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Who listens to the call of the wild

By Sagarica Rajakarunanayaka

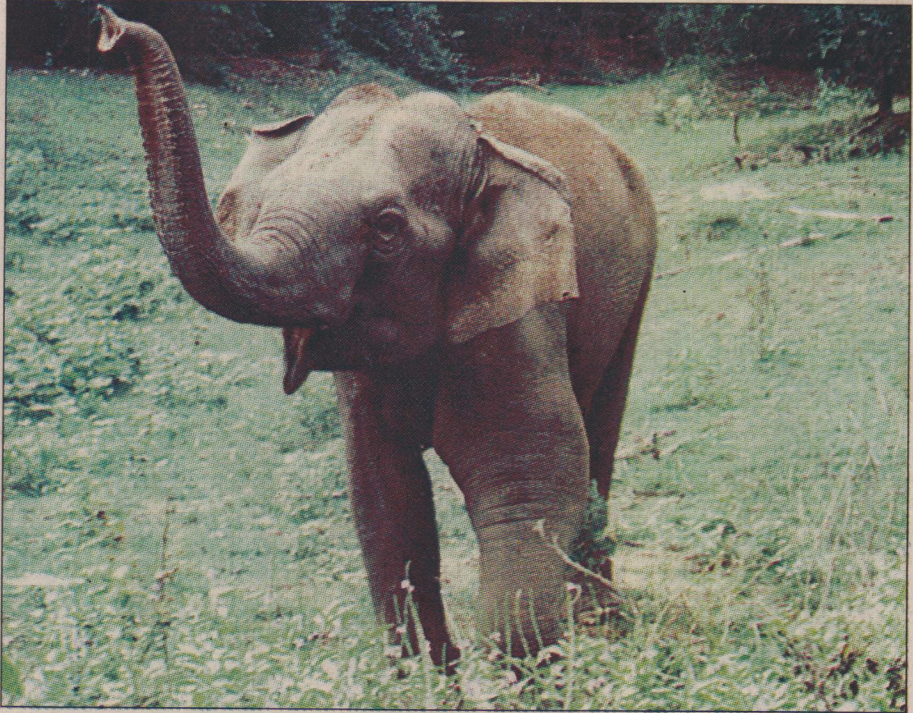
The quality of wildlife management by the Department of Wildlife Conservation has been seen to be fast deteriorating particularly in the last two decades. Some wildlife watchers might believe that this is largely due to the weak stewardship hoisted on the department, by the appointment of persons outside the department to the post of Director, DWLC.

The present minister for the subject of Wildlife Conservation has failed to appoint a competent person from within the department as director DWLC. He has already, appointed, twice in succession officers from the SLAS pool.

Today the management of wildlife conservation could be said to have come to a virtual standstill, with the National Parks and protected areas, particularly the more remote ones, never or hardly visited, the requirements of the park wardens and other wildlife officers not heeded, and even their urgent calls for veterinary assistance for injured elephants and other fauna, ignored.

Just last week we learnt of an incident where the Acting Director despite repeated appeals by the park warden, had failed to send a veterinary surgeon to an injured elephant in a National Park.

In fact we are grateful to a young journalist in Gal Oya whose article (published in the "Lankadipa" of 21.10.97) gave the tragic story of an elephant shot and wounded at a place by the Ekgal Oya tank, within the Gal Oya National Park. According to the writer the animal had been shot in the front leg causing it severe injury and swelling. Being unable to put his injured foot on the ground, it could move neither forwards nor backwards and from its agonized cries and action such as banging its head



Wounded elephant at Gal Oya with the swollen leg, before it was treated by Dr. Atapattu

on a nearby rock, it was evident that the elephant was in unbearable pain.

The journalist relates that on September 22, the park warden, Vasantha Pushpananda had informed the acting Director DWLC of the injured animal and urgently requested the services of a veterinary surgeon.

Although the acting Direc-

tor had agreed, after one week no veterinary surgeon had been sent. Meanwhile the suffering of the animal had worsened and villagers would come in sympathy and helplessly watch the beast, being unable to help relieve it. Meanwhile the journalist himself had contacted the Acting Director again and inquired as to what steps she was taking to send a veterinary surgeon. According to him, her reply was that she had difficulty in sending a veterinary surgeon as there was a short-

age of veterinary surgeons in the department.

She had also said that Dr. Nandana Attapattu was the only veterinary surgeon available in Colombo at the time and that it was not possible to send him out to attend to every problem concerning elephants. However she had assured him of taking some action without further delay.

the Gal Oya National Park.

The Acting Director's statement she was unable to send a veterinary surgeon to the injured animal at Gal Oya appears to be a contradiction because on her own admission, Dr Atapattu was available in Colombo at the time.

Moreover, it is difficult to accept her position that Dr. Atapattu cannot be sent for every problem regarding elephants as it is well-known he is the person sent out most often to handle situations involving elephants, be it injuries or translocatons.

We have raised the above issues with the Secretary to the ministry overseeing wildlife conservation. We are certain other wildlife enthusiasts will join us in appealing to the Minister and the President to seriously consider the interest of Sri Lanka's wildlife, already severely threatened, in appointing a person to the post of Director DWLC.

The writer is the President of Sathva Mithra

Point of view

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Several issues would arise in the mind of anyone reading the story of the injured elephant of