



WASGAMUWA NATIONAL PARK

SOCIOECONOMIC FINAL REPORT
FOR
GLOBAL PARK DEFENSE PROJECT

PREPARED FOR



ABOUT LEF

Established in 2019, LEF is a not-for-profit organisation that supports conservation initiatives in Sri Lanka by acting as a conduit for international funding and awarding grants to maximise local impact.

LEF is an affiliate member of the Conservation Collective, a global ecosystem of local foundations that funds effective grassroots conservation initiatives to protect the environment, restore nature, and build climate resilience.

As conservation administrators, the cornerstone of our mission is the empowerment of local communities, backed up by investment in the local environment.



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INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings arising out of a socio-economic study conducted in a village bordering the Wasgamuwa National Park (WNP). The Lanka Environment Fund (LEF) commissioned the researcher to conduct this study in September 2024. The aim of the study was to “provide critical insights into the needs, perceptions, and socioeconomic dynamics of the buffer communities, informing LEF's efforts to develop community-inclusive conservation strategies that align with the livelihoods and aspirations of these communities.” With this in mind, the researcher designed and implemented the study in the village of Handungamuwa between October 2024 – January 2025.

The village of Handungamuwa

Handungamuwa is one of several mono-ethnic and mono-religious villages along the southern border of the WNP (Sampath Pethikada 2024). Handungamuwa was established in 1968 under Stage IV Minipe Irrigation Scheme. Today the village comprises of three sections; 18th Section, 19th Section and the Elehara Road Section. The first two (18th and 19th) sections share much in common with each other. The villagers in these sections are generally the original settlers of 1968 or their descendants. The government allotted 2 acres of paddy land 1 acre of highlands to these families when they first settled. Their houses are a small distance away from the electric fence separating the village from the WNP, and their paddy fields are separated from the forest by the village. Therefore, while the houses in the 18th and 19th sections have been occasionally damaged due to elephants entering the village, their paddy fields are less likely to be harmed by wildlife who cross the WNP boundary.

