



News

Darwin Initiative project receives top award

A Darwin Initiative project has been awarded the top prize at the 2007 BIAZA (British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria) Awards. The Assam Haathi Project was recognised for its human animal conflict resolution project which aims to protect the large elephant population remaining in the forests of the Himalayan foothills while assisting the local peoples.

The awards highlighted the Zoo's efforts in maintaining high levels of animal welfare, field conservation and educating the public. The award-winning programme demonstrates how modern zoos can be a powerful force for conservation, tackling issues such as species extinction in the wild.

Joan Ruddock, Minister for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Waste said:

"This award by BIAZA is really good recognition of the hard work of those involved in the Assam Haathi Project.

"Darwin projects have provided valuable research and support in countries rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources for the last fifteen years, and the Assam Haathi Project is just one of the many important projects we have supported to conserve the world's wildlife."

The Zoo was one of 14 winners chosen from 62 entries. Held annually for over a decade, the BIAZA awards recognise outstanding contributions and achievements in the fields of wildlife conservation, advances in animal welfare and husbandry, sustained breeding programmes, marketing, PR, education, research, enclosure design and individual outstanding achievement.

Further information

- [The Darwin Initiative](#)
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BIAZA Awards

Chester Zoo received four of the top awards from the zoo world following a prestigious awards ceremony.

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Chester's awards included best conservation project award for the Assam Haathi Project,; best new zoo enclosure for Elephants of the Asian Forest; significant advances in zoo and wildlife medicine for a chimpanzee project and best education project: public and general visitor for The Secret World of the Okapi.

Chester also received four commendations including significant advances in husbandry and welfare for elephants best research project for mandrills and again for Komodo Dragons and best education project for Frost Fair.

Dr Miranda Stevenson, Director of BIAZA said: "The award-winning programmes under the spotlight today demonstrate the huge investment of energy and resources made by our leading zoos to support habitat and species conservation. Conservation within zoos and aquariums is a vital part of the work to protect threatened species and to help change public behaviour and ensure the future of Planet Earth. These awards recognise and celebrate the vital contributions that our members are making to conservation and education each year. Equally, they are standard bearers for excellence in animal husbandry and welfare."

2007 Chester Zoo. Registered Charity No. 306077.

World's Hottest Chili Used as Elephant Repellent

Wasbir Hussain in Gauhati, India
Associated Press

November 20, 2007

Wildlife experts in northeastern [India](#) are experimenting with a new weapon to prevent marauding [elephants](#) from destroying homes and crops—superhot chilies.

(See photos: ["Ghost Chili" Scares Off Elephants](#))

Conservationists working on the experimental project in Assam state said they have put up jute fences made of strong vegetable fiber and smeared them with automobile grease and bhut jolokia chilies. These peppers, also known as ghost chilies, have been certified as the world's hottest by the Guinness Book of World Records.

Wildlife experts also were using smoke bombs made from the chili to keep away elephants.

(Related story: [Elephant Crop Raids Foiled by Chili Peppers, Africa Project Finds](#) [September 18, 2006])

"We fill straw nests with pungent dry chili and attach them to sticks before burning it. The fireball emits a strong pungent smell that succeeds in driving away elephants," Nandita Hazarika of the Assam Haathi (Elephant) Project told the Associated Press on Monday.

Hazarika said the elephants would not eat the chilies because the smell would be enough to repel them. He emphasized the measures would not harm the animals.

Northeast India accounts for the world's largest concentration of wild Asiatic elephants; 5,000 are estimated to live in Assam alone.

Conservationists say wild elephants increasingly attack human settlements encroaching on their natural habitat.

Satellite imagery by India's National Remote Sensing Agency shows that up to 691,880 acres (280,000 hectares) of Assam's forests were cleared between 1996 and 2000.

(Related story: [Himalaya Forests Vanishing, Species May Follow, Study Says](#) [May 30, 2006])

More than 600 people have been killed by wild elephants in Assam in the past 16 years, and villagers have reacted with an anger that has shocked conservationists.

In 2001, in the Sonitpur district, 112 miles (180 kilometers) north of the state capital of Gauhati, villagers poisoned to death 19 wild elephants that had feasted on crops and trampled houses.

"We have been forced to look for ingenious means to keep wild elephants from straying out of their habitats," M.C. Malakar, the state's chief wildlife warden, told the AP.

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[Young World](#)

NEWSCAN

Red hot chilli pepper

COMPILED BY R. KRITHIKA

Ever thought of using a red hot chilli as a conservation measure? Wildlife experts in Assam are trying to see if the *bhut jolokia* chillies, certified as the hottest in the world by the Guinness Book of World Records, will keep the rampaging elephant herds from destroying crops and villages on their path. Fences made of strong jute fibre and smeared with grease and the chilli powder, smoke bombs made from chilli powder and straw nests filled with dry chilis and then burnt are some of the methods. Nandita Hazarika, of Assam Haathi Project, told AP that the strong smell drove away the animals. India's troubled Northeast has the world's largest count of wild Asiatic elephants; Assam alone has about 5000. And the man-animal conflict has been increasing as the humans encroach into the animal's habitat. Villagers tend to use poison and electricity to save their farms and homes, leading conservationists to look for other means to save the elephants.

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