

NEWS
For Immediate Release

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Nepal: A Leader in Addressing Tuberculosis (TB) in Elephants
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Recent news reports have suggested that Nepalese authorities have been "apathetic" in treatment and care of elephants diagnosed with TB. The reality is that Nepal has taken the lead amongst all elephant range countries by initiating a program to examine its elephants for TB. However, Nepal lacks the resources necessary for complete diagnosis and treatment of this disease in elephants. Nepal is not alone in this situation. Even in wealthy nations like the United States, the diagnosis and treatment of TB in elephants is undergoing intense scrutiny and change. New diagnostic methods have evolved and are only now being reviewed.

The initial investigation of TB in the elephants of Nepal was performed by a team of experts from Nepal and Elephant Care International, a U.S.-based charity organization devoted to elephant healthcare with support of Tufts Center for Conservation Medicine, Busch Gardens, and Disney's Animal Kingdom. A full report including recommendations for segregating "high risk" (for TB) elephants was delivered to Nepal authorities in December, 2006. It is the understanding of Elephant Care International that the government of Nepal has taken the appropriate action of segregating "high risk" elephants from the public and other elephants.

Elephant Care International is funding a fulltime Elephant Veterinary Fellow who will operate under the auspices of The Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS) of Nepal. This Nepali veterinarian will work with designated personnel from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to collect blood, culture, and other samples from elephants. The Fellow will play an integral role in the overall surveillance and health management and treatment program. The process of establishing this program was slowed by the tragic helicopter accident last year in Nepal that killed many prominent conservationists and government officials, including several Ministers and department heads.

Though Elephant Care International is obviously focused on elephants throughout Asia and Africa, TB is a devastating disease amongst humans. Nepal must rightly deal with the human situation first. In this context, we also point out that with regard to the threat to humans posed by TB, that threat is far greater from human contact than from casual elephant contact. While the World Health Organization has stated that "A person needs only to inhale a small number of these (TB germs) to be infected", the U.S. Center for Disease Control says: "*To become infected, a person usually has to spend a relatively long time in a closed environment where the air was contaminated by a person with untreated tuberculosis who was coughing and who had numerous M. tuberculosis organisms (or tubercle bacilli) in secretions from the lungs or voice box (larynx).*"

Additional information on the Elephant Care International Elephant TB Initiative can be found at <http://www.elephantcare.org/tbshort.htm>. Further background information on work in Nepal is at <http://www.elephantcare.org/tbnepal.htm>.

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