

Solar-powered solutions for human-elephant conflict – TUI Care Foundation supports wildlife protection in central Sri Lanka

- *TUI Wildlife Sri Lanka inaugurates community-managed, solar-powered fence to mutually protect elephants and humans*
- *Project also creates a sustainable tourism experience to increase income opportunities for the village*
- *Project is part of TUI Wildlife Programme which aims to protect endangered wildlife and habitats in tourism destinations*

Berlin, 31st July 2023. *Over 70% of the elephant population in Sri Lanka lives outside protected areas and in 44% of the country, elephants and humans share the land. However, they do not always live harmoniously side by side and this poses a major conservation and socio-economic issue that the TUI Wildlife Sri Lanka project addresses.*

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Elephants that share habitat with people can cause damage to crops and the local infrastructure. Separating people and elephants at a landscape scale by confining elephants to protected areas has been pursued for decades but without success. In Sri Lanka the scale of the challenge and practical issues make it difficult to address the conflict between elephants and people using nature-based solutions, such as bio fences, chillies and bees or alternative crops. Relocation of elephants is also an impractical solution, as the intelligent animals have proven that they can easily navigate their way back to their original living spaces. Barriers such as ditches, barbed wire fences and walls have also been tried, but not worked.

The most practical barrier has proven to be electric fencing - installed in a way that does not disrupt the elephant's movement patterns and lets them continue to use the natural areas in shared habitat so that people and elephants can continue to co-exist. The TUI Care Foundation therefore initiated TUI Wildlife Sri Lanka in partnership with the Centre for Conservation and Research (CCR) and Cinnamon Nature Trails, to implement two types of solar-powered fences in the village of Bendiwewa in order to protect both humans and elephants whilst also respecting the ecological boundary between them.

TUI Care Foundation Board of Trustees member Dagmar Wöhrl explains: "Sri Lanka boasts an immense natural beauty and impressive Flora and Fauna that I have learned to love in the many years of staying in the country. I am very sensitised to the plight of elephants in Sri Lanka - they are frequently injured and sometimes even killed when they come into conflict with humans. The TUI Wildlife Sri Lanka programme provides a sustainable solution that protects both the people as well as the elephants that inhabit the vast areas around human settlements. "

The first permanent village fences have already been installed around the boundary of settlements to protect dwellings and home-gardens. Another solution offered by the

programme is seasonal paddy-field fences, built by farmers to protect crops during cultivation. These fences are placed on the boundary of the fields, removed at harvest and stored until the next growing season, allowing elephants to roam freely when the fields are not cultivated. For the protection offered by the fences to be long-lasting, the villagers are learning how to regularly maintain it. The programme is also collecting and aggregating data about community-based solar fences and their impact on elephants and the community through a yearly report, with the hope of making it a national standard for other areas afflicted by this issue.

Under TUI Wildlife Sri Lanka, a sustainable tourism experience for domestic and international tourists is also being developed in order to support the livelihoods of the local population.

The project is part of TUI Care Foundation's TUI Wildlife Programme which aims to protect endangered wildlife and habitats in tourism destinations.

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About the TUI Care Foundation

Building on the potential of tourism as a force for good, the TUI Care Foundation supports and initiates projects, which create new opportunities and contribute to thriving communities in tourism destinations all over the world. Connecting holidaymakers to good causes, it supports education and training opportunities for young people; drives the protection of natural habitats and the marine environment; and helps local communities to thrive sustainably and benefit from tourism. The TUI Care Foundation builds on strong partnerships with local and international organisations to create meaningful and long-lasting impact. The independent charitable organisation was founded by TUI, one of the world's leading tourism businesses, and is based in the Netherlands.

About the Centre for Conservation and Research (CCR)

The Centre for Conservation and Research was set up to address environmental conservation in Sri Lanka. It conducts, supports and encourages research into all aspects of the environment, including exploring the relationship between ecosystem health, human health, and wildlife health. The Centre for Conservation and Research has worked on community-based fencing since 2008 and has implemented around 50 fences, some of which have been successfully functioning for over a decade.

About Cinnamon Nature Trails

Cinnamon Nature Trails is one of Sri Lanka's leading and most experienced eco-excursion providers and has worked with organisations such as BBC Natural History productions, Nat Geo Wild, ZDF Germany on wildlife documentaries. It is the Wildlife and Adventure Tourism Division of Cinnamon Hotel Management.

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