

461 ELEPHANTS ELECTROCUTED IN COUNTRY IN 8 YEARS SINCE 2009

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Between August to October 2018, more than a dozen elephants were electrocuted in the eastern and northeastern part of India, including seven elephants in Odisha's Dhenkanal district.

While human-elephant conflict remains a major concern for policy makers and conservationists, electrocution of elephants is turning out to be a critical area in the management of India's elephant population.

50 deaths a year

An analysis of data pertaining to elephant deaths in India due to electrocution between 2009 and November 2017 points out that, every year, about 50 elephants have died on average due to electrocution.

A total of 461 elephant deaths due to electrocution occurred in the eight years between 2009 and November 2017.

A closer look at the data reveals that States in the eastern and northeastern region of the country have accounted for most of these deaths — in Odisha, 90 elephants died of electrocution; 70 elephants died of electrocution in Assam; 48 elephants in West Bengal; and 23 elephants in Chhattisgarh.

Karnataka, which has the highest population of elephants, has recorded the highest casualties by electrocution, numbering 106. While 17 elephants died in Kerala, in Tamil Nadu, the number of deaths in the same period was 50.

The data has been sourced from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC).

Right of passage

Representatives of the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), who along with the MOEFCC's Project Elephant had come out with a publication on the right of passage in 101 elephant corridors of the country in 2017, stressed on the need for greater surveillance and protection of elephant corridors.

"There needs to be greater coordination between the Forest Department and different agencies, including the Power Department, as well as continuous monitoring of electrical wires passing through areas of elephant movement," Upasana Ganguly, Assistant Manager, Wild Lands Division, WTI, said.

Ms. Ganguly said that the publication had touched on the issue of how critical elephant corridors are for sustaining the jumbo population in the country.

Explaining why the east-central and northeastern parts of the country are witnessing greater number of incidents of human-elephant conflict, well-known elephant expert and Professor, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, Raman Sukumar, said elephants are expanding

base all across the country and moving out of forests towards agricultural areas.

“In the east-central Indian landscape, elephants are emerging in the areas where they were never seen in decades or in centuries before. For instance, there were no elephants in Chhattisgarh for centuries, and now we are witnessing human-elephant conflict there,” Dr. Sukumar said.

Different landscapes

Along with taking measures to stop illegal electrical fencing, and having proper guidelines for maintaining the height of high tension electrical wires, Dr. Sukumar said, “We need to come up with a proper zone-wise management plan for different elephant landscapes — where to allow elephants and where to restrict their movement,” he said.

According to the all-India synchronised census of elephants in 2017, their population was 27,312. The States with the highest elephant population are Karnataka (6,049), followed by Assam (5,719) and Kerala (3,054).

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