through an examination of the similarities and differences in ethical approaches used by elephant owners and NGOs active in Sauraha, Nepal?' I wanted to discover if the ethical norms of each group were so different that they got in each other's way, or if working towards a common goal was enough. Is it even possible to identify norms that are consistent across cultures and reframe them in a way that will aid organizations in finding a common language or common ground of elephant care? Before answering these questions, a brief summary is needed of the ways in which 'caring for elephants' is viewed by different organizations.

Co-workers and commodities

Some organizations, such as the United Elephant Owners' Cooperative (UEOC), view elephants both as commodities to be bought, sold, and used until they can no longer work, and as co-workers for humans. Elephant–mahout pairs spend long hours together bringing in significant income for their boss. When viewed through this lens, both mahouts and elephants remain marginalized communities, receiving low pay (or low nutrition in the case of elephants), inadequate housing, and little respect. While elephant–human relationships are often idealized in academic literature, in reality these pairs face daily struggles as co-workers and cohabitators. Working long hours for low wages, drivers face both heavy body-work and emotional labour. These men and women face caste discrimination, exposure to zoonotic disease, accusations of violence and cruelty, inherent danger, and a lack of job security. These mahouts are expected or forced to participate in breaking ceremonies and maintain dominance-based control over their elephant co-worker regardless of how they might personally view these methods.

The private safari elephants face long walks to tourist gates with a heavy howdah on their back, saddle wounds, chronic foot pain, and

beatings in exchange for rice kuchis and a stable roof. Working elephants are conceived via chained mating or wild-caught in India, and must endure the breaking ceremony under the frightened gaze of their mothers. They must continue to perform their own emotional labour, fighting against their instincts while on duty by refraining from skin care or foraging. They return home at the end of their work day to hard, packed-dirt floors, dry grass, and nowhere to rest.

The care afforded these elephants may seem to outsiders to be cruel or inhumane, but in reality one must accept that it is instead considered traditional practice to many elephant caregivers. Providing shelter, food, and access to veterinary personnel is seen as providing necessary care, and many drivers and owners profess a deep love for their elephants. It is this love that drives elephant caregivers to perform the hard physical labour daily to ensure the health and safety of their charges. Many mahouts in the present study demonstrated affection towards and emotional investment in 'their' elephant and seemed to understand individual elephants' needs and desires. Owners, veterinary personnel, and mahouts in the study not only professed a desire to care for and work with elephants, but most felt that their methods were ethical and provided good health and positive welfare for elephant individuals. In addition, many felt that their choices were *more* ethical or better for elephants than those of non-Nepalese organizations. These mahouts are not the romanticized men of previous academic literature, nor are they the cruel or evil beings construed in many social media posts; they are simply humans enmeshed in complex relationships. Elephant staff have asked that outsiders view their care with a 'Nepali eye' instead of a 'Western eye'.

The above descriptions of appropriate care may also reflect social facts rather than reality. The physical care of elephants may have been adequate when mahouts were respected for their skill and knowledge was regularly passed down familial lines from experienced drivers. However, the flow of that information has been interrupted. It must be noted that modern mahouts are often inexperienced, underpaid, untrained individuals with little embodied knowledge of elephants, and thus elephant care is suffering. Some mahouts take advantage of the situation, beating, stabbing, punching, and starving their elephants into

submission. This may reflect their frustration with a system which limits their own agency, or may be a misunderstanding of *how* to care in appropriate ways. Without the guidance of a mahout manual or instruction from their elders, there is little hope to return elephant co-work to its previously respected incarnation. Furthermore, one must consider that many owners do not see a problem with the underemployment and inadequate housing of these mahouts. Socially, these mahouts are 'allowed' to be mistreated or underpaid thanks to their caste and social standing. Likewise, privately owned elephants are allowed to be mistreated thanks to theirs.[1]

Treating these elephants and humans as co-workers or commodities is an unsustainable model for owners, as evidenced by their inability to support elephants and mahouts when tourism disappeared during COVID-19. Some owners have taken the time during COVID to leave the elephant business, sending individuals back to India. Others have leased or sold elephants to NGOs, and others are exploring creating a common hattisar to divide elephant costs and care. Many owners accept that elephant-backed tourism is viewed as an unacceptable practice by many Americans, Australians, and Europeans, but feel that as long as it provides income there is no impetus to change.

Some INGOs have chosen to focus on supporting mahouts and elephants enmeshed in the above-mentioned situations, attempting to improve working and living situations *in situ,* as it were, for both. As the captive elephants in range countries are unlikely (or unable) to be returned to the wild, efforts should focus instead on creating hattisars which provide more opportunities for captive elephants (and mahouts) to experience good health and positive welfare. Studies from countries with larger captive elephant populations have come to varying conclusions on how best to proceed. Elephants in zoos generally suffered earlier mortality and poorer welfare than elephants in intensively managed camps in range countries, indicating that perhaps intensively managed facilities themselves are not necessarily the problem. Some research demonstrates that human–elephant co-work in elephant-backed tourist venues in Thailand may result in more positive welfare than in non-riding facilities. One issue with these studies is the lack of consistent

results from tests used to assess positive welfare (see Chapter 5, this volume). Another problem lies in the lack of a welfare tool that universally fits all captive situations. This is one reason I developed a list of welfare impactors (as opposed to a behavioural checklist; see Chapters 5 and 10, this volume) which uniquely applies to the situation in Nepal and can be repeated on future visits, along with recommendations for improving health and welfare through simple changes. The owners in the current study expressed interest in improving the health and welfare of their elephants (despite at the same time claiming they are already well-cared for), and working within the owners' own construct of a co-working stable may be key to successfully improving care.

Environmental justice

Elephants have traditionally been studied as biological entities but pushed to the sidelines of environmental justice discourse. Thanks to the overlap of their ranges with those of marginalized humans reliant upon tourism for survival, the ethical implications of elephant-based tourism activities have been largely avoided in favour of discourses surrounding the needs of single-species human communities.

In response, several NGOs have chosen to view elephants through the lens of environmental justice, promoting their wild nature and encouraging others to consider their emotional lives, social structure, and need to be seen as wildlife deserving of respect. In addition, these organizations seek to improve the socio-economic status of mahouts and other marginalized communities. These organizations, including the Nature Guide Association, focus on ending the 'torture' of elephants, freeing them from servitude, and promoting ethical lifestyles (such as veganism, in some cases). To create better living situations for all species, these groups feel that humans must see animals as equals, and attempt to understand elephants' desire for choice. They see the protection of the environment as a global concern, and local communities in areas of high biodiversity as actors in a globalized society, one which is reliant on tourism to survive. This view, at least, acknowledges marginalized

communities of various species as intrinsically valuable co-creators of the environment.

These organizations are often in open conflict with owners, the government, and the NTNC. They are vocal about ending cruel practices and publicly protest at events like elephant football and breaking ceremonies. NGOs viewing elephants through the lens of environmental justice have discovered that questioning traditional practices of these communities, even with regard to illegal practices, may result in accusations of neocolonialism, or even threats of beatings or death. In addition, a focus on sustainable development initiatives may serve to reinforce gaps between castes and cultures, undermining the push towards environmental justice.

Cosmopolitans

Several of the NGOs in the present study appear to see elephants as cosmopolitan actors sharing landscapes with humans as they navigate the culture of globalized tourism, and encourage sustainable development which focuses on the survival of the entire community. This development might be supported by ecotourism which does not use elephants as conveyance, but instead allows tourists to visit elephants living in free-range facilities. Community members have also adopted this style of thinking, asking that wild and captive elephants be offered a place in which they can live out their lives intersecting with humans but without the complete repression of their agency. Several owners expressed an understanding of elephants' unique personalities and desires, which may indicate that they are adopting a more cosmopolitan approach to care. Tiger Tops and INGO2 have incorporated the daily lives of their elephants into the lives of guests and staff, and are approaching elephants as individuals who require social lives independent of human direction. INGO6 and INGO4 appear to favour releasing elephants from service, but ensuring they remain in their original neighbourhood in a sanctuary-style facility with improved shelters for both elephants and humans. In addition, mahouts at several facilities are being trained in

different styles of elephant management and offered financial and social support as valued community members.

These organizations also find themselves at odds with owners, the government, and each other as they call for enforcement of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) regulations and an end to elephant import. In addition, the publication of videos and other accusations of cruelty have resulted in an inability to promote elephant welfare by creating the impression that all non-Nepalese are troublesome animal rights advocates out to end traditional practices.

It is vitally important to note that all of the above relationships are intimately tied to the continuation of tourism in Nepal. INGO2, INGO6, and INGO4's plans rely upon tourists being willing to pay fees higher than those charged for safari rides. During the next pandemic or natural disaster (such as 2015's devastating earthquake which ceased tourism for over a year), this leaves facilities vulnerable to closure and elephants and mahouts facing loss of pay or food. They could also face a return to India to become temple or beggar elephant–mahout pairs.

INGO5 also embraces this cosmopolitan view of elephants. However, unlike the organizations above, INGO5 does not currently rely on tourist income for survival. It does require a great deal of fundraising and support from sponsors, which can be unreliable during lean economic times. Despite being reliant on outside funding, and therefore vulnerable to global recession, INGO5 may still represent the best model in Sauraha thanks to their founders' and staff's status as community members, their commitment to funding vs tourism activity, their hands-off policy for visitors, and their work with elephant owners, veterinary staff, and mahouts throughout the area. Rather than create rifts between the government, NTNC, owners, and advocates, INGO5 has remained focused on changing the riding culture by demonstrating an alternative. However, it is able to help only a very limited number of elephants due to facility size restrictions.

It is likely that the ideal view of elephants is one that combines the lenses above. Humans should perhaps focus on the spaces where elephant and human bodies and emotions intersect, like Haraway's (2008, p. 42) 'knot of species' or van Dooren's (2014, p. 147) 'entangled

significances'. These spaces are where we will find a set of ordinary ethics which organizations can use to develop working relationships with owners and each other. Combining the best practices of each organization is key to improving the lives of both elephants and mahouts in Sauraha.