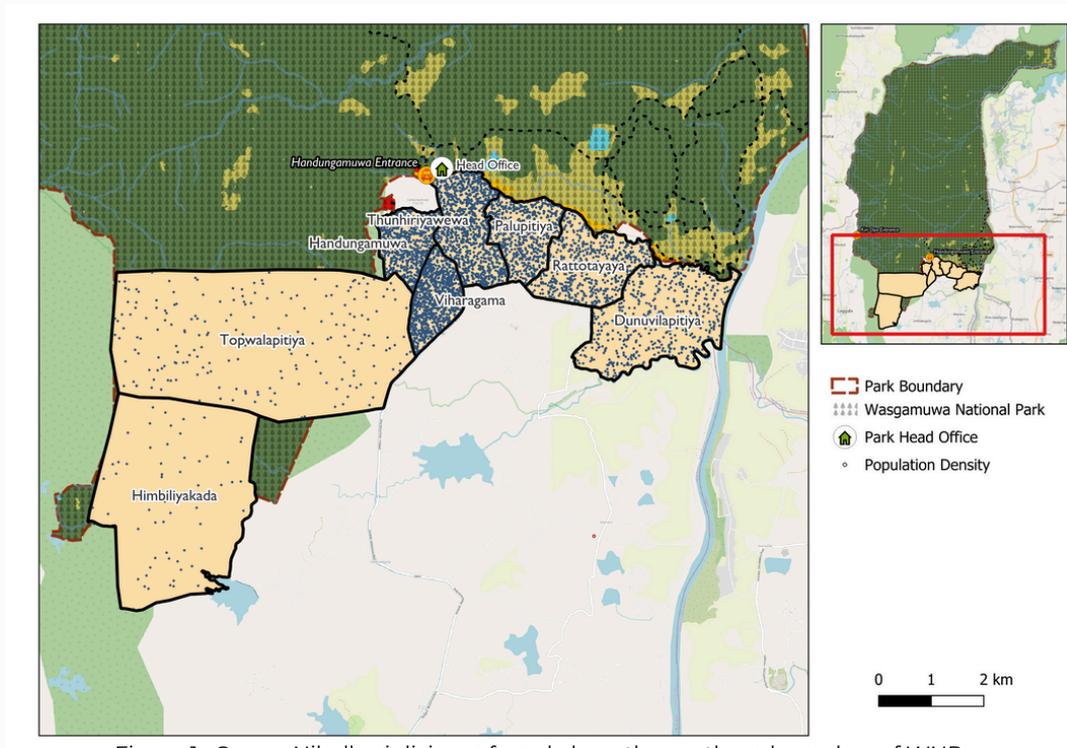


Figure 1: Grama Niladhari divisions found along the southern boundary of WNP



Figure 2: Handungamuwa Grama Niladhari Boundary and demarcation of the 18th, 19th and Elehera Road Sections

The Elehera Road Section of the village, which is located immediately next to the WNP, serves as a buffer, protecting the houses and paddy fields of those living in the 18th and 19th sections. The Elehera Road Section's immediate proximity to the WNP results in it enduring the most deleterious effects of wildlife incursions into the village. It is their houses and paddy fields that have been most affected when elephants enter the village. Moreover, it is their efforts to chase away wildlife who enter the village, which also alerts those in 18th Section and 19th Section to remain vigilant to the presence of wildlife in the village.

The Elehera Road Section villagers' challenges are further compounded by the fact that their livelihoods are not as secure as those living in 18th Section and 19th Section. This section comprises of families – generally descendants of the original settlers – who illegally settled on state reservation land bordering the WNP. These families therefore did not receive any paddy lands through the Minipe Irrigation Scheme.

Moreover, the highlands they did capture are not irrigated by the Scheme, compelling them to cultivate paddy only one season each year, rather than two. Thus, life in the Elehera Road Section of the Handungamuwa is doubly precarious due to the greater likelihood of them being adversely affected by wildlife, and by their inability to cultivate as extensively as those in other parts of the village.

There are of course exceptions to the general rule regarding land ownership in the three sections of the village outlined above. Firstly, due to land fragmentation, many in the 18th Section and 19th Section do not own, or own only very small, paddy lands. Despite the original settlers receiving 2 acres of paddy land, this land was divided among multiple children of the second generation. With the third generation, it is likely that more families in the 18th Section and 19th Section will not own paddy lands, or will own lands too small to build an economically secure life. Secondly, some in the Elahera Road Section have purchased paddy lands from others in the village, or they cultivate paddy on a sharecropping or promise basis. Therefore, there is great diversity in patterns of land ownership across the three sections of the village today.

Unfortunately, given the scope of this report, it is not possible to delve into the complexities of land ownership and other inequalities in Handungamuwa. Handungamuwa, as with any other village, is extremely diverse in terms of land ownership, livelihoods, social class, age and gender. The data collected indicates that this diversity has a direct bearing on the multi-species relationships teased out in the research findings. However, it is beyond the scope of this report to explore all these fascinating aspects of life in Handungamuwa. Therefore, the reader is urged to be mindful that there is greater complexity and diversity to the multi-species relationships than what is presented in the report.

