

**STUDY ON THE DAMAGE CAUSED AND THE NEED FOR
CONSERVATION OF THE LAST TWO ASIAN ELEPHANTS (*ELEPHAS
MAXIMUS MAXIMUS*) IN THE WORLD HERITAGE SINHARAJA
PRIMARY FOREST OF SRI LANKA**

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Sinharaja is a tropical primary rain forest located between 6° 21' – 6° 26' North and 80° 30' – 80° 34' East. It spreads across 11187 hectares in the Galle, Matara and Rathnapura districts. The biodiversity of Sinharaja is unique among the ecosystems in Sri Lanka. Among the estimated 5879 elephant population Sinharaja has only two remnant elephants today. Nearly 20 elephants lived in Sinharaja in 1920. Thus, the elephants of Sinharaja become important for a special case study. If these elephants are not urgently conserved, an important wild life component in this primary forest becomes extinct creating a vacuum in the biodiversity. This study addresses this national issue.

The main objective of the study was to search for a solution to protect the remaining elephants in Sinharaja. Other objectives were to study the behavior of elephants, their importance to the ecosystem, threats to their lives and the impact of elephants on human lives and their activities. The Thanabela, Dolekande, Katulana, Pothupitiya north and south, Ilumbakande Gramaniladari divisions in the Kalawana Divisional Secretaries Division in northern slope of the Sinharaja rain forest was selected as the study area. The methods adopted for data collection in the study were a questionnaire survey among these villages, interviews and field observations. Sample house holders were randomly selected (70) from these villages having their houses closer to elephant entry places. Results were analyzed using simple statistics (percentages) and reported both qualitatively and quantitatively. The research was conducted from March to June 2013.

According to the study the wild life officers said elephants of Sinharaja had entered the peripheral villages 186 times in the last five years (2009 to May 2013). The villagers have seen only two elephants and these wild elephants had damaged two vehicles, three cultivated crops, and one house. They have killed nine cattle and two persons during the last five years. In July 2013, elephants had attacked the wild life officers too in Sinharaja. Elephants of Sinharaja have been harmed by many human activities. There are several actions to protect them such as translocation of them to the other eco systems (Yala, Sri pada, Uda Walawa), adding female elephants for population multiplication, building electric and bio fences around villages. Adoption of these methods can eliminate the damages to the elephants as well as to the community and protect them further.