Common Language and Ordinary Ethics

Within these different views of elephants lie the threads of a common language and ethical approaches to improving elephant and mahout health and welfare. The first aim of the current study involved an examination of the motivations of local, national, and international conservation groups active near Chitwan National Park (CNP). The second aim sought to compare the stated aims of these organizations with the ways in which they practise elephant care. Aim three attempted to understand the perceived efficacy of these organizations and how their aims overlap, support, contradict, or directly undermine each other. I will discuss each of these aims through the following common language subheadings.

Sanctuary

While INGO6, INGO4, INGO5, INGO2, INGO3, and the elephant owners' cooperative all used the word sanctuary to describe their plans for the future, the word was interpreted in vastly different ways. The elephant owners saw a sanctuary simply as a place where elephants were managed as a group in a central location. This location would allow riding, and breeding would be encouraged to ensure a steady supply of biocapital for future use. Owners mentioned their desire to allow older elephants to remain at the facility once they could no longer be ridden, rather than being sent to India. INGO6 and INGO4 developed plans for the owners' cooperative to establish and run this type of facility, housing

elephants in chain-free corrals but continuing to financially benefit only their owners.

This style of sanctuary does not mesh with the ideas of other organizations wishing to entirely remove owners from the picture and remove elephants from hands-on tourism activities. These NGOs want elephants to 'be elephants', meaning that deriving income from tourism is a fringe benefit, not a need. Much of the problem arises from differing senses of urgency – organizations who wish to stop riding 'right now' or to 'save elephants' are purchasing individuals and focusing on moving them to private stables. Organizations such as INGO6 and INGO4 choose to view elephants as a population, and emphasize that it is important to wait until every owner can transition at the same time with the understanding that no more riding elephants will be purchased from outside Nepal. They believe this is the only workable option for ending elephant riding in Sauraha. They have not acknowledged that stopgap measures may be necessary to ensure that elephant welfare is improved while waiting for owners to agree upon a sanctuary-style plan.

There is merit in each of the above plans. While it is urgent to remove elephants housed in inappropriate or dangerous conditions, one must consider the tourism–elephant system as a whole. Nature guides and other community members recommend any plans proceed 'slowly, slowly', lest outsiders forget that more is at stake than elephant lives. Privately owned elephants have multiple mahouts, and these mahouts are often lacking other job options. When elephants in the current study were moved to a private facility, typically only one of their mahouts accompanied them, creating an ethical dilemma by firing the others. Is it ethical to save elephants at the cost of mahout families?

In addition, the sale of elephants into private facilities owned primarily by foreigners is unlikely to create a sustainable future for local communities, and should be considered through a neoliberal lens. Any resultant tourism may bring in guests who consume local goods, but may benefit elephants and foreign interests more than local people. Instead, alternative income-producing methods must be established which will financially support retired elephants throughout their lives while offering livelihoods to local humans. One example that may be working is the involvement of elephant- and hotel-owner Tika Kumar in sustainability

efforts surrounding Hotel1. His success in pairing with foreign investors to create a chain-free facility means that his lodge welcomes a higher number of non-Asian tourists, who sometimes pay double the cost of lodges aimed at other tourists, and a portion of this hotel income supports community projects. However, his success may also serve to create gaps between rich owners pairing with foreign investors, and may result in further class or caste distinctions.

These concepts of sanctuary may seem incompatible, but within each is a seed of promise. The key to success lies in communication. As mentioned in previous chapters of this book, following the sanctuary summit several interested parties composed an email which was sent to ten organizations and two independent parties which have declared an interest in the captive elephants of Sauraha (this email did not, however include Nepalese elephant owners). There was a great deal of confusion at first from parties assuming they knew what other parties meant by the word sanctuary. This email chain has allowed participants to clarify their vision and expectations for a sanctuary facility. In addition, parties are slowly starting to share information regarding 'their owners' – those who have contacted only certain NGOs, professing an interest in discussing alternatives to safari. Transparency about these contacts is key to developing relationships with interested parties which will benefit elephants. The parties in this email chain agreed to advance projects which promote elephant welfare, inform the group about contacts with owners, and notify the group of meetings between members.

With regard to sanctuary plans in Sauraha, the diverse ethical norms of owners and advocates continue to create problems. However, the ethical norms of NGOs and INGOs are much more closely aligned than these groups initially thought. Returning to the research question above: on paper, it seems that the answer is a resounding yes. It *is* possible to improve the health and welfare of captive elephants and their caregivers through an examination of the ethical approaches of organizations in Sauraha. These organizations have similar missions and goals. However, that 'yes' is itself a word which is situationally dependent. Yes, examining these ethical approaches resulted in a number of organizations agreeing to work together. Yes, some organizations are also working with owners thanks to an understanding of the expectations and goals of each.

However, egos continue to present such a problem that this 'yes' does not apply to all groups or all situations.

Some NGOs continue to create their own private sanctuaries, making changes and decisions without consulting other groups. When confronted, some groups explained that they had no obligation or desire to work with others, with some stating that while their ethical norms are aligned, their methods are simply too different. However, it appears to me that the efficacy of these organizations is undermined by their inability to cooperate. There remains a refusal to share resources despite proposed cooperation. Smaller organizations find themselves forced to align with one of two larger NGOs if they hope to influence elephant futures. Often, it is the refusal of a single person within an NGO who chooses not to allow cooperation, or in some cases any communication at all.

For example, had larger organizations like INGO6 and INGO4 been willing to work with the smaller NGOs operating in Sauraha during COVID-19 in 2020, I believe that it would have been possible to create a one-of-a-kind, sanctuary-style, free-range facility that would have been an example for other countries. In 2020, time and a lack of tourists were on their side, and owners regularly reached out asking for help and support, or offering to sell or lease their elephants. Thanks to a stubborn resistance to sharing details of their plans, or allowing a portion of the owners to contract with other organizations, the INGO6 plan is now unlikely to proceed. I believe that like facilities in Thailand, Sauraha will ultimately house numerous chain-free tourist venues and a handful of 'walking with elephants'-style, for-profit venues or expensive hotels focused exclusively on international tourists. While this model works in some areas of Asia, it is unsustainable in Nepal for several reasons. Elephants do not reproduce well in captivity, and infant mortality in Nepal remains high while numbers of individuals of breeding age continue to fall. This model also does not solve what some advocates see as the ultimate problem – elephants captured and sold into captivity. Unlike Tiger Tops' management, other hotels have not agreed to stop buying elephants to replace or expand their herd, and therefore illegally obtained elephants will continue to walk across the border, seemingly invisible to enforcement agencies.

Necessary care

Elephants owned by the government of Nepal and the NTNC are protected by legislation regarding nutrition and husbandry, although it is rarely enforced. The definition of care by these organizations involved physical provisioning and an inclusion of elephants in religious celebrations (which often simply involves painting their elephant with colourful dyes and allowing her to be close to celebrating humans). These organizations have been successful in achieving their aims of providing anti-poaching patrols in support of conservation efforts. They have been somewhat successful in breeding the next generation of patrol elephant, but as this herd ages out there are too few to replace them without bringing in (illegally) more wild-caught individuals. This puts their aims in direct conflict with one another, wherein 'saving' a species in the wild requires removing the same species from the wild, albeit in a different country. The use of captive members of endangered species to protect the same species in the wild seems inconsistent to many non-Nepalese in the present study, including myself. This is especially troubling when one considers the use of NTNC elephants to bring in income via rental to tourist groups or researchers.

Private elephant owners share at least a few common goals and practices with the government and NTNC (not to mention cross-employment of human staff). The desire to promote tourism in CNP is key to the success of each of these groups. Without the owners, the government could not focus on conservation, and without the national park the NTNC would not exist. Without these conservation practices, the owners would have nothing to draw in tourists. The aims of these three groups, however, are in direct conflict with those of most other Nepalese and non-Nepalese organizations interested in elephant care.

INGO3, INGO2, INGO6, and INGO4 see 'necessary care' as not only the daily tasks involved in maintaining health, but also offering improvements in welfare, such as adequate nutrition, free access to water, removal of chains, and a reduction in dominance-based management. Other organizations such as INGO5 and the Nature Guide Association feel that the only ethical option is a complete end to the use of elephants in tourism. They view necessary care as moving beyond the

physical requirements and into the realm of positive welfare, which includes access to conspecifics and natural spaces, freedom from daily human direction, and the option for elephants to express their own agency.

While these concepts of care appear to be incompatible, again we must look for the seed of commonality. Every well-cared for elephant begins with good nutrition, space, shelter, and rest of some form. By focusing on the needs which elephant owners, governmental bodies, the NTNC, and other NGOs see as 'requirements', we have common ground upon which to build. By focusing on these specific needs, NGOs and INGOs can impact the health of elephants in small ways which may lead to the adoption of alternative methods by mahouts and owners. The owners have demonstrated willingness to use chain-free corrals, improve nutrition, and move facilities closer to the tourist gates. If NGOs are willing to cooperate, and likely finance, many of these changes, perhaps relationships can be built which will lead to lasting change. Offering financial support to those individuals who are on the top rung of the financial ladder in Sauraha – the owners – may cause discomfort to non-Nepalese readers and NGOs. However, as evidenced by INGO2's approach, along with my own experiences with Nepalese owners, this is currently the only way forward. There is a need for perspective-taking. If the owners see elephants solely as a commodity, then only by approaching change in this way can we succeed in increasing welfare for captive elephants.

Welfare

This volume was concerned with assessing elephant health and welfare, documenting the potential impactors of each, and exploring ways that this research might contribute to improving the welfare of elephants in the area. By creating a checklist which uniquely fits the stables of Nepal, I have contributed to the larger body of knowledge surrounding captive elephant welfare. This work successfully documented the welfare status and stable conditions at 25 of the 40 area hattisars. I found a concerning lack of appropriate substrate, lack of water access for drinking, and a

lack of places or ability to recline or lean for rest (among others). These stables were representative of most found in Sauraha, but conditions have likely deteriorated even more thanks to the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism.