Multi-species relationships

This study is rooted in a multi-species theoretical framework. Drawing on decolonial and indigenous scholars' work, multi-species theory exposes the ways in which human society is entangled in complex relationships with other species. This theory questions at least two tenets of the Western worldview. In the first instance, multi-species theory rejects the notion of human exceptionalism – this is the idea that humans are superior to all other species due to their capacity for reason (Locke 2013). In the second instance, the theory dismantles a core dichotomy in Western philosophy – that of nature-culture. This dichotomy seeks to separate categories of nature as untouched by humans and culture as purely the work of humans (Locke 2013). Through a careful analysis of everyday life, multi-species theory demonstrates the ways in which such demarcations are ultimately arbitrary. By questioning these two foundational ideas in western philosophy, multi-species theory unpicks the ways in which humans and various forms biotic life are implicated in co-producing the worlds they share. Thus, multi-species theory lent itself to analysing the data to capture the complexity of life in Handungamuwa and simultaneously fulfil the objective of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Having relied on a multi-species theoretical framework, methodologically, this study adopted a **rapid-ethnographic approach**. This approach requires the researcher to extend data collection beyond conducting interviews, to immerse themselves in the life and world of the community being studied. The final purpose of this approach is to develop a complex understanding of the many multi-species relationships which produce and re-produce the community being studied, from the community's own perspective. In the present study, this approach was instrumental in formulating a nuanced analysis of the many multi-species relationships which are important to those living in Handungamuwa.

Interviews and group discussions are integral but not exhaustive tools of data collection within the rapid ethnographic approach. **Therefore, in addition to 34 interviews and 4 group discussions, this study also relied on other tools for data collection. In order to immerse himself in the field - to some degree - the researcher relied on the participant observation method.** While in the field location the researcher made several mundane, but nonetheless significant decisions, including to (a) take up accommodation within the Handungamuwa itself, rather than in a hotel; (b) rely on walking, using public transport and riding a motorcycle to travel during fieldwork and; (c) interview villagers in their homes, or grocery shops, or huts - sometimes even over a meal, rather than in a formal setting.

On the one hand, these decisions helped the researcher better understand Handungamuwa from the perspective of those caught up in innumerable multi-species relationships there. On the other hand, it also made the researcher familiar to villagers, shaped the power hierarchies within which interviews are conducted, built trust and rapport between the researcher and the villagers, facilitated more honest, open and robust conversations, and permitted closer observations of the form multi-species relationships took in Handungamuwa. Thus, the methods the researcher employed in the field greatly enhanced the depth and richness of data gathered.

Data collection took place over the course of three field trips.

- The first scoping visit was conducted between 14th October 2024 – 18th October 2024. The purpose of the scoping visit was two-fold.
 - Firstly, to understand the particular relationships which are important to communities who live in Handungamuwa.
 - Secondly, to establish contacts with key persons in the village who could be relied on to talk to those relationships in detail in later field visits.
- The second field trip was conducted between 03rd December 2024 – 11th December 2024
- third stage of data collection conducted between 05th January 2025 – 11th January 2025.

FINDINGS

Handungamuwa is a **multi-species contact zone**.

In Handungamuwa, humans, the plants they cultivate, the animals they domesticate, the wildlife who move through, and in and out of the WNP, as well as the plants within and outside the forest are entangled in inter (and intra) species relationships. It is these relationships which continue to produce and reproduce Handungamuwa today. Being attentive to these relationships allows for a broader understanding of life in Handungamuwa which does not over-emphasise the human world, but places humans alongside the many other biotic species they share space with. Moreover, it recognizes that non-human species also play an active role in shaping avowedly “human” spaces, and allows for tracing the ways in which non-humans are entangled in human processes such as politics and economics (Fuentes, 2010). Such an approach is also useful when thinking through and designing interventions as the needs and interests of both humans and non-humans can be accommodated within it. Thereby, it can contribute to designing interventions that ensure justice for both humans and the non-humans they share space with.

Human-Paddy Relationships in Handungamuwa

Now work in the paddy field just finished and my husband left for Colombo. Work in the paddy field finished day before yesterday. [my husband] left yesterday - Interview, Young Mother.

