



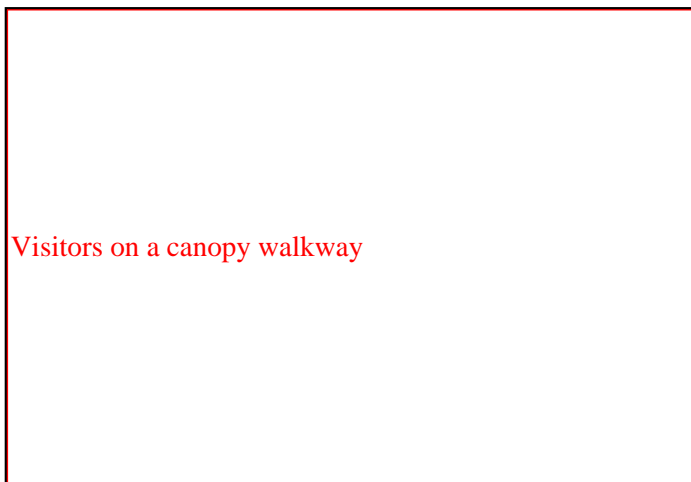
Elephant Walk Thru

A Project that integrates Wildlife Conservation, Human Development and Economic Development for the economically and biologically sustainable management of biodiversity.

The conventional wisdom of the day dictates though that for any community-based project - whether it is for wildlife conservation or human development is to succeed - it needs to have its own economic base. Ecotourism can be one of the important solutions to fulfill this need. This is what we are attempting with Elephant Walk Thru (EWT). It is a project integrating wildlife conservation, human development and economic development for the economically and biologically sustainable management of natural resources.



With EWT we hope to take ecotourism to another level. Ecotourism lodges, even though they are built according to stringent rules, regulations and ethics can still be ecologically damaging and cause disruptions of species habitats. Especially by creating edge effects that are not too obvious but can still be detrimental to wildlife. With EWT we hope to integrate architecture, construction engineering, forest conservation & management, wildlife conservation & management, human & economic development, and community participation into one broad-based program. To minimize the edge effects and other adverse effects that may occur by establishing ecolodges on the forest floor, EWT hopes to locate all lodges and support facilities at the canopy level with inter-connected canopy walkways. The forest floor will be left intact. Probably EWT will be the world's first fully elevated canopy level ecotourism resort.



Visitors on a canopy walkway

Visitors on a canopy walkway in Malaysia

Village households that wish to "host" guests will have some basic infrastructure, such as plumbing, kitchen and sleeping facilities and household hygiene developed. Guests who would like to experience village life - "what is it to be a wild honey gatherer?" "A fisherman?" "A herbalist?" "A traditional farmer?" "A traditional medicine man?" can spend a day and a night in one of these village homes. These Village Satellite Hospitality centers will adhere to stringent quality control requirements administered and monitored by EWT.

The goals of EWT are two fold.

- 1) To develop an economic base for villages which border natural forests so that the villagers will realize the potential of these forests to bring them an income without exploiting them for consumptive use.
- 2) A project that will generate an income to help fund further projects to help conserve Sri Lanka's dwindling biodiversity in other threatened areas.

Project Concept by **Ravi Corea**

Concept Development and Operations Development: **Jayantha Jayewardene and Chandeep Corea**

Architectural Design Team Leader: **Sanjeeva R Guneratne**

For more information e-mail us at ewt@slwcs.org

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volunteer work on migratory bird survey in sri lanka with avifauna turtels and islands by boat on the sandy beach

VISION: To help protect and conserve the diminishing biodiversity of Sri Lanka and to make the local and international community aware of its endangered status.

MISSION: To enable communities to balance ecosystem protection and economic development by pioneering a model for sustainable conservation.

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ELEPHANT WALK THRU

We Give You an Up-Close and Personal Experience with Nature

A nature tourism project integrating wildlife conservation, economic development and human development to ensure the continuity of community-based wildlife conservation efforts.

(A project of the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society – www.slwcs.org)

BACKGROUND:

For the past five years the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society has been working in Sri Lanka resolving human-elephant conflict with community participation for the long-term conservation of the Sri Lankan elephant (*Elephas maximus maximus*). Why the SLWCS is concentrating its efforts to contribute to the conservation and protection of the endangered Sri Lankan elephant is because the elephant is a Key Stone species and its habitats are in rapid decline especially outside of the protected areas. Elephants range over long distances and across a variety of habitats that are home to numerous other plant and animal species. As they need very large areas to survive, effective conservation and management of elephants can deliver widespread benefits to people, the environment, and to other endangered, threatened and vulnerable species.