These stable conditions reflect more than simply a disconnect between a Nepalese and non-Nepalese view of welfare and care. Owners, mahouts, local community members, tourists, academics, and NGOs interviewed for the current study all reported that conditions could or should be improved with regard to nutrition, number of safaris, management systems, housing, foot care, etc. With this amount of agreement that conditions are less than ideal, why is elephant health and welfare suffering? It cannot be due solely to a lack of funding – as conditions in some financially strapped range-state camps have resulted in better overall welfare than for individuals housed in Western zoos. Therefore, it can't simply be that access to financial support, research, and health diagnostics are completely necessary for better welfare outcomes.

I suspect there are several issues at play here. First, the owners have little motivation to change. As long as safari income continues, so will the status quo of stabling and care. I would argue that this is not unique to Nepal, but is the case with many businessmen in a multitude of countries. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume, some owners *choose* to do the opposite of whatever elephant advocates want. This adversarial relationship, in which NGOs paint elephant owners as one-dimensionally cruel or cold people, has created a lose–lose situation for captive elephants. Instead, any group interested in changing the lives of captive elephants in Nepal must accept that these owners are dynamic, complex humans, as are elephant advocates. What is needed is perspective-taking, the building of relationships, consistent communication, willingness to fund cooperative projects, and an understanding that 'slowly, slowly' is the only way forward. However, some understanding of welfare, and agreement upon what the term means, might offer common ground on which to build.

Limitations of the Current Study

Nepal is not representative of the relationships between elephants and mahouts, or mahout–elephant–owner–camp relationships in other parts of Asia. While there is obvious influence due to the employment of Indian mahouts throughout Sauraha, the relationships seen in Nepalese hattisars are incredibly unique. Critics may point out that elephants, owners, and mahouts in other range states face vastly different challenges and lifestyles. While other range states were used as examples for health and welfare guideline comparison, this volume did not set out to examine elephant–human relationships in these countries but rather to examine the changing relationships found within Nepal. A natural, and necessary, extension of the present study would be to expand the search for commonalities of language and care into Thailand, India, or Myanmar.

Another limitation is due to the likelihood that some information provided by both Nepalese and non-Nepalese informants was based upon their expectations of what I wanted to hear. While I believe this happens in all studies thanks to perceived power differentials between researcher and interlocutor, it is a common cultural practice in Nepal. To counteract this, I attempted to gather a variety of information from diverse sources to create a better understanding of each situation.

Lastly, government-owned elephants present a conundrum. Their health and welfare is little studied, thanks to restrictions by the government involving access to stables and research permits. While they appear to live in significantly better conditions than privately held animals, the use of one endangered species to save or protect others is ethically problematic at best. Deeper studies into these government stables, and an assessment of how many elephants are truly necessary to operate anti-poaching patrols and perform rescue and census duties, are needed. Whether any use of elephants is ethically permissible remains to be seen.

Final Conclusions and the Way Forward

Most Nepalese people involved in elephant care in Nepal are doing what they perceive to be the right or ethical thing. There is the need to acknowledge that what we each see as right or ethical is both personally and culturally dependent. There is also a need to acknowledge basic animal rights. Sentient, wild, intelligent beings who did not choose to affiliate with humans are being kept in conditions which adversely affect their health and welfare. Basic human rights are also involved – marginalized communities of mahouts cannot be ignored as advocates try to provide better living conditions to elephants at the expense of these mahouts. Elephants and mahouts must both be offered equal consideration as organizations move forward in ending elephant-backed safari in Nepal.

Elephant owners also require consideration as community members and human beings. While I understand that they feel they are operating using good business practices, the fact remains that they acknowledge the illegality of owning elephants for profit. Their feelings of frustration are understandable, as they see governmentally linked organizations such as the NTNC doing the same thing. However, asking these owners to part with their 'property' should not present an ethical concern – if animals are illegally obtained, as are these elephants, they should be confiscated and released to facilities where they can live out their lives as freely as possible. The best business plan for these owners would appear to be selling their remaining elephants to NGOs with space or working with NGOs to create a chain-free facility. Of course, this plan is fraught – if the border is not closed to trade, and CITES regulations not enforced, then owners may decide to continue bringing in elephants illegally and create a commodity market for 'retired' elephants. A first step in the success of any sanctuary plan is governmental support of existing regulations.

The national, international, and local organizations advocating for captive elephants in Nepal have had a great deal of success, despite getting in each other's way. At least nine elephants have been transitioned to facilities where tourists are not allowed to touch or ride them. This is a huge proportion of Nepal's privately held captive elephants, but the future of these elephants still relies heavily on tourism and international funding. In addition, Rudra Raja, with the help of

INGOs, is now building chain-free corrals for his herd. Several owners have agreed to coordinate on land purchases to house elephants together, and this may lead to the eventual formation of a sanctuary-style venue. Other owners have agreed to work with the author on stable improvements if financing for these improvements comes from outside interests (such as grants).

The future

Further studies documenting the changes which occurred in attitudes towards elephants and their living conditions following the COVID-19 lockdown are needed. These studies could determine if the small changes suggested in the current study are still feasible options for improving the health and welfare of captive elephants in Sauraha. In addition, welfare measurements which include the input of caregivers, veterinarians, and local communities, or perhaps a combination of metrics which offer a variety of health and welfare measurements would help determine a way forward. However, the elephants in Sauraha can't wait for these studies to begin. The most logical path forward is to support the organizations who are physically present within Nepal and working to improve the health and welfare of captive elephants. These organizations are intimately acquainted with individual elephants, mahouts, owners, and the community. Any hope of creating better living conditions for elephant–mahout pairs will likely come through these groups, and thus ensuring their collaboration is key. There is a desperate need for NGOs and INGOs who do not have a year-round presence in Nepal to work with and through those that do. Lastly, researchers, activists, officials, and the public must support national and range-state-wide legislation regarding registration and elephant welfare.

Note

[1] Elephant castes were the subject of the author's master's thesis, several conference talks, and of an unpublished project by the author (Szydlowski, 2019, 2020a, b, 2021).

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Appendix I: Management Systems and Their Effects on Health and Welfare

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Current training and management styles have variable impacts on elephant health and welfare, and an analysis of the type of management found at different facilities can help predict overall elephant welfare (Greco *et al.*, 2016, p. 11). However, these population-level studies should act only as a guide while allowing for adjustment to the needs of individual animals (Greco *et al.*, 2016, p. 21; Veasey, 2020). Below is a summary of each style, along with a discussion of their potential welfare impacts.

Traditional Dominance Training with 'Free' Contact

In South-East Asia, traditional elephant training using force and punishment is still the norm (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Sukumar, 2003; Desai, 2008; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2019; personal and participant observations, 2014, 2017 and 2019). Because elephants are a species with a clear social hierarchy, many trainers believe that dominance training is a 'natural' way to manage elephants (Sukumar, 2003; Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008; Mar, 2020). Dominant males are typically strong, large individuals but may be ousted by smaller,

more determined bulls (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 105–106). These males rely on threat displays to maintain their dominance (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). In a traditional management programme, the handler tries to become the socially dominant member of the herd, thus leading some to refer to this as dominance training (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). Obviously, human trainers will not be able to dominate based on size or family relations, and therefore must obtain dominance through the demonstration of strength or intimidation, often in situations where the elephant can't fight back (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 143; personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019). In addition, humans may use threat displays or psychological means to dominate these animals (Poole, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002). Traditional training often includes punishments for non-compliance with human instructions, such as beatings with metal bars, ankus, sticks, or metal hooks (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). In addition, many 'traditional' styles of free-contact management involve the elephant being chained or tied if not in direct control of a human (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; personal and participant observations, 2017 and 2019). However, matriarchal elephant societies do not function in this way. Instead, larger, older females with dominant family lines are more likely to be herd matriarchs who lead not by fear or intimidation but by demonstrating an ability to do what is best for the herd (Poole, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002; Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008).

In parts of South-East Asia, elephant training begins following the subjection of a juvenile elephant to a breaking ceremony, which often includes both physical and psychological trauma (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018; Mar, 2020; see Chapter 4, this volume). It is possible, since nearly 60% of elephants in European zoos were captured from the wild, that most elephants currently residing in Europe went through a breaking ritual (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 120), and Nepalese stables still use breaking processes (see Chapter 4, this volume). Due to the complex emotional history of elephants, not knowing how an elephant was initially broken or trained may create issues for handlers later (Clubb and Mason, 2002,

pp. 113–114 and 126–127). Continued use of dominant training methods may make certain behaviours such as veterinary procedures or foot care easier on the handler but may also result in increased aggression towards humans (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 142).

It is unlikely that elephants view their trainer as dominant, but rather associate fear with certain behaviours and pleasure with others (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 111). The elephant may learn to associate pain or fear with certain areas of their enclosure, or with certain humans (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 125). Furthermore, use of a bull hook seems to violate the 'prevention of injury or disease' and 'freedom from fear' portions of the five freedoms (FAWC, 1979; Clubb and Mason, 2002). In the USA, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) began phasing out bull hooks in 2021, and has agreed to discontinue all use by 2023, except in emergencies or urgent veterinary situations (Brulliard, 2019).

In both Western zoos and Asian stables, elephants may undergo dominance training which includes the use of negative reinforcement – a method in which a negative stimulus is removed upon compliance (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). These methods often use the sharp point of the bull hook as a negative pressure stimulus. With negative reinforcement, the animal is poked with the hook and moves away (or moves the body part away) from the discomfort (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). A verbal command may accompany the prod, and with repeated use, the elephant learns to respond to the command without the prod (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 97). If the desired behaviour wanes (i.e. the elephant tries to put his or her leg down before told to do so), then the point of the ankus is again applied to reinforce holding the position (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 98). Rewards may then be incorporated for compliance with a trained command (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 98). Care must be taken, as improper use of the ankus can result in wounds which may then decrease welfare (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). Some facilities use ropes to obtain the same result, tying body parts to hold down or position an animal until she learns to assume the position on her own (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011). Elephants who do not comply may be beaten until they submit and many in Nepal carry wounds on their head and face (Gautam and Khatiwada, 2011).