Paddy cultivation dominates life in Handungamuwa. This is borne out by official statistics. According to the District Secretariat data (2024), all 120 acres of agricultural land in Handungamuwa are devoted solely to paddy cultivation. The centrality of paddy cultivation to life in Handungamuwa is further corroborated by qualitative data. During interviews, most villagers and every state bureaucrat maintained that Cultivation, and specifically paddy cultivation was the main livelihood in the area. Apart from official statistics and interview data, the pre-eminent position of paddy in economic life Handungamuwa is also inscribed into the landscape. The main road from the nearby town of Hettipola to Handungamuwa serves as one example here. As one travels into Handungamuwa, one is flanked by acres of paddy fields on the right, and the main Minipe Canal which irrigates those paddy fields on the left. Therefore, even before entering Handungamuwa it becomes abundantly evident that paddy plays a central role in village life in Handungamuwa. These official statistics, qualitative data and observations all suggest that many aspects of life in Handungamuwa could be understood through being attentive to the relationship between humans and the paddy they cultivate.

The relationship between farmers and paddy structures everyday life in Handungamuwa. Cultivation seasons organize life in Handungamuwa. There are two harvesting seasons (*kanna*) each year. In every *kanna* there are periods when paddy fields must be worked more intensively, such as when preparing the fields for cultivation, or during harvesting time. During these periods where paddy demands attention, all other commitments in the village take a back seat. It is during these times, that those who migrate out of Handungamuwa for often precarious forms of employment return to work their fields. Since such intensive work is done before the sun beats down too hard on the fields, farmers work their fields early every morning. Once the intense cultivating work is done, many leave Handungamuwa for bigger cities in hope of securing employment.

Even when intense work is not required, paddy still structures daily life. Farmers often inspect their fields for diseases early morning, and spray various insecticides and pesticides if they detect such life forms. Thereafter, they return to their fields in the night, particularly those whose lands are closer to the WNP, to guard their crops against wildlife predations. All other quotidian tasks, such as taking children to school, visiting government offices, attending medical clinics are organized around the daily demands which paddy makes of their human masters. Thus, understanding the relationship between paddy and farmers is fundamental to understanding the patterns of everyday life in Handungamuwa

This is important from a programmatic perspective too. Workshops, awareness programmes, and trainings will necessarily have to be organized around work in the paddy field. On the one hand, one could target to do trainings when working the paddy fields are less demanding so that more people will be able to participate. On the other hand, by intentionally and thoughtfully planning activities during periods when there is more work around paddy cultivation, programmes could potentially attract people who are otherwise not in the village



Multi-species Relationships in the Paddyfields



Figure 3 Peacocks in the paddyfields

Even though, or perhaps because, farmers in Handungamuwa share a nurturing relationship with paddy, they do not share the same relationship with other forms of lives. In fact, between farmers' and some other species who could potentially harm paddy is markedly more hostile and violent. These other species include various **fungi, bacteria, and insects; grizzled giant squirrels; peacocks; wild-boars and elephants**. Each species poses specific threats to paddy, at specific periods of the development of paddy, and farmers relationship with each of these other species responses are based not only on the threat they pose to paddy, but also on how each species are culturally constructed.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss all these aspects of the many different multi-species relationships which enliven the paddy fields of Handungamuwa in this report. Rather, only brief examples will be provided in supporting the three points made above.

Firstly, each non-human species poses a specific threat to paddy. For example, the harm caused by a fungi or bacteria in paddy is markedly different from the wild-boars who dig up balks in paddy fields, which in turn is different to elephants who trample paddy underfoot as they roam through fields eating the paddy.

Secondly, each species has a propensity to eat paddy at particular stages of paddy development. For example, whereas peacocks are more likely to eat paddy during its early stages development when its shoots are still tender, elephants prefer paddy when it is more mature.

