



ELEPHANTS ON THE EDGE



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Environmentally, we are facing dark times. We have used up precious natural resources by burning down the Amazon, contributed to rising sea levels and warming up the oceans. Everyday, we are unthinkingly and callously polluting air, water and land that Mother Nature has provided for us.

And, we in our arrogance actually believe that we own all Nature's bounty and abundance forever ! The availability of these resources has today shrunk to a frightening extent, and when shortly clean water, air and wilderness spaces are not available anymore, then our own destruction is very close.

Anger, frustration and inability to cope in a changed environment will lead humans to extreme violence as nature is being irretrievably destroyed and numerous species are going extinct, even as I write this.....It is

dark times for all animals, but for one of the world's most iconic keystone species – the elephants – it is possibly the very worst and tragic times.

As they edge towards annihilation, animals like elephants, which have complex cognitive abilities, should be entitled to basic legal rights, to protect them from Man.

As slavery permitted legally to abuse and misuse a human being, so obsolete and archaic laws enshired decades and even centuries ago, is permitting nature's most intelligent creation – the elephants - to be considered as objects and therefore property with no rights. The time has come to declare elephants as non-human persons in their own right.

Just being a legal entity acknowledged with personhood will prevent the world's most precious and understanding mammal from being misused, abused, trafficked, captured, and violated in all respects including taking away their lands and corridors for their very survival.

Their living space is drastically shrinking due to overpopulation and development, uncontrolled settlements of humans, degradation of the forest, corridor losses and slicing their habitats with roads, railways, walls and irrigation canals.

For me, it is always a sacred act to enter a forest.



Brigitte Uttar Kornetzky

Shrubs, bushes, trees, grass, with all the fauna and flora around challenge and refresh my senses in different ways. There is no clock that dictates time, for nature is time itself, and every moment is fraught with the unexpected, whether we witness it or not. To look into animals' eyes, to listen to aerial, spatial and discreet sounds of animal and plants communicating in a jungle, forest or in a wilderness space changes human perceptions and mindsets forever. One learns to respect the wild within the framework of its own rules of existence.

It teaches Man the humility to respect and preserve Nature and not to Rule or Destroy it mindlessly.

When I look into a captive elephant's eyes I feel the depth of the forest sinking under my feet, and I am deeply saddened about the loss this animal had to endure to become a captive.

A tiger in a cage that used to roam 40 sqkm can never be complete in the biggest cage that Man can provide! The dignity he had in the wild is lost forever! What have we done? We have subjected a beautiful wild animal to pain and torture, stolen its dignity by pushing them into submission, and displayed a power

over them which we could never have had, if they were free! Because we can never, ever, compete with the natural power of a wild elephant or tiger – so we have emasculated them to become entertainment for us!

And now we are taking their space away by populating the forest areas. Elephants and humans, tigers, leopards and rhinos live in uneasy proximity, competing for the same landscape, as cities and townships expand, railways and roads cut across wilderness, and forests shrink and fragment. People graze their livestock in forests, and the cultivation of monocultures like tea plantations, eucalyptus and timber have furthermore degraded the forests. Electrocuted elephants are on the list as well. Around 450,000 families in north-eastern India annually cultivate 10,000 sq km of forestland with a total area affected by jhumming amounting to approximately 44,000 sqkm, according to a study on elephant corridors.

In 2017, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) identified 101 viable corridors from among 166, where safe passage could be ensured. However, the corridors



TIGERLAND TRIVIA

An elephant's trunk has 40,000 muscles and upto 1,50,000 muscle-bundles.

The entire human body has just 640 muscles !

An elephant can lift 300 kilograms of weight using only its trunk !

are under tremendous pressure. Many of the corridors are just one kilometre or less in width, and they are not safe from encroachments either. Almost all the corridors show the same conditions due to habitat expansion, noise and CO-2 pollution affecting wildlife crossing. This must be addressed before its too late.

Elephants should not be made to stay in those corridors but be able to move gently and undisturbed from one habitat to the other, the habitat that we have divided into pieces.

While shooting for the new film on Human Elephant Conflict- Human Elephant Coexistence, a friend in Assam showed me the breeding ground of elephants locked out of their migrational route.

The barbed-wired boundary of the Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) in Assam blocks their movement.

Who allowed such illegal and criminal activity of an oil company?

Why do railroad functioneers not implement drastic speed limits of trains passing through elephant corridors nationwide when recently seven elephants were killed by such rails in one shot and on monthly basis average two elephants are knocked down by overspeeding trains?

One elephant survived the collision with a forty to fifty km/hour speeding train and then two days later succumbed to its inner injuries. Why?

Why were three captive elephants forcefully kidnapped from a rehabilitation centre that they

called their home and paradise since three and a half peaceful years?

Why is almost one captive elephant dying in the South of India per week, kept in institutions or by private owners?

Although the Government of India has issued standard welfare issues on the upkeep of captive elephants, the conditions of facilities are miserable and lack basic understanding of the animals needs, leading them to suffer their lives in isolation and stress.

Why are elephants ripped off their families and tortured in the name of tourism, entertainment, religion ?

Why have so many wild elephants been found with plastic in their gut and dung, attracted by household vegetable waste that comes with other household plastic?

Why do we litter our industrial waste and personal garbage everywhere we go ?

Have we a functional educational system?

Why do elephants have to endure such disgraceful procedures by us, humans? With no rights of defence?

The list of violations to our Planet Earth is endless!

I am appealing to the last humans, to change this misery and injustice to our planet and its creations, before it is too late.

Brigitte is a Swiss filmmaker. She has been working for elephants and making films on this gentle giant for last several years. She has penned this article on special request of TIFF.

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Blackbuck is the fastest mammal of India.

Before the extinction of the Indian Cheetah, the blackbuck occupied the second spot in

speed. The Cheetah was used by the royalty for the shikar of this beautiful antelope !