Such beatings are not limited to Asian facilities, however. In statements to the US government in 2000, elephant managers and staff offered testimony that chaining, beating, electric prodding, and stabbing were a recognized element of traditional US zoo and circus management (US Government, 2000 in Clubb and Mason, 2002). It should be noted that the use of electrical devices is prohibited in US zoos – excluding emergency situations to defend against imminent attack (AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums), 2003). In the UK, negative reinforcement training (NRT) is not allowed, but there are still reports of items such as cattle prods being employed in elephant training (Clubb and Mason, 2002; DEFRA, 2012).

Furthermore, some traditionally trained behaviours seen in zoos, circuses, and elephant camps have come under scrutiny due to their innate unnaturalness (PETA, n.d., 2002; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017). Behaviours such as standing on one leg or mounting (placing front feet on top of another elephant) can cause permanent damage to joints, and being forced to sit can lead to hernias or other damage (Kuntze, 1989). These types of behaviours are often taught via dominance training (PETA, n.d., 2002; Bradshaw, 2007; Schmidt-Burbach, 2017).

Dominance training may have positive benefits as well, such as making it easier to perform husbandry behaviours or veterinary care (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 127–128). There may also be increases in welfare via the sense of belonging to a larger herd if the human caregiver is seen as a conspecific (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 127). Access to outside activities may be available to individuals who appear to be under keeper control (including via dominance), and this access may have positive health benefits (Sampson, 2001, p. 58; Clubb and Mason, 2002). Traditional dominance methods may also allow for free-contact situations with caregivers, where the hands-on nature of training could result in earlier detection of physical issues (Sampson, 2001; Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 127).

While there are a few desirable benefits, the overall effects of traditional training methods on welfare are predominantly negative (Sukumar, 2003). Studies on other species, including humans, have demonstrated that individuals who believe that their behaviour has no effect on their environment experience a sense of hopelessness which is

akin to depression in humans (Seligman, 1972; Peterson and Seligman, 1983). Loss of control over one's surroundings can lead to 'maladaptive passivity' and even death (Seligman, 1972; Peterson and Seligman, 1983, p. 104). This type of stress and passivity has been described in captive animals (Joffe *et al.*, 1973; Widman *et al.*, 1992; Carlstead and Shepherdson, 1994).

Traditional training and management are often accused of not allowing elephants time to 'be elephants' (Bames interviews, 2019).[1] This refrain was heard from informants throughout the study period and is a complaint in zoos using traditional methods as well (Clubb and Mason, 2002). Without a large-scale study of elephant behaviour in different management systems, as well as the wild, it is hard to judge the validity of this claim. One study by Katole *et al.* (2014, p. 386) demonstrated that 4 hours of tourism work had no negative effect on food consumption or blood profiles of semi-captive elephants. Periods of work instead had a positive effect on food digestion (in part due to an increase in bacteria and fungi which degrade fibre) and appropriate caloric supply (Katole *et al.*, 2014, p. 386). Of course, that study examined only working elephants under semi-captive management, who could forage during work hours, and therefore may have limited applications to elephants who are not permitted to forage (Katole *et al.*, 2014). Likewise, the study did not assess the mental effects of such work on captive elephants.

Free Contact Without Dominance

A few (non-AZA) facilities in the USA use free contact or 'passive control' with sanctuary elephants and claim to use no dominance training with their herd (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 241; Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). Some facilities begin such training by placing an individual in a no-contact situation and observing the elephant's behaviour towards staff (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 136–137), while others begin establishing a social relationship with calves (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008). The elephant is then allowed to choose whether to interact with

humans, and once accustomed to staff can be trained using positive reinforcement (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 137). The small number of staff in residence allows for personal connections to be made and may impact the success of this type of training (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 138). This passive method of control seems ideal, allowing for elephant management which doesn't result in pain or fear responses, and allows for basic husbandry to be performed without restraint (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 138). In addition, elephants in these sanctuaries have a large range over natural substrate and therefore need little additional foot care (Clubb and Mason, 2002). Therefore, passive control methods appear to offer more positive welfare outcomes.

The applicability of this method to larger-scale elephant facilities such as zoos and Asian elephant camps is unknown. Due to concerns for handler safety, and the high turnover rate of zoo staff limiting the creation of personal attachments, it is unlikely that this method could be used in US or UK zoos (Clubb and Mason, 2002, pp. 137–138). Protected contact developer Gail Laule (in Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 138) feels that this type of elephant management is simply impossible to apply in such situations.

Protected Contact and/or Positive Reinforcement Training

In protected contact or 'voluntary-contact' (Kalk and Wilgenkamp, 2001, p. 63) situations (formerly called restricted contact), handlers are physically separated from the elephant (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008, p. 169). Human spaces are on the other side of a barred enclosure where the animal can walk away if desired, or with the animal held in a restraint device or chute (Kalk and Wilgenkamp, 2001; AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums), 2003). Twenty-two per cent of European zoos were still using free contact with females at the time of Clubb and Mason's landmark study (2002), but protected contact is the new norm in AZA-accredited zoos, and the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) is following suit, requiring protected contact in all

facilities by 2030 (AZA, 2012; EAZA, 2019). The EAZA is allowing a longer period for adjustment to protected contact methods, acknowledging that these types of management require extensive staff training and changes to enclosure design. The EAZA was careful to acknowledge that free-contact systems have been successfully used for a long while, and will not specifically condemn them (EAZA, 2019). AZA (2012, n.p., Section 1.4.9.2) guidelines also allow for 'certain, well-defined circumstances' that may require free contact with elephants.

Training with protected contact frequently typically uses a target and positive reinforcement or operant conditioning methods with positive stimuli (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Greco *et al.*, 2016) and was the most common method in use in a survey of US zoos (Greco *et al.*, 2016, pp. 15–16). Positive reinforcement training (PRT) asks the animal to move towards an item or behaviour instead of away from a painful stimulus (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Ramirez, 2020). These methods use a bridge, such as a whistle, followed by a reward such as chopped produce or positive physical attention and are performed in a voluntary manner, with the animal free to break off and walk away at will (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Kalk and Wilgenkamp, 2001; Greco *et al.*, 2016). This method of training requires extensive experience and/or education in behaviour theory and operant conditioning (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 143). Without this education or experience, handlers may end up confusing the animal rather than training it (Desmond and Laule, 1994; Clubb and Mason, 2002; Ramirez, 2020). Considering the need for consistency in training, the AZA (2003) has recommended standardizing commands across facilities.

With PRT, there is no breaking process and no need to be socially or physically dominant over the elephant (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Clubb and Mason, 2002). There is no physical punishment, and therefore concerns for animal welfare are decreased (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 143). PRT can be more effective than dominance training in gaining voluntary responses during routine husbandry and medical care (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020). Animals receiving such training show better weight management but may have less opportunity to leave their enclosures than animals in free-contact situations (this does not apply to animals outside zoos, as elephants who receive PRT in other countries

are managed with free contact). Elephants in protected contact still receive physical interaction and tactile rewards from their handlers, albeit through a barrier (Laule and Whittaker, 2000; Kalk and Wilgenkamp, 2001).

PRT is often paired with NRT, or the removal of positive stimulus. The only ideal NRT comes from the withdrawal of attention by the handler if the elephant is displaying unwanted behaviours (Laule and Whittaker, 2000); however, many US zoos still keep an ankus on site for emergencies. Due to public relations concerns, this ankus is now referred to as a 'guide' (Lehnhardt and Galloway, 2008; Greco *et al.*, 2016, p. 4).

PRT and NRT are not without issues. Some trainers (with or without the knowledge of management) withhold food until the animal completes the desired behaviour upon demand (Hargrove and Chua-Eoan, 2015; Baldwin, 2017; Goodman, 2017). For some, this can mean starving an animal until she complies, or until she perishes (Holt, 1992; Hargrove and Chua-Eoan, 2015; Baldwin, 2017; Goodman, 2017), even though the US animal welfare act prohibits these harsh training methods (USDA, 2019).

No Contact

Elephants who are considered too dangerous to keep in traditional settings may be housed in no-contact facilities (AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums), 2003, p. 6). This method is not recommended as a standard form of confinement, but rather for use only in extreme cases (AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums), 2003). In these situations, physical breaking is still not required, since physical punishment or dominance is not used (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 139 and 143). Unfortunately, these situations offer no opportunity for daily health checks as recommended by the AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums), 2003, p. 6), or for veterinary care without anaesthesia (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 139). The need to use anaesthesia for any medical procedure, including routine checks, raises welfare concerns due to its inherent risk (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 143).

No-contact management requires appropriate substrate and hygienic conditions to ensure good foot health since regular care is not available, and an in-depth knowledge of herd relationships since no intervention is available if aggression breaks out (Clubb and Mason, 2002, p. 139). No-contact facilities with large range areas and appropriate design may more successfully mimic natural conditions and may therefore be the best for elephant welfare (Clubb and Mason, 2002; Veasey, 2006). However, to ensure positive welfare outcomes, these facilities would have to ensure adequate herd size and social structure (Clubb and Mason, 2002).

Conclusion: The Best Method?

Due to a lack of welfare studies comparing these different methods of elephant management, it cannot be said whether one method is clearly best for positive welfare, but Clubb and Mason (2002) feel that passive restraint (free contact without dominance) holds the most promise. Consistently kept, individual elephant biographies are needed to best assess what method would best serve each elephant, rather than letting the limitations of each facility decide. Perhaps placing elephants that require the same type of contact or training style in facilities together is an option. Of course, this point is moot in facilities that have required contact-style methods, such as US zoos, but may be applicable in the elephant camps of Nepal, India, and Thailand. More research needs to be done into successful methods of combining elephants, particularly as areas of South-East Asia move towards camp and sanctuary models of elephant management.

