

EleVETS Sri Lanka

Project Report

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Summary

EleVETS is an innovative, new project planned and implemented in 2016-2017 by the EleVETS Team, which included Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund, Dr. Susan Mikota, and Dr. Ashoka Dangolla (their professional associations are noted above). Working pro bono, team members donated hundreds of hours to the planning and implementation (including all field activities) of this project over a period of one and a half years.

In August of 2017, our team of elephant experts worked hand-in-hand with 21 practicing Sri Lankan veterinarians over a six-day period to help bring about sustainable improvements in the health, care, and management of captive elephants in Sri Lanka.

July 25-31, 2017: Pre-workshop, in-country organizing

Dr. Susan Mikota and Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund arrived in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on July 25th with luggage filled with many veterinary supplies and equipment purchased in the months leading up to the EleVETS Project. They relocated to Kandy and, with assistance from local veterinarians, subsequently spent the next three days purchasing the remaining veterinary supplies in order to stock the following:

- Twenty-one (21) “First Aid Kits” for participating veterinarians;
- Three (3) “Field Training Kits” for the EleVETS Team; and
- Six (6) “EleFEET Kits” (foot care) for distribution/donation to key veterinarians throughout Sri Lanka.



Hollis packs EleVETS First Aid Kits ~ Kits loaded for delivery to participating vets.



Dr. Susan Mikota (DVM), Dr. Tharaka Deepal and Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund (elephant is being washed by mahout).



Dr. Ashoka Dangolla (DVM) checks in on his patient--a baby elephant with broken leg.



In addition, Hollis and Susan travelled to the Elephant Transit Home (ETH) in Udawalawe. ETH rescues and rears orphaned baby elephants, and has successfully released more than 100 back to the wild. Susan consulted with Dr. Vijitha Perera, ETH's lead veterinarian, on the specialized care and rearing of baby elephants.

August 1-3, 2017: Veterinary Training Workshop

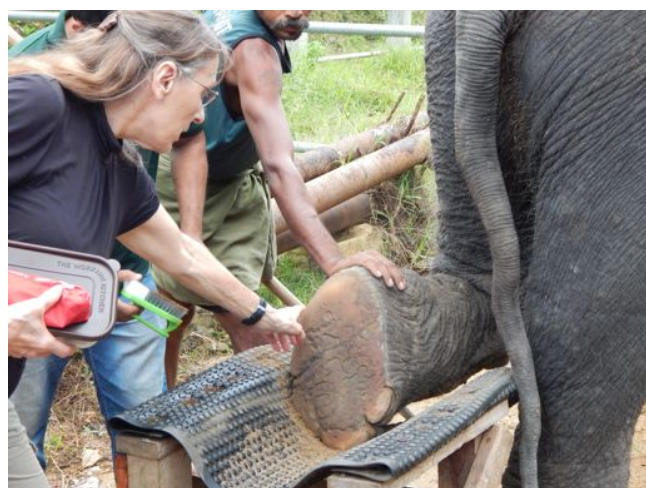
Pooling the expertise, skills, and resources of elephant care experts, our EleVETS Team brought 21 practicing local veterinarians from throughout Sri Lanka together for a 2-day intensive, hands-on, veterinary training workshop on captive elephant care.

Participating veterinarians were appointed by the country's nine Provincial Directors of Animal Production and Health, the Director of National Zoological Gardens, and the Director General of the Department of Wildlife Conservation. This ensured all geographic regions and key departments benefited from the EleVETS training to better serve the needs of captive and wild elephants. The lecture portions of this workshop were held at Hotel Elephant Park in Pinnawala where participants stayed in shared rooms and received meals and training free of charge. Field instruction took place at the nearby Millennium Elephant Foundation, which cares for seven captive elephants.



Sri Lanka's national news station covered all days of the EleVETS Project with its film crew reporting four times daily from the classroom and the field, sharing EleVETS updates, interviews, and activities. Each participating veterinarian received a free, fully-stocked "First Aid Kit" and an EleVETS t-shirt. Three Land Rover vehicles were donated for use by our EleVETS Team, which facilitated the transport of team members and equipment. Six "EleFEET Kits" were donated to veterinarians who treat elephants' feet in Sri Lanka.