Our experience from working with rural communities has convinced us of the following. If conservation projects involving local communities are to survive over the long term they need an economic base. Foreign aid and grants are important and crucial during the initial phase to lay the foundations and develop infrastructure...but if these projects need to depend on outside funding for their future survival then they are bound to fail. Hence it is very important to develop an economic base for their long-term survival. We have already invested over US\$120,000 on two community based elephant conservation projects to resolve human-elephant conflict in the village of Gamburu-Oya/Pussellayaya, and in the village of Weheragalagama which adjoins the proposed Elephant Walk Thru nature tourism project site [see *The Island*, Saturday, March 17, 2001, Sect. II –www.island.lk, and *The Sunday Times* (www.sundaytimes.lk), May 12, 2002]. Both villages are situated south of the Wasgomuwa National Park in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. Additionally we have provided over US\$6,000 for the Rural Schools Environmental Awareness Program conducted by the Bio-Diversity and Elephant Conservation Trust of Sri Lanka, and committed our support to a long-term field study of the endangered Sri Lankan leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*).

The conventional wisdom of the day dictates that for any community-based project – whether it is for wildlife conservation or human development – it should have its own economic base if it is to succeed. Also, it is fundamentally important for local people to get involved in wildlife conservation efforts. Additionally rural communities must see direct positive benefits to them from the wildlife conservation projects established in their communities, and must gain some level of social and economical upliftment from the funds that are both spent in the area and generated from the area. This is what we are attempting with Elephant Walk Thru, to integrate wildlife conservation, community development, capacity building and sustainable economic development into one broad-based program.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES, FORA AND SYMPOSIUMS

In May 2002 SLWCS was invited to present the project, Elephant Walk Thru at the World Eco-Tourism Summit in Quebec, Canada organized by the World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environmental Program.

In September 2002 SLWCS/EWT was in the delegation of the Sri Lanka Investment Forum visiting the United States of America with the Honorable Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe. EWT is also a member of AMCham.

In November 2002 SLWCS presented a paper on their work to conserve the Sri Lankan elephant and the EWT project at the International Elephant Symposium, organized by the International Elephant Foundation, USA and the Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park in Orlando, Florida.

In December 2002 SLWCS made a presentation, which included the EWT project to the International Wildlife Conservation Division of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Arlington, Virginia.

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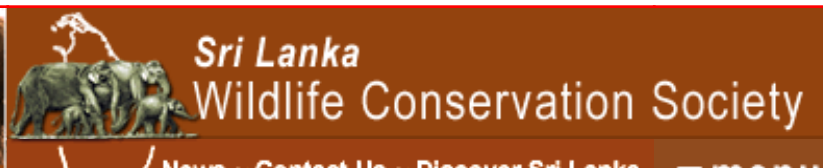
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PROJECT: Elephant Walk Thru

In an effort to ensure the long-term survival of the projects that we are establishing in Sri Lanka, we have applied to the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka to establish a community-based nature tourism project nearby to our project sites at Wasgomuwa. We have made a request to lease 15 acres from some undeveloped land adjoining the village of Weheragalagama. The land is situated between the village of Weheragalagama and a Forest Reserve administered by the Forest Department. The land we have requested is reserved forestland earmarked by the Office of the Wilgamuwa Divisional Secretary for village expansion at some future day. Eventually one day this land will be cleared to accommodate village expansion.

The adjoining forest reserve extends all the way from the Dry Zone through the Intermediate Zone to the Wet Zone of Sri Lanka. Has a high diversity of habitats, and presumably an equally diverse fauna and flora. When in that forest it is easy to understand why Sri Lanka has been declared one of the biodiversity hot spots of the world. The biggest threats to these forests are from some of the communities that live next to them. Their illicit logging and other non-timber extraction such as herb, spices, and medicinal plant harvesting, illicit-gem mining and poaching are an ongoing threat to these forests and its wildlife.

Fieldwork to survey the biodiversity of these forests, ascertain their conservation status and minimize human threats to it will be an important component of the comprehensive project planned for this region by the SLWCS. The first phase of this project, which was the resolution of human-elephant conflict with community participation was accomplished by erecting two 9-kilometer solar powered electric fences to stop HEC.

The Second Phase, which has programs for Community Development, Capacity Building, and Sustainable Economic Development - of which Elephant Walk Thru is a part of - will also include a Field Scouts Program to monitor, observe and record the temporal and spatial distribution of elephant populations in these forests. These Scouts will be recruited from the local villages, trained and educated in the wildlife of the area and how to conduct fieldwork under the guidance of an expert local Field Biologist. Eventually they will function as field guides to visiting guests, earning a reasonably high wage from an alternate, environment friendly, sustainable source that will supplement the meager income they earn from agriculture. They will also conduct environmental awareness programs for other communities, schools, etc., in this area furthering the local grass root environmental movement.