Note

[1] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

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Appendix II: Elephants in Asia

© Michelle Szydlowski 2024. *Elephant Tourism in Nepal* (M. Szydlowski)
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Part 1: Acts Impacting Elephant Health and Welfare in Asia

Out of concern for the threats facing Asian elephants, in 1997 the USA passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act and committed financial support through the formation of an Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (Stromayer, 2002, n.p.). This fund was aimed at supporting Asian elephant conservation efforts throughout the 13 range states[1] and funded 26 projects in its first two years (Stromayer, 2002). In 2018, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) awarded over US$1.8 million to projects related to the fund (USFWS, 2018). Over US$130,000 of this went to projects in Nepal and was followed by another US$78,000 in leveraged funds (USFWS, 2021). In 2019–2020, the USFWS sent US$71,705 to the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) (along with over US$44,000 in leveraged funds) for population studies and human–elephant conflict mitigation (USFWS, 2021).

The USFWS also supports the Asian Elephant Range States Meetings (AERSMs), and in 2017 supported stakeholders from all 13 range states in the signing of the Jakarta Declaration for Asian Elephant Conservation (Jakarta Declaration, 2017; USFWS, n.d.). This landmark accord recognizes Asian elephants as both an umbrella species and a keystone species,[2] and states that elephants are culturally significant throughout Asia (Jakarta Declaration, 2017, p. 2). The accord asks for international cooperation from range states in coordinating efforts to conserve elephants (Jakarta Declaration, 2017). Additionally, the accord

recognizes the need for governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to work together (Jakarta Declaration, 2017). The accord lists several priority actions including the maintenance of large, connected landscapes in protected areas. The accord seeks to address the causes of human–elephant conflict and mitigate them, enable participatory development and conservation, encourage working elephant registration, enforce legislation of animal and animal part trade, support international treaties and bodies such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), ensure captive elephant welfare, develop action plans for range nations that are in need, and create a range-level plan (Jakarta Declaration, 2017). Range state agencies have voiced concern about the lack of timely reporting and the failure of inter-agency and inter-state cooperation, and range-wide action plans along with DNA registration (see the following section, 'Registration as the basis for all welfare') would help with reporting violations (AERSM, 2017).

Range state agencies also expressed their desire to develop captive breeding programmes so that elephants do not have to be removed from the wild (AERSM, 2017). While this might positively impact wild populations, it does bring up further concerns surrounding populations of captive elephants and their use. Only one political body, Peninsular Malaysia, specified that it had no plans to increase numbers of captive elephants (AERSM, 2017, p. 53).

Of the range states, only around half currently have captive elephant management and staff training programmes in place (AERSM, 2017, pp. 51–52). Developing guidelines for management followed by the institution of appropriate training programmes for elephant staff is key to improving the welfare of both mahouts and elephants in captive situations (Desai, 2008; Varma and Prasad, 2008; AERSM, 2017).

The USFWS sent the NTNC an additional US$60,000 to support the 2019 AERSM which was held in Kathmandu, Nepal (USFWS, 2021).

Registration as the basis for all welfare

Lair (2002, n.p.), a US-based consultant for the Food and Agriculture Organization, explains that the key to captive elephant management lies in national and international registration. Any hope of improvement for elephant welfare, health, or quality of life must begin with registration (Lair, 2002). Without it, laws regarding care and keeping cannot be enforced, trade across borders will continue, and disease tracking is impossible (Lair, 2002). Registration systems do exist in some range states, such as India and Myanmar, but according to Lair (2002) these systems are not user-friendly, nor are they legally enforced. Getting mahouts and owners to comply with a registration system is a daunting task, and one that, despite Lair's (2002) prediction that it would come to pass by 2005, is still lacking in most countries.

In 2006, range states again acknowledged their willingness to enforce captive elephant monitoring, microchipping, and enforcement of cross-border movement regulations (Desai, 2008, p. 69; AERSM, 2017, p. 6 and 23). Yet, years later, these elephants are still passing across CITES member borders without microchips, papers, or interference from governments (AERSM, 2017, p. 6; Menon and Tiwari, 2019, p. 24). Because microchips can be tampered with, all AERSM delegates agreed that DNA tracking tests should instead be used, and Thailand has recently begun registering individuals using DNA (AERSM, 2017; Menon and Tiwari, 2019). New methods of DNA testing include the ability to test ivory as well as blood and skin, allowing for better tracking of trade in elephant body parts (AERSM, 2017, p. 43). NGOs have offered to finance the development of DNA testing, and delegates agreed that a range-wide elephant action plan is needed on top of national conservation plans (AERSM, 2017, p. 6 and 38). Nepal is credited as one of the few countries with a national elephant conservation plan, but it should be noted that this plan does not apply to captive elephants (Tewari, 2016; AERSM, 2017, p. 36; see Chapter 4, this volume).

Part 2: Elephant Care and Welfare in India

With over 3500 captive Gajah (Asian elephants), India holds the largest captive population in the world; it is also home to 60% of the global wild population (ETF, 2010; Sarma *et al.*, 2012; Menon and Tiwari, 2019). Many of Nepal's elephants and drivers originated in India, making a discussion of its history and husbandry practices key. Like many of the other countries whose welfare policies are discussed in this volume, the Indian government has been working with researchers to develop a set of guidelines for better care of captive elephants for at least 30 years (Desai, 2008; Varma and Prasad, 2008; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010). However, the lack of implementation of suggestions and failed enforcement of current legislation mean that, like in Nepal and Thailand, India's elephants remain in the same cycle of inadequate care and poor health that they have faced for decades.

Elephants in Indian stables lacked proper 'preventive or curative treatment' (Sarma *et al.*, 2003, p. ii), and suffered from such maladies as fungal infections, external parasites, harness wounds, farra gal,[3] colonic impactions, and overgrown tusks and nails (Harris *et al.*, 2008; Menon and Tiwari, 2019). Eighty-four per cent were reported to have worms, and some showed wounds from run-ins with wild rhino, or improperly cleaned injection sites (Sarma *et al.*, 2003, p. 10). Reasons for the lack of medical care included the lack of a reliable four-wheel drive vehicle to access remote camps, a lack of equipment for routine field tests, and the lack of a tranquilizer gun (Sarma *et al.*, 2003, p. 11).[4]

In 1992, the government of India launched Project Elephant with the goal of protecting wild elephants and their habitats (GoI, 2023). Wild elephant populations, once spread across the subcontinent, now occur only in four regions of India (GoI, 2023). These populations are fragmented, and Project Elephant was intended to protect and restore elephant habitats and wildlife corridors (GoI, 2023). The project was also designed to serve captive elephant populations through the creation of a welfare infrastructure which would include provisions for public education, research facilities, veterinary care, and mahout and management staff training (GoI, 2023). While Project Elephant's initial study concluded in 2003, no further action was taken by the Indian government for years. In a document dated 1 August 2008, Project

Elephant's director asked the government to follow up, citing committee recommendations to create specific rules and guidelines for managing elephants, improve training facilities for mahouts and elephants, improve working conditions and salary of mahouts, improve veterinary care for elephants, and enforce cruelty and registration laws (Prasad, 2008). That document included a copy of the 'guidelines for care and management of captive elephants' (Prasad, 2008, n.p.). In short, the guidelines require a current survey of captive elephants, microchipping and registration, transport rules, larger stable sizes of 9 m × 6 m for adults (and 7 m × 3.5 m for sub-adults), requirements for stable cleanliness, veterinary care including disease reporting and necropsies, and the development of a definition for cruelty to elephants (Prasad, 2008, n.p.). In 2019, Project Elephant added a Captive Elephant Health Care and Welfare Committee, and in 2022 Project Elephant celebrated its 30th anniversary. Ongoing projects include involvement in CITES' Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme, an atlas of elephant reserves in India, and a focus on creating migratory corridors across the country (GoI, 2023).

Husbandry recommendations in India

Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA), the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation (ANCF), and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) performed a large-scale, year-long study in 2003. The study examined the management and welfare conditions of captive elephants and their mahouts, and the results were presented to 22 international field experts. The purpose of that study and subsequent workshop was the determination of measurable health parameters for captive elephants (Varma and Prasad, 2008).

The 2003 study and its workshops helped formulate a 'common language' of elephant care and a list of topics for future discussion (Desai, 2008; Varma, 2008; Varma and Prasad, 2008; Varma *et al.*, 2008). For example, Varma *et al.* (2008, p. 18) suggested that any assessment of captive elephant welfare first consider how closely any man-made habitat can mimic a 'species-specific environment'.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to the 'alien' conditions faced by animals held in captivity (see Chapter 5, this volume). Parameters for assessing facility suitability included an evaluation of the sizes of space for sleeping, exercising, and resting; as well as elephant and mahout work requirements, access to health care, the presence of veterinary records and recordkeeping, feeding, crop-raiding patterns (which might create conflicts between wild and captive elephants), and management (Varma *et al.*, 2008; see Chapter 5, this volume).

Varma and Prasad (2008) next developed a set of recommendations likely to increase positive health and welfare for captive elephants and their handlers. These recommendations included long-distance walking restrictions on travelling or beggar elephants and the limitation of walking to cooler time periods. Travelling elephants must be regularly fed, offered water, and given shaded breaks (Varma and Prasad, 2008, pp. 55–62). All captive elephants should be registered, and both routine and emergent veterinary care undertaken by wildlife veterinarians experienced in elephant care (Varma and Prasad, 2008, pp. 55–62). Additionally, if ill elephants must be quarantined, it must be within 'communication' (visual, olfactory, or auditory) of the herd (Varma and Prasad, 2008, p. 60; see Chapter 5, this volume).

These recommendations included guidelines for mahouts, such as the suggestion that they be exposed to elephants at a young age, around 12 or 13 years old (Varma and Prasad, 2008, p. 62). One mahout must be employed for each calf, until calves reach 1.8 metres (six feet) tall, when a second mahout must be obtained (Varma and Prasad, 2008, p. 62). Mahouts should be trained in basic skills which include 'elephant care, family and social skills, anger management, personal development, alcoholism, insurance', etc.. (Varma and Prasad, 2008, p. 62).

Using elephants

During the above-mentioned 2008 workshop, Desai (2008, p. 67), a wildlife biologist, International Union for Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission (IUCN/SSC) Asian Elephant Specialist Group member, and steering committee member for Project Elephant, made numerous recommendations for facility management which are

applicable across range countries. Management staff should have a clear understanding of the rationale behind keeping captive elephants and must be aware that elephants deserve humane treatment. Desai (2008) suggested that management quality be standardized via training, and mahouts well-paid to encourage long-term employment which reduces stress on elephants (see Chapter 5, this volume).