Photos: Left to right from the top: Dr. Mikota demonstrates proper foot care. Participating Sri Lankan veterinarians learn how to analyze urine and blood and utilize the microhematocrit centrifuge. Dr. Dangolla demonstrates how to distinguish a vein from an artery and draw blood. Our EleVETS Team and participants are on the way to the field lab. Photo credits: Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund

August 4-6, 2017: Training and Veterinary Care During the Kandy Perahera

Dr. Mikota and Dr. Dangolla taught and demonstrated essential veterinary care techniques and protocols to our 20 participating veterinarians (and one scholarship recipient from the University of Peradeniya) at the Kataragama, Vishnu, Natha, and Pattini Temples, and the Temple of the Tooth Relic during the days and evenings of August 4, 5 and 6 of the Kandy Escala Perahera. The Perahera is Sri Lanka's major annual, week-long event, which this year included the use of 80 captive elephants. Our EleVETS Team and participating veterinary trainees provided the following to an estimated 50 temple elephants, as needed:

- De-worming and antibiotic medication
- Body condition evaluation
- Consultations with mahouts on skin infections, foot care, dehydration, weight loss, digestive disorders, and stereotypical behaviour
- Herpes virus testing

Hollis distributed 88 t-shirts and sarongs to mahouts and their assistants as incentive gifts for working with our EleVETS Team.

During this portion of the EleVETS Project, our 21 veterinary participants stayed free of charge at dormitory lodging in Peradeniya (an inkind contribution to the project). EleVETS also included a meeting with staff, faculty, department heads, and graduates of the University's Department of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science to explore the future care and treatment of captive elephants and celebrate the success of the EleVETS Project.



Photos left to right from the top: Dr. Mikota consulting with a mahout on a skin condition. A Perahera elephant suffers from chronic foot problems due to poor substrate and living conditions. Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund distributing EleVETS t-shirts and sarongs to mahouts at the temples as a 'thank you' gift for working with us. Photo credits: Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund and Susan Mikota.



Photos left to right from the top: One of 80 captive elephants used for the 2017 Kandy Escala Perahera. Dr. Dangolla shares insight into stereotypical behavior of captive elephants (bobbing, swaying, etc.). An EleVETS participant measures proper dosage of antibiotic medicine for a sick Perahera elephant. Temple elephant. EleVETS participants measure the girth of an elephant to estimate its weight for proper dosing of deworming medicine. Dr. Mikota consults with mahout late at night on the condition and prognosis of a sick elephant, and administers antibiotic treatment. Photo credits: Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund and Susan Mikota.

EleVETS field and workshop training included:

- Wellness examinations and body condition assessments
- Preventative health care (parasites, de-worming, nutrition, vaccination, etc.)
- Major infectious diseases (TB and Herpes virus)
- Major non-infectious disorders, colic, eye problems
- Wound, infection and abscess treatment
- Foot evaluation, care, treatment and disease prevention
- Joint health assessment and disease prevention
- Basic elephant pharmacy, important drugs and dosages, pain medications
- Stereotypical behaviour and special welfare concerns for captive elephants
- Anaesthesia and safe restraint/working around elephants
- Dietary and nutritional management including hydration
- Post-mortem examination

Many kind thanks to Sri Lanka's veterinarians who took time away from their families and their work to be part of our EleVETS Project. Together, we have shared a very special experience!

- Dr. K.H.S.M. Wijesinghe
- Dr. D.G.S.N Bandara
- Dr. H.P. Roshan Nimal Shantha
- Dr. A.M.U.T.B. Senanayake
- Dr. G.S.S. Gunawardana
- Dr. K.A.T.K. Vedasinghe
- Dr. R.L. Ranasinghe
- Dr. E.D. Malaka Lasantha
- Dr. S.A.P. Subasinghe
- Dr. T. Dishanthan
- Dr. S. Kirubanantha Kumaran
- Dr. N.W.M.R.B. Bothata
- Dr. B. Lisban Dalima
- Dr. P.P.S.K. Premathilake
- Dr. J.J.W.K. Gamage
- Dr. W.M.C. Wickramasinghe
- Miss T.P.J. Athapattu
- Dr. Mrs. Kalani Samarakoon
- Dr. S.S. P. Malalasekara
- Dr. W.W.C Kularathna
- Dr. K.A.P.A. Bandara



And a special thank you to Dr. Susan Mikota and Dr. Ashoka Dangolla for all of their hard work over many months to create a very special targeted training program to support elephant care in Sri Lanka. Thanks too to Dr. Eranda Rajapaksha, Dr. Vijitha Perera, and Dr. Kodikara for their elephant healthcare and welfare expertise.

Thank you!

Hollis Burbank-Hammarlund

EleVETS Project Manager