BASIC CONCEPTS of the nature-tour project are:

The nature tourism project will have two operational levels. One operation level will involve establishing village guesthouses for eco-tourists to stay in the village. The other operational level will be the establishment of an eco-tourism resort, which is Elephant Walk Thru to provide a high quality, enriching experience to high-end eco-tourists to enjoy the true wilderness of Sri Lanka.

Operational Level One. Stage 1. Village Hospitality Centers. Participating village households will have their basic infrastructure such as: kitchen and sleeping facilities, plumbing, general hygiene, wells and gardens developed to host paying visitors. The villagers will be given basic training to provide hospitality services. Establishing the Village Hospitality Centers and training the householders to provide hospitality services are a part of the Community Development and Capacity Building component of the project that will be initiated in January 2003.

Operational Level Two. Stage 1. Elephant Walk Thru Eco Tree Lodges (Currently government approval is being sought for services and structures only).

1. Canopy level eco tree lodges. The basic concept is to have 8-10 habitat immersed, canopy level eco tree lodges integrated into the existing forest structure. None of the buildings except for the supporting beams and columns will be built on the ground to minimize ecologically detrimental edge effects that can be caused by ground construction. The height of all these well-camouflaged structures will be at a level where they will give un-impeding access to the forest floor from elephants to shrews. The construction engineering will be integrated in such a manner so that

existing large trees can support luxury tree huts. Each hut will have a bedroom/living room with efficiencies, modern bathroom, intercom and telephone, and wrap-around balcony. All the support structures will be well camouflaged to blend with the forest environment.

2. All the tree huts will be connected to an elevated Central Lodge by canopy walkways. All infrastructure facilities such the offices, kitchen, restaurant and dinning room, games room and bar, library, video parlor and lecture/slides presentation hall, will be located in the Central Lodge which will be also built off the ground and situated slightly away towards the margin of the forest. The swimming pool will be a natural-looking rock pool fed by natural spring water. All of these facilities would be connected to each other by elevated walkways. This resort would be a unique feature in Sri Lanka and could probably be the first entirely elevated nature tourism resort in the world. It would also ensure maximum safety to the visitors and allow for the forest and the forest floor to remain totally untouched with the animals minimally disturbed at all times.

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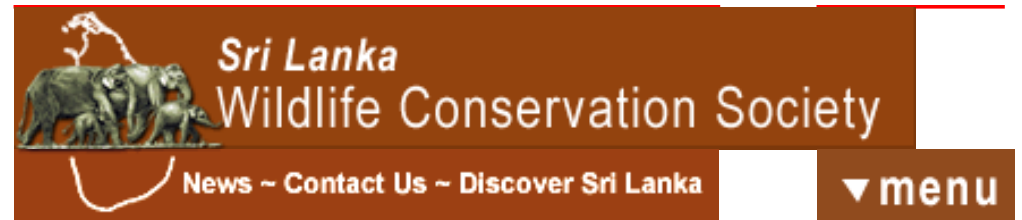
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KEY TECHNOLOGY, CONCEPT AND STRATEGY:

The KEY TECHNOLOGY: we will use are some of the most eco friendly technologies for water recycling, waste management, and electric power generation and for construction and building maintenance. Our concept is to make minimum or zero disturbances to the natural environment. Adhering to this principal we are elevating all of our buildings to the canopy level of the forest. This way the wild animals from smallest insects to the elephant will be able to move about in the forest, or even under or through our eco-resort without obstruction or hindrance. Since our resort is elevated there is no need to make paths or roads in the forest for people to travel. We will just use the one existing motor-able main dirt road, which will give access to the central lodge. Roads and paths create edge effects that are highly detrimental to wildlife. We hope to minimize edge effects so that our presence in the forest will not affect the wildlife.

INFRASTRUCTURE: Almost all of the facilities will be built above the ground allowing for minimal disturbance of land and maximizing aesthetic value of the site.

BASIC FACILITIES: (Stage 1 – For all items under stage 1, Elephant Walk Thru is seeking approvals from relevant government agencies as they form the core concepts of our proposed project.)