Individuals and organizations should consider whether their desire to own elephants is justifiable and whether these animals are going to be used for short- or long-term activities (Desai, 2008). Justification considerations should include whether the elephants are a *necessary* part of the experience, for example if obtained for a religious festival in contrast to a zoo or circus event (Desai, 2008). Consideration of whether animals are truly needed for ecotourism activities or conservation management is also needed (Desai, 2008). If the use of elephants is found justifiable, organizations must then ask themselves if the use of animals in these practices is simply 'traditional' – in which case changing social perspectives on animal use need to be critically reassessed (Desai, 2008, p. 68).

Organizations should assess if the need for elephants is temporary, and if so, explore options such as reallocation of elephants already housed in the area. If the use of elephants is *still* considered justifiable, a management plan is needed to ensure humane treatment (Desai, 2008, p. 68). Elephants should not be used in dangerous or stressful environments and should not be kept under strict control or forced to remain stationary for extended periods of time (Desai, 2008, p. 71). Elephants brought into a locale should be legally obtained only from areas which are noted to have a surplus (Desai, 2008, p. 70). In addition, any elephants added to a locale should have monitoring and enforcement bodies in place to ensure standards are met (Desai, 2008). Lastly, there needs to be a plan in place for the support of new elephants for the rest of their natural lives (Desai, 2008, p. 68).

The Elephant Task Force (ETF) met in 2010 to report on the progress of Project Elephant. The ETF found that India faced huge gaps in its wildlife divisions, with up to 50% vacancies in oversight positions (ETF, 2010, p. 82). These gaps, coupled with a generally young and inexperienced forest staff, allow for poaching and illegal trade to continue

unchecked (ETF, 2010, p. 82). The ETF would not only like to see the commercial captivity of elephants phased out, but also better care provided for the current captive population (ETF, 2010, p. 94).

The current situation in India

A 2008 assessment of 1200 elephants in various captive situations (including zoos, private ownership, temples, circuses, and street beggars) used a predesigned datasheet with 50–83 parameters, each rated on a scale of 0–10. Observations and interview methods of data collection were used to build 'passports' of 32 data points for each elephant (Varma, 2008, p. 8). Travelling elephants – also called beggar elephants by Nepalese – scored an average of 2.4, whereas forest camp elephants averaged 7.9 (Varma, 2008, p. 11). Privately held elephants generally received a moderate score (Varma, 2008, p. 11).

According to Varma (2008, p. 12), there was no demonstrable difference found between the welfare of mahouts in forest camps, private facilities, or zoos. However, beggar-elephant handlers and temple mahouts faced decreased welfare (Varma, 2008, p. 12). One issue arose from a lack of health care for mahouts, and poor mahout health may have negative impacts on elephant welfare (Varma, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2015, p. 2; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a; also see Chapter 5, this volume).

Elephant work in India

Studies by Vanitha *et al.* (2010, p. 118) found that privately owned elephants used for rituals and begging spent only 8% of their time in ritual activities, but spent an average of 5.5 hours begging, sometimes walking 30–40 km per day in unsuitably hot conditions. In comparison, temple elephants received less than an hour of exercise per day and spent 20% of their day working on ritual activities while standing in one place, and 65% of their time resting and feeding in indoor enclosures (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 119). Temple elephants spent ~70% of their time on chains, and the ankush (ankus or bull hook) was used ~90% of the time

in both temple and private management systems (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 120).

Forestry elephants, who perform safari rides twice daily for approximately 2 hours each time, spent a good deal of their time (55.5%) free to forage in natural surroundings, and about 24% of their time resting and stall-feeding (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 120). Overall, these elephants spent nearly 13 hours per day eating, wandering, and resting – albeit on hobbles or long chains (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 119). Most forestry bull elephants were tethered at night to protect them from the potential of being taken by poachers (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 117). These elephants worked for humans 10% of their time, much less than institutionally or privately owned individuals (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010). Forest department mahouts did not use an ankush at all, relying only on a stick for bulls in musth (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 119). Vanitha *et al.* (2010, p. 121) recommend restricting working hours, focusing on welfare-improving activities (such as exercise), and offering regular bathing opportunities. They further call upon Hindu temple authorities and governmental agencies to legislate and enforce better conditions for working elephants (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010, p. 121).

Overall, the temple and privately owned elephants fared much worse in a comparison of welfare, due to the lack of shade, substrate (such as hot roads or metal surfaces), natural opportunities for movement, and access to natural food sources and eating behaviours (Vanitha *et al.*, 2010). Due to an excess of forestry elephants, Vanitha *et al.* (2010, p. 121) recommend further training for young elephants so that they may be used in safari rides, or a transfer of young animals to anti-poaching camps.

Follow-up studies showed that privately owned and temple elephants continued to demonstrate more stereotypies, particularly during their developmental years (Vanitha *et al.*, 2016). Vanitha *et al.* (2016) attribute these ongoing issues to continued practices of long-term chaining, separation from maternal herds, separation from their natural habitat (i.e. when removed from the wild for camp use), and deprivation of socialization opportunities. Ill effects lingered even after elephants were transferred to timber camp facilities (Vanitha *et al.*, 2016).

Part 3: Elephant Care and Welfare in Thailand

Thailand is the primary country of focus for researchers interested in welfare and management issues of elephants due to its large number of captive elephants. Thailand is home to approximately 3700 captive individuals, 95% of whom are privately owned (Tipprasert, 2002; AERSM, 2017). Like in Nepal, the number of wild elephants in Thailand is roughly equal to that of captive populations (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005; AERSM, 2017). Captive elephants in Thailand, like those in Nepal, are considered private property and can be sold or traded legally to others within each country (Schliesinger, 2010).

History

Thai elephants were first protected in 1921 with the drafting of the Wild Elephant Protection Act, outlawing killing or injuring wild individuals (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 2). While this act did not attempt to legislate captive animals, it did result in the need for captive breeding programmes throughout the country (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 2). Elephants in Thailand are also covered by the Draught Animal Act of 1939, which also lists animals such as cattle and donkeys (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 2). According to Bansiddhi *et al.* (2020a, p. 2), elephants in Thailand are now typically classified into two subgroups: captive and wild. Other researchers subgroup individuals as timber elephants, camp elephants, and travelling or temple elephants (Varma, 2008; Vanitha *et al.*, 2010).

Prior to the late 1980s, most Thai logging elephants belonged to the forestry office, a governmental agency (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 8). A Thai logging ban in 1989 resulted in thousands of elephants and their drivers – around 70% of them – suddenly out of work (Tipprasert, 2002; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). Because elephant food is costly, elephants' welfare can be linked to their position as income-producing private property, and out-of-work timber elephants became a burden instead of an income source (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 8). Some human–elephant pairs found their way to cities, where they faced illness from a

lack of food and water, or injury from run-ins with traffic (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). In addition, elephants posed a hazard to human city-dwellers (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). Around 100 of these wandering elephants can still be found throughout Thailand, another 1200–1400 pairs are simply considered 'unemployed', and another 1000 work at one of Thailand's 37 elephant camps (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). Most Thai elephant camps are in the northern part of the country, with seven major camps in the district of Chiang Mai (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 3). Elephant groups in these camps are not comprised of matriarchal herds as they would be in the wild, but rather of a hotchpotch of unrelated animals (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 6).

In 1991, the Thai government's Forest Industry Organization (FIO) built an elephant conservation centre to solve, in part, the problem of unemployed elephants and mahouts (Laohachaiboon, 2010, pp. 77–78). The Thai Elephant Conservation Centre (TECC) is the only government-owned camp in the country and houses 48 government-owned elephants and around 110 trained and 'certified' mahouts (FOI, 2002 in Tipprasert, 2002; Laohachaiboon, 2010). Originally focused on tourism activities which included elephant riding and homestay programmes, the facility has now expanded to include an elephant orchestra, elephant painting, a health clinic, and an artificial insemination programme (Tipprasert, 2002; Laohachaiboon, 2010). One benefit of this facility, and others in the Chiang Mai area, is its location within forested areas, allowing captive elephants access to browse which has not been chemically treated (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 6).

These elephant camps became the focus of the first nationwide study of ecotourism in the country (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). That study recommended a change to the classification of 'domesticated' (see Chapter 1, this volume) elephants from 'transport animal' to an animal 'reflecting the unique identity of Thailand' (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). Additionally, Tipprasert (2002, n.p.) called for the establishment of permanent jobs for mahouts and elephants in the national parks service, the establishment of quality standards for both elephants and mahouts through training schools, the implementation of an identification card system, fixed income and working hours for mahouts, governmental support of disabled or elderly elephants, protection for the traditional

lifestyles of mahouts, and an institution dedicated to elephant medical care and research.

In 2002, the TECC affiliated itself with the National Elephant Institute (NEI) in what some described as an attempt to escape the corruption and growing debt of the FIO (Laohachaiboon, 2010, p. 83). This 'new' organization was tasked with developing elephant conservation within the country while maintaining local traditions and indigenous wisdom (Laohachaiboon, 2010, p. 83). The Department of Livestock instituted new standards for elephant camps throughout the country (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020b, p. 166) which included shelter and health regulations as well as tourist safely protections. The NEI spearheaded a drive to instil the elephant as Thailand's national symbol and ensure that captive elephants received humane care through the drafting of the Protection and Conservation of Elephants as the National Symbolic Animal Act (Laohachaiboon, 2010, p. 84). The drive to pass this bill has stalled due to certain inclusions in the document draft which would eliminate or undermine the revenue and authority of numerous elephant owners in Thailand (Laohachaiboon, 2010, p. 85). Further complicating attempts to codify training methods were debates over the Phajaan (sometimes spelled Phachan, paah jaan, or pajan) 'breaking' ritual, much the same debates are still taking place in Nepal (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Cohen, 2015; Vidanta, elephant owners' cooperative members and mahout interviews, 2019).[5] This ritual, called 'epidemic elephant trauma' by Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2018, p. 117), includes the separation of young elephants from their mothers and often includes beatings, food deprivation, and other harsh treatment (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Cohen, 2015; Gwala interview, 2020; see Chapter 4, this volume). While many experienced mahouts were baffled by complaints against what they see as an ancient and necessary tradition, Westerners have moved to eliminate the practice (Cohen, 2015; Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018). Elephant cruelty throughout tourist destinations is one reason that several large travel organizations, such as Trip Advisor and the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), have decided to cease supporting travel to any venue where free contact with elephants is permitted (ABTA, 2020; Tripadvisor, 2020). The ABTA also restricts activities where captive

breeding occurs, or where CITES-listed species are exhibited (ABTA, 2020). These boycotts are potentially missing an even larger issue – that what an organization may think is an 'ethical sanctuary' may in fact be one that simply has not been investigated properly.

