

## *The Elephant Training Project, Nepal - December 2007*



*Here we have begun the work of teaching the Nepalese trainers to use the positive learning method. You can see one mahout with a food reward in his hand (called a Kuchi which is rice, molasses and salt in vine leaves).*



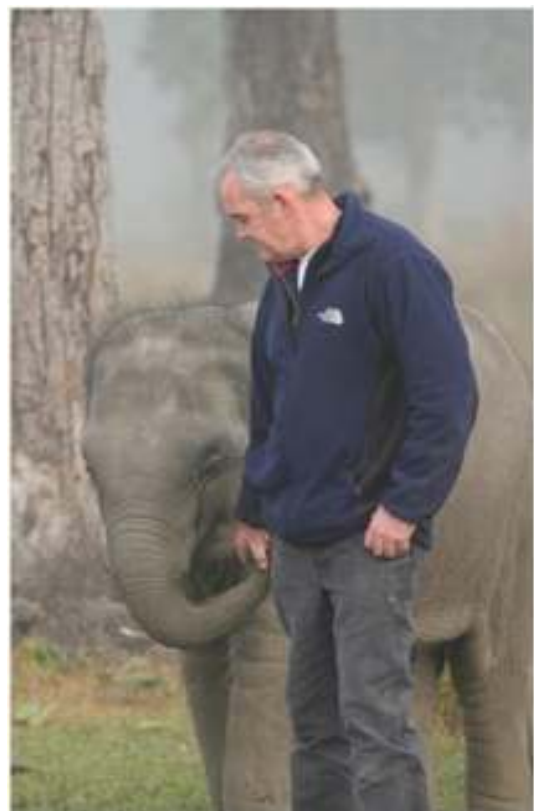
*With tourists and elephants in the background, here at the end of the project I am giving an informal lecture to Australian students from Griffith Uni about our WWF/WSPA elephant project. These conservation biology students were involved in another WWF project mapping flora.*

*The Elephant Training Project, Nepal - December 2007*



*Here Dr Kamil Ghari is translating my lecture to the Nepalese trainers. Dr Ghari is a highly intelligent man and quickly understood how learning theory works. He is the top elephant Vet in Nepal.*

*A quiet moment with a one year old elephant that was catching on to vocal commands for stop go and turn.*



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*Tuikku and I training Saraswati Kali to respond from light pressures on her ears where mahouts use their toes to ask for forward responses.*



*A young elephant learning the ear signals of forward using positive reinforcement. Tuikku implemented a 'preschool' for baby elephants beginning at one year where they learned basic in-hand commands using positive reinforcement.*

*The Elephant Training Project, Nepal - December 2007*



*Andrew and Tuikka experimented with training the young elephants and then developed a training programme that amalgamated the use of positive and negative reinforcement (pressure-release).*



*One of young pupils, having had enough school decided to leave and attend to an itchy foot.*

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*Elephants do many tasks in Nepal. Grass cutting and collecting is a major task as these animals consume vast quantities. Adult Indian elephants are enormous - the tallest elephant in the world is in Nepal and is 11 feet 3 inches high (3.5 m or 34 hands!) at the shoulder. They can lift a ton of weight with their trunk. Note the old rhino in the foreground.*

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*Stimulating the area behind the ear for turn right.*



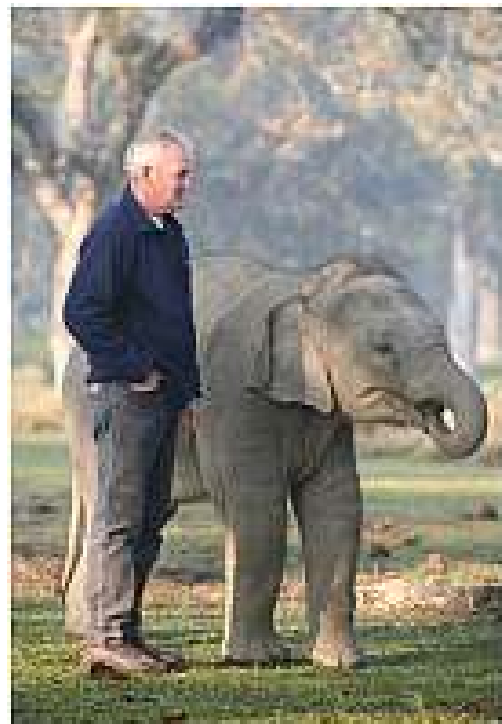
*Habituating a yearling to human touch. In the early stages, the hand is removed when the elephant is immobile.*

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*Here comes Kush Prasad back to work after deciding to leave for a short break... There were no fences or yards and the elephants were totally in control of their learning programmes! The program was dually funded by both WWF and WSPA so we wore the different shirts each day.*

*Sometimes it was nice just being with them, no demands...*



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*Elephants, like horses love being caressed as opposed to being patted. Yet like horse people, elephant trainers pat elephants thinking it an adequate positive reinforcement.*



*Because there were no yards or enclosures and we used no ropes or restraining devices, the elephants were free to leave when they had enough. This one can't get away fast enough. Real characters.....*



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*Here we are training a 4 year old female elephant named Saraswati Kali. Elephants are of spiritual significance in Nepal, Kali on a female elephants name means goddess while Prasad at the end of a males name means god.*



*We were very fortunate to be working with highly experienced and exceptionally talented and open minded Nepalese elephant trainers who were very keen to learn new ways of training, and very adept at implementing them .*

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*Once the training protocol was in place, we then showed the correct application of positive and negative reinforcement to the elephant trainers and managers.*



*Time was also spent explain to tourists the importance of a welfare friendly training system not for the animals but also to help transform Nepal into the key centre of modern humane elephant training which would give their tourism a competitive boost.*

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*Developing the positive learning method involved experimentation and discussion between myself, Tuikku and the project manager, Marc Pierard.*



*We experimented with using pressure on the young elephants in order to assess their responding tendencies*

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*Here I'm giving the tactile command for turn right. We aimed to finish a set of training on around 3 improved responses followed by rest of 2 or so minutes.*



*It is hard to put into words what a great experience it is to train these amazing animals. They are very friendly, sensitive, playful and affectionate.*