1. One central hall that will also have the kitchen & dinning restaurant.
 - a. 1500sqft x 1200
2. One smaller hall for activities such as talks, discussions, slide presentations.
 - a. These halls would also house the office, a games room, a library and a natural history collection of the area (not of species restricted by the FFPO without DWLC approval).
 - b. 3500 square feet on 2 stories.
3. Eight to ten semi-luxury eco tree lodges with attached toilets, deck, and hot tub. Each unit will be capable of housing 2-5 guests up to a maximum of 20 guests in all the units at one time.
4. Staff quarters. (Approximately 20 support staff from surrounding areas).
 - a. 400 square feet for 3 people (expert guides), 1500sqft for minor staff, 500sqft house for manager.
5. Cesspits, Wells, Roads and elevated walkways (development & improvement)
 - a. Estimated Cost: worked into all above square feet costs.
6. Secure garage for vehicles and boats.



POWER and WATER SUPPLY:

Wind and Solar Hybrid system

- First of its kind on this scale in Sri Lanka. Approximate initial power output – N43/600 kW able to power over 600 households.
- Excess power fed to surrounding villages (currently not connected to the national grid)

Additionally Biogas and eco-friendly waste disposal systems will be developed.

- **VEHICLES and FIELD EQUIPMENT:**

- 3 Land Rover TDi Defender County station wagons
- 1 Luxury mini-bus to transport guests back and forth (12 +3 seater)
- 1 Double Cab 4WD for general lodge use
- 2 Zodiac Grand Raid Mark III inflatable boats with Honda 50HP outboard engines and 10 HP electric motors for shallow water cruising.
- Mountain Bikes
- Binoculars, spotting scopes and night vision scopes
- Tents and camping accessories and equipment
- First Aid and snake bite kits

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MARKET SUMMARY: Elephant Walk Thru

This nature tourism resort is targeted for high end, up-market clients. Most of the world's tourism services - especially in Sri Lanka; are targeted to attract package tourists. There is a large group of affluent tourists who are willing to pay premium prices for novel, unusual and high quality services and opportunities to experience nature. This market segment has mostly eluded Sri Lankan tour operators because there are no truly eco-tour services on the ground to attract these high spending tourists. Only now is nature tourism being extensively promoted – such as in Sri Lanka Tourist Board's new slogan; “A land like no other” - but it is still in its infancy.

There are big untapped high-end eco-tourist markets in the U.S.A., Canada, Europe, Australia, Middle-East, Japan, China, and New Zealand. By developing partnerships with international eco-tour operators such as Abercrombie & Kent and Discovery Tours we hope to tap into these markets.

Review:

Since we will be the only operation in Sri Lanka providing such an unusual nature experience, initially we will have full market share. We will be playing a leadership role introducing some very novel concepts in design, service and quality. The players are the affluent international nature tourists who are willing to pay a premium for the best possible nature experiences and hospitality services. It is highly unlikely that the market will shift away from nature tourism since nature tourism has become the most economically and biologically sustainable way of using the world's depleting biodiversity resources. The cost and prices will be set according to international standards and to match or compete with what is being offered in the market. All brilliant and novel workable ideas eventually become common. As our competition increases with other operators emulating our concepts, it will be a challenge for us to be more innovative, while being environmentally friendly in our nature tourism ventures.

We hope to maintain our leadership in this market because we are confident of the following:

- 1) We have the knowledge and the experience in regard to wildlife, good environment stewardship, and most importantly working with rural communities through our wildlife conservation projects.
- 2) The wildlife conservation projects we have initiated give us the credibility and establish our integrity to do what is always best for the environment.
- 3) We will gain further recognition for introducing thoroughly innovative ways to experience nature in a sustainable manner.
- 4) We will recruit the best in the hospitality industry to provide services for our clients. This will ensure that we will build a reputation for providing nothing but the best in excellent hospitality and customer service and client satisfaction.
- 5) The recognition we have for the community work we have done and will continue to do to further wildlife conservation goals will be too big of a challenge for our competitors.

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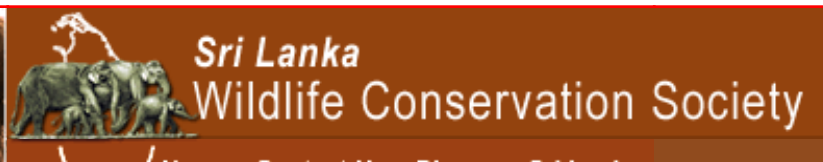
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THE TEAM - Elephant Walk Thru

CEO – Ravi Corea:

SUMMARY BIO: Ravi Corea has been involved in wildlife conservation in Sri Lanka for more than two and half decades. Ever since his childhood Ravi has shown a keen interest in natural history, and today Ravi is a student on a scholarship at the prestigious Columbia University's Center for Environmental Research & Conservation in New York finishing a degree in Environmental Biology. Ravi has worked for the National Zoological Gardens (Dehiwala Zoo) as a Student Guide Lecturer, and has conducted research on reptiles, fish, and elephants of Sri Lanka. In 1995, Ravi initiated to establish the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (www.slwcs.org), a fully incorporated, non-profit, tax-exempt organization based in the USA. Ravi presently functions as its founder President. Ravi has also established the project - Saving Elephants by Helping People – the first community integrated effort in Sri Lanka to help resolve human-elephant conflict in the villages of Gamburu-Oya/Pussellayaya and Weheragalagama in Wasgomuwa in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. The Wildlife Trust, the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, Computer Associates International Inc., and The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have provided funds for this ongoing project. The Columbia University; the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York; and the National Office of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) have funded Ravi's earlier research efforts. Ravi has also obtained the financial support of the Abercrombie & Kent Global Foundation, the International Elephant Foundation, and the Leo Model Foundation, for the conservation efforts of the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society in Sri Lanka. Ravi Corea presently resides in the State of New Jersey in the USA.

Director: Jayantha Jayawardene:

SUMMARY BIO: ADB Wildlife Project Director. Formerly - Senior Manager, Finlays Plantations. Member of Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Conservation, Southern Development Authority, and the Mahaweli Ministry. Publisher/Editor of the magazine, Sri Lanka Nature. Member of the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group. Author of book, The Sri Lanka Elephant. Founder member and Managing Trustee of Biodiversity and Elephant Conservation Trust.

Director: Chandeep Corea:

SUMMARY BIO: B.Sc., Marine Biology. Final year MSc., in Forestry and Environmental Management. Founding partner successful web-design company, ENIGMA (Pvt.) Ltd. Projects Director of the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society, U.S.A. Chandeep has extensive fieldwork experience working in Sri Lanka on wildlife conservation projects. He has worked with Dr. Wolfgang Dittus on the Smithsonian Institution funded Torque Macaque Study in Polonnaruwa. A team member of Dr. Prithiviraj Fernando's – Southern Area Elephant Radio Collaring Program funded by Global Environmental Facility, and participated in the ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY of Sri Lanka coordinated by Lyn De Alwis (President's Counsel for Wildlife Conservation). Additionally he is working with villagers in establishing small eco-lodges for local visitors to experience nature with minimum footprint.

Chief Architect: Sanjeeva Guneratne:

SUMMARY BIO: Faculty Member, Department of Architecture, University of Sri Lanka, Katubedda. He is presently working on his PhD in Architecture at the University of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.

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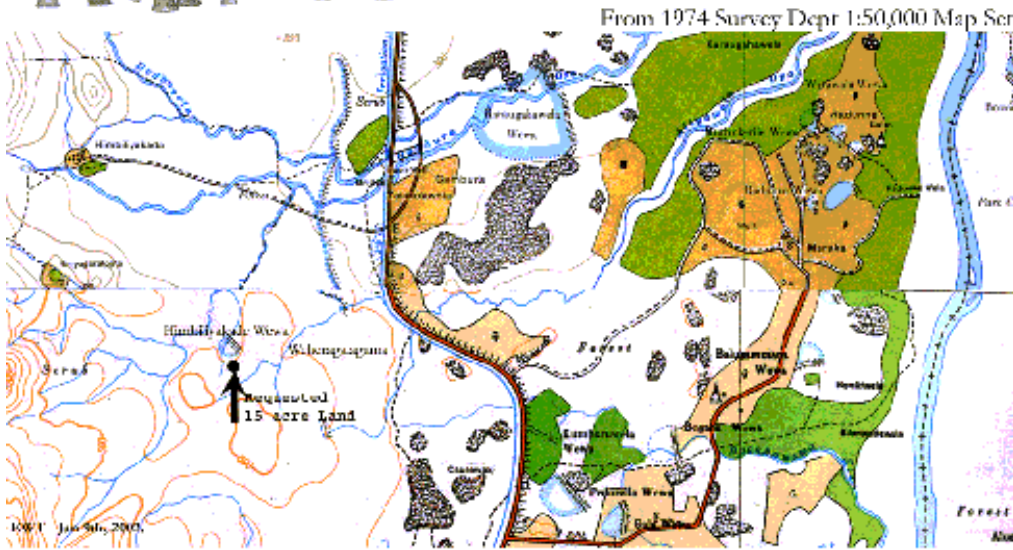
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Elephant Walk Thru: Site of proposed Nature Tour Project Weheragalagama, Wilgamuwa, Matale District.



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