

**Samrakshan Trust – Meghalaya**  
**Training For Informants – Participatory Elephant Monitoring Programme**



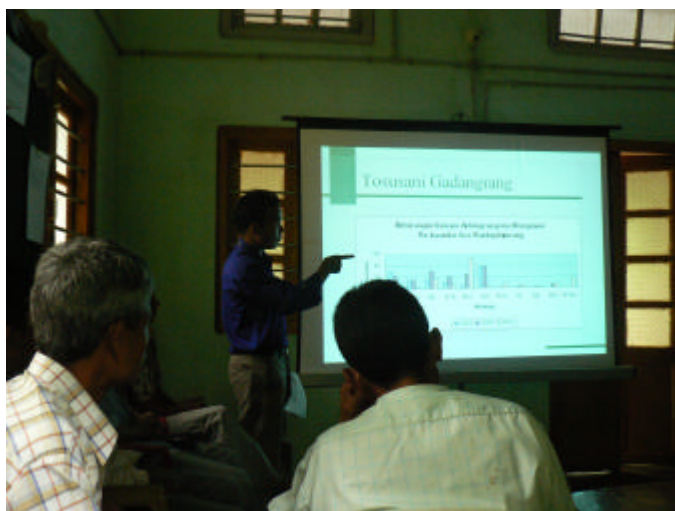
Event Date	27 <sup>th</sup> August 2007.
Location	Samrakshan Trust – Baghmara Campus.
Number of informants	14
Samrakshan Team	Six
Time	10.00 am to 01.00 pm (3 hours).
Activities.	Presentation of analysed data from the Elephant Monitoring Programme
	Slide show on species in the landscape and their inter-dependence
	Presentation of the ongoing exercise in identifying Biologically Significant Areas in the landscape

**Background**

Garo Hills has one of the seven populations of the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) that is greater than 1,000 and one that is among the least studied and understood. Since June 2005, Samrakshan Trust has initiated an exercise to collect information on elephant movement and presence in select *Akings*<sup>1</sup> of South Garo Hills. A reliable local person (informant) capable of recording elephant presence and movement has been identified in each of these *Akings*. Personnel from the wildlife monitoring team visit and meet the informants twice a month to collect the data recorded by them. The informants in most cases also guide/accompany the team members to the exact location visited by the animals and the latter record the GPS location of each site. The data is collated and analysed at the field office. Samrakshan Trust regularly brings together all the informants providing them with the opportunity to exchange information, discuss elephant movement and presence in their areas, clarify their doubts and air their grievances if any. As of August 2007, there are 17 informants spread across 11 *Akings*.

**Proceedings of the meeting held on August 27, 2007**

The meet began with a brief welcome address by John Fernando Shira, a member of the Wildlife Monitoring team, who also shared with the participants the schedule for the day.



Bensen Sangma, another member of the Wildlife Monitoring team then made a presentation of the information on elephant presence, movement and activities across the select *Akings* over the past two years. The idea behind making a detailed presentation of the analysed data was to convey to the informants the manner in which the data that each of them recorded had been collated and analysed to build a picture of elephant behaviour over the past two years in the selected *Akings*. Information on total number of elephant visits year-wise, month-wise, *Aking*-wise, activity wise (making a comparison between records of animals passing through and records of incidents of damage) were graphically represented. The presentation was well received

and most informants were in agreement when one of them suggested that the same presentation be made in their *Akings* especially to the *Nokmas* (headmen).

<sup>1</sup> An *Aking* is a tract of land usually comprising several villages and is predominantly inhabited and owned by members of the same clan. An *Aking* can vary in size from 3-4 sq. km. to even 20-30 sq. km.



Ericstone Momin from the Environment Awareness team made a presentation on the biodiversity of Garo Hills. Using images taken by members of Samrakshan Trust, the presentation traversed from images of landscapes such as the culturally significant Chitmang Peak and Balpakram National Park to the various trees, plants, insects, birds and animals found in the region seeking to explain the interlink between the various landscape elements and how all of these together make the Garo Hills a unique place and give the Garo people their cultural identity.

Bappi Marak from the Wildlife Monitoring team went on to speak of the exercise in identifying Biologically Significant Areas in Rongara Community Development Block that has been underway for the past four months. The process of identifying such biodiversity rich areas was shared and it was explained to the participants, several of who have provided some assistance in the exercise that the objective is to locate pockets of primary/secondary growth forests within the landscape that harbour biodiversity, corridors (disturbed or otherwise) that are used by various faunal species, river and streambeds that provide suitable habitat for aquatic fauna and other species.

One of the informants suggested that for the exercise to be more effective an awareness programme on the same could be organised for the *Nokmas*, members of the Self Help Groups and the community at large. It was communicated that the *Nokmas* are consulted with before initiating the exercise in a particular *Aking* and once the areas are identified, these would be presented before the community members and particularly the *Nokmas* urging them to protect these areas and ensure that there is no land use change that is detrimental to the biodiversity that these harbour.

Once the presentations were complete the participants were asked if there were any issues that they wanted to share. Some of the observations/suggestions made by informants were on the need to step up the environment awareness programmes at the community level and equally importantly with the district level authorities so that the latter respond with greater alacrity to their (the community's) compensation (for damages caused by wildlife to crop and property) needs. One of the informants also requested that their stipends be raised.



Mohanto Momin from the Environment Awareness team closed the programme by thanking the informants who had made the effort to attend the meet and for their enthusiastic participation in the proceedings. Their contribution to building the information database of elephant presence was acknowledged. They were informed that there were larger responsibilities that they needed to take up which included their becoming spokespersons for conservation in their communities. It was also acknowledged that for that to happen they needed greater inputs from Samrakshan Trust more information, training and exposure on how communities

in other parts of the country are protecting their natural surroundings and striving to co-exist with large animals such as elephants. They were informed that preliminary discussions had been initiated with organisations in neighbouring Assam to visit their field sites and if all went well a visit was planned for in the first week of October and on that note the meeting came to an end.

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	Contact: Samrakshan Trust, Meghalaya Field Office, Bolsalgre, Baghmara, South Garo Hills - 794102
• Informants	Telephone Numbers: 03639-222187
• People in the Aking	Website: <a href="http://www.samrakshan.org">www.samrakshan.org</a>
• United States Fish and Wildlife Service	