However, 2002's new guidelines for elephant camps were soon rejected, as owners realized the increase in costs associated with providing higher standards (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). Instead of higher standards bringing in money which could then be applied to better elephant care, the owners realized that the immediate costs of implementing these standards were high, and instead cut corners in elephant care (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 13). Some informants in a 2008 study explained that 'good camps take care of their elephants', and it should be left at that (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 13). Enacting restrictions simply forces the smaller camps out of business or requires elephant owners to find ways to make even more money with their animals – leading to a decrease in welfare (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 13).

Elephants in these camps suffered from a lack of mahout training, the employment of many already marginalized people in a profession lacking social standing, and high rates of turnover as mahouts look for better income (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020). This turnover might have been because mahouts no longer share long histories or have had time to develop bonds with individual elephants, making it easier to leave as new opportunities arise (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020). A lack of experience with elephants may result in signs of illness or injury being missed, and the need to use harsher methods to control them (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009). Elephants at Thai facilities showed both wounds from howdah wear and injuries from ankus use (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, pp. 7–8).

The Thai NEI again fell under scrutiny when the costs associated with its mahout training school massively outpaced those at other facilities, using funds that allegedly could have been distributed more equitably among training schools (Laohachaiboon, 2010, p. 89). The NEI has been successful in its efforts to use artificial insemination to increase captive elephant numbers and has introduced a reintroduction programme to return elephants to the wild in the hope that more genetic diversity will

help increase numbers of wild elephant (Laohachaiboon, 2010, p. 81). This reintroduction programme has resulted in the released elephants behaving in much the same way as wild elephants, wary of human contact (Thitaram *et al.*, 2018, p. 176). The released elephants did return often to settlements for crop-raiding, creating issues with human–elephant conflict and the need to pay compensation to crop owners (Thitaram *et al.*, 2018, p. 176). These elephants also face issues with their legal status – as it is unknown whether they are covered under the same protections as other wild elephants (Thitaram *et al.*, 2018, p. 176).

Thailand began to take elephant welfare more seriously by launching the Thai Elephant New World Project, a multi-sited programme slated to build elephant conservation centres throughout Thailand (Tipprasert, 2002; Laohachaiboon, 2010). Each centre would attempt to provide a naturalistic environment and range for captive individuals, while providing tourism-centric activities and money-making opportunities (Tipprasert, 2002). These facilities would include tourism information centres, art and culture centres, museums, research centres, elephant health care areas, and mahout training facilities (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). Within each centre would be a 'reserved zone' of original forestry and water resources, with additional cultivation of elephant-friendly food sources (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). This area would serve as a feeding area for elephants and a tourist trekking zone (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). Of great importance for the implementation of this plan was the need to improve and then maintain the quality of reservoir water (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.). Furthermore, a commitment to the prevention of elephant trespass into neighbouring, privately owned lands was necessary, as was a commitment to the safety of villagers and tourists while bulls are in musth (Tipprasert, 2002, n.p.).

The suitability (and pricing) of each of Thailand's elephant camps varies by location. Some of these camps have their own veterinarian on staff, while others rely on a local vet who may not be an elephant specialist (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018). While the camps in the Chiang Mai area pay better, they are still subject to fluctuations in numbers of tourists (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, pp. 10–11). Tourism directly impacts camp elephants, and out-of-work individuals return to urban areas

during the lower tourist season in search of food and income (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 10).

The current situation in Thailand

In 2014, Thailand passed the rather vague Cruelty Prevention and Welfare of Animals Act which calls for the formation of an animal welfare and cruelty prevention committee, and states that cruelty to animals cannot take place 'without justification' (Department of Livestock Development/Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand, 2014, p. 12). Cruelty charges may carry a two-year prison term and fines (Department of Livestock Development/Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand, 2014, p. 16). This act allows for outside groups to file as animal welfare organizations and initiate campaigns for welfare (Department of Livestock Development/Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand, 2014, p. 8), and outlaws abandonment of animals. The act purposely excludes any killing of animals for food or religious reasons, and allows for 'ear, the tail, fur, horn or tusk' cutting and 'local traditional animal' fighting (Department of Livestock Development/Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand, 2014, p. 13). This act does require that animals used for human entertainment must be provided with proper welfare but does not clarify what that welfare entails (Department of Livestock Development/Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand, 2014, p. 14). Thailand has instituted a National Master Plan for the Conservation of Elephants 2018–2037 (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 11). This plan addresses the need to reduce poaching and trade in elephant parts, connect populations and landscapes, increase knowledge of populations and habitats, legislate and enforce policies, and change negative perceptions of elephant conservation in Thailand (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 11). While this new legislation is a step in the right direction for animal welfare, it leaves a great deal of room for interpretation.

In 2017a group of camp owners formed the Chiang Mai Elephant Alliance (then renamed it the Thai Elephant Alliance Association the

next year), and this group includes representatives from 15 camps (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a; TEA (Thai Elephant Alliance Association), n.d.). This alliance seeks to promote elephant tourism through a positive lens, educate others on elephant care, improve messaging about elephant tourism, and promote cooperation surrounding elephant tourism issues (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 10).

Pandemics and their effect on elephant welfare

Like the logging ban of 1989, the 2002 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) changed captive elephant status in Thailand from income-producer to burden (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 10). As tourism plummeted, owners sold off their elephants at discounted prices (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, p. 10). The same thing happened in 2019, as COVID-19 circled the globe and tourism disappeared (see Chapter 7, this volume). Even before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, news outlets began posting articles about starving elephants abandoned on the streets (Kindred, 2020, n.p.). Due to the relatively high cost of feeding captive elephants – around US$40 daily, or three times the minimum Thai wage – these individuals faced starvation as tourism disappeared in Thailand (Paddock and Suhartono, 2020, n.p.). As tourism at elephant parks faded to 10% of normal, many owners simply set the animals free, though some were concerned that elephants wouldn't know how to find food on their own (Paddock and Suhartono, 2020, n.p.). Over a hundred of these camp elephants were marched 150 km to forested natural areas near the Mae Chaem district, where they have been traditionally kept by members of the Karen community (Sivasomboon and Peck, 2020, n.p.).

The Thai Elephant Alliance Association (TEA) website is still seeking donations to support elephants affected by COVID lockdowns and the loss of tourism (TEA (Thai Elephant Alliance Association), n.d.). Some camps are unable to pay mahouts or feed elephants, and drought is further affecting the availability of other food sources (TEA (Thai Elephant Alliance Association), n.d.). According to TEA, elephants are spending longer times tied in one place as mahouts seek out work or are being

taken to mahouts' home villages where foraging may not be available (TEA (Thai Elephant Alliance Association), n.d.). The alliance hopes to support camp members through food donations, edible salts, and first aid kits (TEA, n.d.).

Asian Captive Elephant Standards (ACES)

Another organization is now attempting to change elephant conditions in Thailand. Asian Captive Elephant Standards (ACES) is the brainchild of sustainable tourism developer Nicolas Dubrocard, who began developing guidelines for Thai camps starting in 2019 (ACES, 2020; Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a). These guidelines include registering elephants, microchipping, staff training, and elephant welfare plans – all of which are necessary for elephant well-being according to the welfare studies listed in preceding sections of this chapter. However, the ACES website purports that bull hook use, riding, and chaining are desirable tools in the tourism and elephant trade (ACES, 2020), so Western welfare activists or those wishing to participate in ethical tourism may not agree that an ACES certification is a guarantee of appropriate treatment. ACES certification does require that camps do follow the five freedoms guidelines (ACES, 2020).

The Thai elephant manual and other guidelines

One publication of note in Thailand is the *Elephant Care Manual for Mahouts and Camp Managers* (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005), aimed at mahouts in the hopes of ensuring faster diagnosis of issues and better elephant care. This document lists normal parameters for elephant health and husbandry, appropriate interaction guidelines, and anatomical descriptions to aid with assessment (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005). The guidelines for food and care found in this manual served as a comparison to the conditions found at stables in Nepal, where no such guide exists (Tewari, 2016; Vidanta interviews, 2019). Many suggestions from the

guide are included in the discussion of health and welfare in Chapters 5 and 10, this volume.

According to this manual, elephants are required to have registration and ownership papers for every elephant over the age of 8 years, and mahouts and/or owners must always keep these papers with the elephant or risk the elephant being confiscated (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 3). Elephants must also be microchipped, and microchipping is offered throughout Thailand free-of-charge (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 5). However, regulations on microchipping, registration, and disease reporting are rarely enforced (see AERSM, 2017).

The manual also includes a discussion of control methods (see Appendix I, this volume). Phangkum *et al.* (2005, p. 25) suggest using an ankus, but in a way that doesn't injure the elephant. The ankus should be used to apply pressure, not to cause pain. Striking the elephant with the ankus is never acceptable, and it should never be used around the ear canal to prevent damaging the sensitive area within. However, the manual does allow for striking the elephant with the shaft around its eyes or eyebrows only 'in the most extreme emergencies' (Phangkum *et al.*, 2005, p. 26). Ankus use has become a topic of great debate among researchers and welfare advocates alike (see Appendix I and Chapter 5, this volume).