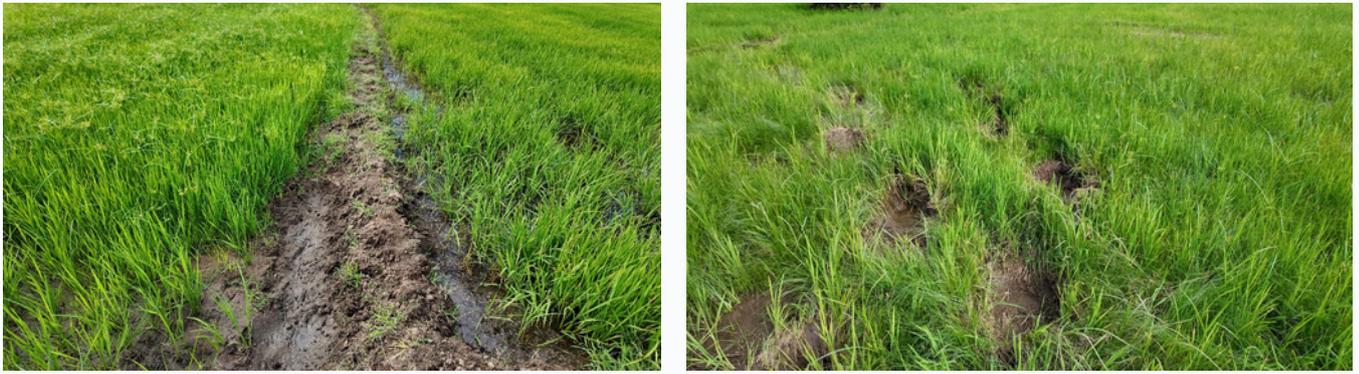


Figure 4 Tracks of elephants and wild boar in the paddyfields

Thirdly, farmers' relationships with each of these other species who enter his paddy field are markedly different. For example, in case bacteria are found to be causing disease, farmers immediately strap on a chemical spray can to their backs and generously spray their fields, killing the bacteria but sparing the paddy. If wild boars harm a paddy field, farmers are eager to kill them, rather than drive them away, because villagers enjoy wild boar meat. In contrast, farmers are far less likely to kill elephants and peacocks. The different responses farmers mete out to wild-boar and bacteria on the one hand and elephants and peacocks on the other is not only a function of dietary preferences in Handungamuwa.

It is also a product of how the different animals are culturally constructed.

Whereas the elephant is perceived as a national treasure which plays a central role in Buddhist procession, the peacock is associated with the God Skanda. Unfortunately, the wild boar is not coloured by any such cultural significance. Therefore, farmers are more likely to respond with violence to wild-boar but are more restrained with peacocks and elephants who enter their fields. These contradictory responses farmers have to other non-humans demonstrates how the lived realities of non-humans are intimately linked to local human cultures. Seen through this lens, the paddy field in Handungamuwa emerges as a vibrant site of multi-species relations – both convivial and antagonistic – and as a site brimming with life and death. Moreover, the paddy field provides a point of departure to consider the various attitudes humans living in Handungamuwa have towards the various species they share space with.

Exploring these attitudes, particularly in relation to those species who are not protected by the shroud of cultural significance, would be a first step towards designing measures aimed at conservation. Given that all species play a significant role in maintaining and sustaining ecologies, it would be useful to consider avenues to raise awareness of how species deemed killable do in reality contribute not only to maintaining the ecology, but also potentially support paddy cultivation.

Human- Elephant relationships in Handungamuwa

It is only someone who does not have a heart who can shoot or electrocute an elephant. Even if an elephant destroys a house, that man does not have an intention to kill. They want to shoot the elephant, but only to chase it away without killing it. If there is someone who can look at a dead elephant and not have a tear form in his eyes, that person does not have a heart. He has a heart of stone - Interview, Retired Village leader (Grama Niladhari)

Despite the centrality of the human-paddy relationship in Handungamuwa, it remains an unremarkable aspect of life in Handungamuwa. Human-elephant relationships in contrast captured the imagination of villagers, and it was a topic which unfailingly hijacked every interview. This is perhaps because paddy is understood as belonging within Handungamuwa, whereas elephants are never imagined as comprising part of the village. These perceptions, render elephant incursions into Handungamuwa extraordinary, while the abounding presence of paddy remains ordinary.

