

MANAGEMENT OF ELEPHANTS AT THE PINNAWALA ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE, SRI LANKA.

T.M.N.K. TILAKARATHNE AND C. SANTIAPILLAI

Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya

The Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawala is a unique resource in Sri Lanka, currently having a group of 63 elephants, of both sexes and of all ages. This study examines the management, structure and composition of the population of domesticated elephants at Pinnawala. Elephants were studied during seven month from March to September 2000. Information was gathered through direct observations, from the records that are kept at Pinnawala and also by interviewing the manager and the mahouts. The population consisted of 42.86% adult females, 17.46% adult male (3.17% tuskers), 22.22% sub adults, 12.7% juveniles and 4.76% calves. The sex ratio of adult males to adult females was 1:2.5, biased in favour of the females. The elephant orphanage plays a major role in *ex-situ* conservation of the elephants by providing opportunities for breeding elephants in captivity. A total of, eighteen calves had been born at the orphanage within a period of sixteen years, with only one infant mortality and a still birth. Between 1998 and 2000 there were six births, indicating a high degree of captive breeding. Elephants are provided with good veterinary care and a balanced diet. They are left untied during the day that promotes social encounters, especially while bathing. Such practices have resulted in a high breeding success, health conditions of elephants and low mortality. The orphanage spends about Rs.15,118,300 (=US \$ 101,577) annually on food and milk for elephants. It earns about Rs.20, 659,000 (=US \$ 275,453) annually from visitors, especially foreigners. However, no measures have been taken to educate visitors about elephant biology, ecology, conservation, breeding and training.

