

The Bloody Elephant Corridor: Where Elephants & People are Dying and How a Bus Can Help Save Them

The following is an account documented by United States resident Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund who currently serves as Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS) director of development. Founded in 1995, SLWCS is a US-based nonprofit organization and a registered voluntary social service non-governmental organization in Sri Lanka.

Following the Trail of Human-Elephant Conflict

The trail of blood seen in the photo to the right tells the story of a painful encounter between humans and elephants, which unfolded along a rural road outside the Wasgamuwa National Park in Sri Lanka in March of 2015. The road—used by school children, farmers and other villagers in this beautiful, remote area—runs through an elephant corridor that has been used by elephants to access food and water since the beginning of time.



Signs of conflict. A bloody trail means trouble for wild elephants outside Wasgamuwa National Park in Sri Lanka.

Sadly, it is a bloody story that repeats itself over and over all throughout this region (and throughout the entire country) as the growing number of humans, farms and other land disturbances continue to push the boundaries of tolerance and coexistence between people and elephants to their breaking point.

Staff and volunteers (including myself) of the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS) discovered the bloody scene while monitoring the elephant corridor where violent conflicts between people and elephants who compete daily for space and resources occur frequently. Without the implementation of practical solutions to this growing problem, the remaining population of Sri Lanka's 4,000 endangered Asian elephants will be at serious risk of extinction according to SLWCS conservationists.



Daily human-elephant conflict. The simple act of walking to and from school can turn deadly.

We followed the trail of blood evidence for more than 500 feet. Tiny drips in rapid succession as well as large splashes of blood spaced three or more feet apart could be seen, suggesting more than one wound was inflicted, perhaps on more than one elephant, most likely by gunshot. For villagers, guns are the ‘preferred’ weapon against elephants—they are easy to conceal from authorities, have been adapted to use refilled shell casings, and are deadly effective at both scaring and killing elephants.

Eventually, the trail of blood veered off into the tall grass lining the roadway. Muddy tracks indicated the herd, including at least one juvenile, was fleeing—*running for their lives*.

Whether to scare or kill elephants, shootings like these are illegal but rarely if ever prosecuted in Sri Lanka. There is a code of silence shared by area villagers that shields perpetrators from laws designed to protect endangered elephants. Sadly, more than 200 elephants and 80 humans die each year in Sri Lanka from such conflicts.



Big feet, big conflicts.

Keeping the Peace ~ A Win/Win for People & Elephants with the World's First EleFriendly Bus Service!

Saving wild elephants while helping people is at the heart of SLWCS’ work. It includes a wide array of research and conservation projects designed to quell the tension between elephants and humans. Yet keeping the peace in a land where poverty, fear, guns and death are common is no simple task. It requires myriad approaches that must evolve over time to meet changing needs.

SLWCS’ EleFriendly Bus will help to reduce tensions between villagers and the dangerous giants that live among them—protecting school children and other pedestrians from elephants, and vice versa—by providing safe transportation along a dusty rural roadway that transects “The Bloody Corridor.” This road is used daily by elephants to source life-giving food and water. In turn, the frequency of bloody human-elephant encounters will be vastly reduced, helping to keep people safe and endangered elephants alive.



**It's No Laughing Matter...
Elephants & children are dying
and this bus can save them both.**