In a discussion about dominance training, Bansiddhi *et al.* (2020a, p. 3) claim that anecdotal and emotional evidence is the impetus for organizations making 'unfounded claims of universal brutality' towards elephants in Thai camps. Safely controlling captive elephants is necessary to prevent mahout or tourist injury, and Bansiddhi *et al.* (2020a, pp. 4–5) argue that the bull hook is a necessary tool to ensure safety. While they acknowledge the existence of other options – such as positive reinforcement techniques – they point out that these methods must be firmly established before more traditional tools can be left behind (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 6). They do recommend mahout training on methods of using the ankus appropriately (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 6). Outlawing the ankus, according to Bansiddhi *et al.* (2020a, pp. 6–7), may result in more positive training techniques being used in public, but behind-the-scenes treatment becoming harsher. The authors acknowledge that Thai mahouts use painful weapons, such as nails and

knives, and that the prevalence of their use is unknown (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 4).

Reviews of Thai elephant camps

A 2018 camp welfare study by Bansiddhi *et al.* (2018, p. 18) found that the recommendations made in the elephant care manual are being completely ignored, and elephant welfare is still suffering. Sixty-seven per cent of these camps reported injuries due to equipment, typically ankus, but also nails and slingshots. Chain length recommendations in the above manual are rarely used due to space restraints, and chains less than a third of the recommended length were the norm. Eighty-two per cent of captive elephants in the study spent at least portions of the day chained, but some camps did allow elephants to roam under the care of a mahout during the day. Despite evidence of the dangers of hard substrate, concrete flooring was still in use at 52% of the camps (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018, p. 13).

Food requirements were not being met, with amounts of roughage and variety significantly lower than needed (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018, p. 21). Sixty-one per cent of the elephants in the study had no access to natural browsing areas. Water was not provided during the evenings at 82% of the surveyed camps, as the main sources of water at these facilities came from nearby rivers or streams rather than being stored on-site or piped in. Thirty-nine per cent of the study elephants had no access to appropriate veterinary care. Without the enforcement of legislation or guidelines for elephant care, welfare at many of these camps has suffered (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018, p. 24).

Bansiddhi *et al.* (2020a) used the five freedoms method in another recent study to re-evaluate camps. Nutritional intake was hard to quantify due to a lack of measurement by mahouts and the feeding of elephants by tourists, but elephants were supplied with vitamin supplements, and around a third were now provided with foraging opportunities (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 7). Most of the elephants were described as overweight, in contrast to prior studies by these authors (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2018; Norkaew *et al.*, 2018). This may be due in part to the fact that elephant camps have chosen to refocus their operations from

tourist rides to more 'elephant friendly' activities such as walks with elephants (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020b). The only approved tourist interaction at some facilities is the feeding of high-sugar treats like bananas, and without the opportunity for safaris and baths, some individuals are gaining weight (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 4 and 7). Both male and female elephants were scored higher in overall body condition compared to those in Western zoos, but over a third of the females were declared overweight (Norkaew *et al.*, 2018, p. 9).

Eighty-eight per cent of the elephants surveyed had adequate shelter, and most were provided dirt substrates at night, but only a few were provided water (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 8). Additionally, tourists are not limited in number, and stressors such as noise may negatively impact welfare (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 8). Noise as a stressor has been documented in zoo elephants (Jakob-Hoff *et al.*, 2019, p. 9 and 12). Elephants in the earlier Bansiddhi *et al.* (2018) study were chained at night and unable to touch conspecifics, but newer camps reportedly take elephant mental health into account, allowing more interaction with other individuals (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a). Changes to camp management and veterinary care are ongoing. As of 2020, there are six elephant hospitals in Thailand, all of which offer veterinary care at no charge (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020b). Only 18% of the camps surveyed had a full-time veterinarian, but each camp does screen for tuberculosis yearly and provides a visiting vet twice per year as well as access to mobile vet clinics (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020a, p. 8).

Elephants in Thai facilities showed signs of psychological issues or complex post-traumatic stress disorder in up to 74% of elephants (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018, p. 119). These issues include trauma stemming from earlier separation from familial groups, breaking ceremonies, violent treatment by caregivers, prolonged chaining, and limited nutrition (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018, pp. 119–120). These traumas may be expressed through aggression, avoidance, anxiety, stereotypies (i.e. repetitive behaviours), or self-injuring behaviour (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2018, p. 120).

While Thai elephant camps are now – allegedly – inspected and certified every 2 years, there is no enforcement of standards nor any real benefit to those camps that pass (Bansiddhi *et al.*, 2020b). Bansiddhi *et al.*

(2020a, p. 3) found that a lack of oversight and failed enforcement of legislation have resulted in Thai elephant owners continuing to behave as they always have, and this leaves some elephants suffering with poor health and negative welfare.

Despite these challenges, a 2019 survey found that every stakeholder interviewed felt that elephants in Thailand would be worse off without the presence of tourism activities (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2020). Tourists provide the means to keep mahouts and elephants employed. As 'livestock', tourism work might be considered the 'fee' elephants pay for their continued care (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009, 2020).

Conclusions

Following the logging ban in Thailand, the lives of elephants and mahouts suffered, but the timing happened to coincide with a sharp rise in tourism. This rise allowed for the quick transition of unemployed lumber elephants into tourist attractions. Because they are seen as livestock, the ability of elephants to serve as money-makers is directly tied to their care. Elephants making money may also raise the standards of care offered by their mahout and prevent the mahout from seeking employment elsewhere – again benefiting the welfare of the elephant. Having elephants located in central camps provides easier access to veterinary care, and thus having centralized tourist areas may benefit elephants overall.

Tourism activities appear to be key to the survival of captive elephants in Thailand, and interactions with tourists may be the price elephants pay to receive food and shelter. Promoting tourism as the answer to financially supporting elephants is a paradox. More tourists mean more work and more income, leading to more stability, but also mean less time spent drinking, resting, or eating. Not having to move to urban areas during slow seasons may increase welfare but spending less time in the expression of natural behaviours may negatively impact welfare. A lack of understandable or enforced legislation prevents organizations who might want to improve elephant welfare from doing so, cutting off a potentially ripe source of income or educational opportunities.

The question remains whether forced reproduction and continued commodification of this endangered species is necessary or appropriate. If countries agree that this generation of captive elephants is the last, what happens to those economies now reliant on elephant-based tourism?

Notes

[1] A range state is a country that has authority over areas in which an animal resides or through which it migrates.

[2] An umbrella species is one whose conservation also conserves other animals sharing the same habitat (falling under the same umbrella). A keystone species is one which is critical to the continued survival of other living things sharing the same ecosystem. The loss of a keystone species has the potential to cause the collapse of the entire ecosystem in that area (National Geographic, 2019, n.p.).

[3] Farra gal is an abscess typically caused by ill-fitting harnesses, especially when worn in heat and humidity. A small wound becomes a painful abscess and may be fatal (Sarma *et al*., 2003).

[4] India is facing an ongoing crisis with wild elephant populations as well, having lost over 260 individuals since the 1980s to collisions with trains (AERSM, 2017; Menon and Tiwari, 2019). With new high-speed rails being built, these fatalities are likely to increase (AERSM, 2017), putting more pressure on wild populations.

[5] See Chapter 2 (this volume) for descriptions of the research methodology, interview and personal communication (PC) citation format, and terminology used, and a discussion on pseudonymization.

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Elephant Tourism in Nepal

Historical Perspectives, Current Health and Welfare Challenges, and Future Directions

Michelle Szydlowski

A study of elephant tourism in Nepal from its origins in the 1960s to the present day, this book examines the challenges faced by captive elephants. Used as human conveyance, on anti-poaching patrol teams, as rescue vehicles, and in forestry service, elephants have worked with and for humans for hundreds of years. However, the use of elephants in tourism is a fairly new development within Nepal. Because the health and welfare of tourism elephants is vital to the conservation of wild individuals, this book offers an assessment of captive elephant needs and an examination of their existing welfare statuses.

Numerous NGOs and INGOs are now active in elephant lives, and many advocacy organizations have arisen with the goal of changing tourism practices and improving captive elephant welfare.

This book seeks to examine the motivations of these NGOs and INGOs, and to consider their ethical approaches to elephant health and welfare. Are the motivations of these organizations similar enough to work together towards a common goal, or are their ethical norms so different that they get in one another's way? Using an ordinary language and ethics framework, this text aims to identify the norms of cultures and organizations and reframe them in ways which may allow for more successful interactions.

Front cover: Play Fighting by Carl Jones
Eva Kali and Lhamo Kali in the jungle near their home. Both are retired tourism elephants living at the Stand Up 4 Elephants sanctuary near Ratnanagar, Nepal (SU4E.org).



Fig. 10.1. Long Description

The columns header are a consideration, available numbered 1, unavailable numbered 0, and unable to assess with N or A option. The considerations are listed as follows. Shelter, appropriate substrate, cleanliness of substrate, availability of dirt for bathing and digging, access to clean water for drinking and bathing, availability of browse, variety of diet, social groupings, freedom of movement, non-traditional or non-dominance based management, structures for rest or sleep, prevention of injury, access to health care, choice in activity or agency. Additional considerations are listed as follows. Life history or exposure to Phajaan, the available is yes means 0 and unavailable No means 1. Very short distance to the tourist gate, the available is yes means 1 and the unavailable No means 0. Mahout housing with available as concrete 0, unavailable as traditional 1, and unable to access as elevated 1.

Navigate back to the figure.

Fig. 10.5. Long Description

The horizontal axis is labeled the number of stables at which each welfare consideration was found and it ranges from 0 to 24 in increments of 2. The vertical axis labelled the list of welfare influencers. The details are as follows. Structures for rest or sleep, 2. Access to clean water for drinking and bathing, 2. Non-dominance or traditional management, 3. Choice in activity or agency, 4. Prevention of injury, 4. Availability of loose dirt for bathing and digging, 4. Loose dirt, natural or mixed substrate, 4. Variety of diet, 5. Freedom of movement, 6. Availability of browse, 6. Social groupings, 10. Cleanliness of substrate, 20. Access to health care, 21. Shelter or roof, 22.

Navigate back to the figure.