Each villager the researcher spoke with had at least one story to narrate about their own or another's encounter with an elephant. One person's house was razed to the ground by a single elephant when he and his family had left the village for a few days. Another recalled how he had watched in horror as a child had excitedly jumped out of a three-wheeler to look at an elephant who stood in the path of the vehicle. There was absolute relief in his tone when he told us that the boy was not harmed. One woman, still visibly shaken, recounted how she had gone with a group of women into the WNP to collect firewood. She was separated from her companions when they encountered an elephant, and had run in fear to escape. Another woman had hugged her children close and huddled in their house as an elephant roamed around in her garden. These are but four of the innumerable stories about elephants that were narrated in the field. The eagerness with which people spoke about elephants, the deep emotions that simply recalling the experience stirred and the sheer number of stories about elephants underscore the unshakable shadow that these great terrestrial beasts cast over life in Handungamuwa.

The relationship between elephants and humans in Handungamuwa are extremely complex. This is most apparent in the many emotions provoke when humans encounter elephants. **Firstly, as is apparent from the stories mentioned above, elephants provoke a deep fear in the minds of humans.** It is a fear that is not easily shaken off. **Secondly, elephants who harm crops, houses and people stir up unbridled anger.** Farmers are often justifiably incensed when the paddy and other crops they cultivated for months are destroyed by elephants overnight. **However, elephants also provoke laughs in certain interactions with humans.**

One young man, who was soon to launch a tirade against the harm elephant caused, noted with a chuckle and the slightest hint of fondness in his voice, that there was one elephant they call kos maama (uncle Jack) because he eats only jack fruits, and that there was a second elephant who eats only mangoes.

Finally, elephants also provoke respect. Despite all the anger at the countless crops that have been damaged, and the many scary experiences with elephants, humans in Handungamuwa have a profound respect for the animal. On several occasions villagers indicated that it was utterly inhuman to kill elephants, and that the sight of an elephant drawing its last breath would bring tears to any on-looker's eyes. Thus, the relationship between humans in Handungamuwa and the elephants they co-exist with is multi-layered, complex and does not lend itself to easy categorization. It is important to acknowledge both the negative and the positive emotions these beasts evoke in humans if a just solution to the problems caused by human elephant entanglements is to be pursued.

Finally, the multiplicity of narratives about elephants left the researcher utterly confused in the field. Some villagers claimed that the human-elephant entanglement was a grave issue in the village. Others dismissed it forthright saying it was not as great an issue as others made it out to be. In one instance, one individual articulated both these views in two separate interviews! At a loss to make sense of these contradictions, the researcher asked an individual with whom he had built a good relationship, why these contradictions existed. His response pointed to the ways in which humans and elephants in Handungamuwa have learnt and are learning to live alongside each other. He claimed that there are elephants in the village. He noted that people must guard their crops against "greedy" elephants. He claimed that elephants still do harm to crops. However, he also observed that people are becoming accustomed to the presence of elephants in the village. He claimed that elephants entering Handungamuwa is a problem, but because the problem is so persistent and has been on-going for a long time, people have also come to accept it as part and parcel of life. This explanation points to the ways in which human-elephant relationships are not static. Both humans and elephants are adjusting and learning to share spaces together.

Indeed, these multitude of emotions and experiences could become a starting point to consider ways of encouraging co-existence between humans and elephants in Handungamuwa.

The human-elephant relationship in Handungamuwa is extremely complex and evokes many visceral reactions and emotions in humans who share space with elephants. Any intervention to resolve the problem of elephants causing harm in the village, which fails to acknowledge this complexity, will necessarily alienate local communities and fail. Therefore, in acknowledging the complex relations, it can open spaces for conversation and common ground to advocate for elephant conservation in Handungamuwa.



Herd of elephants inside WNP, close to the southern boundary

Human Relationships and Resource dependencies in Handungamuwa

As much as humans are entangled in multi-species relationships within Handungamuwa, they are also in relationship with non-human species within the WNP as well. However, collecting data regarding this relationship proved extremely challenging. Since entering the WNP is illegal, villagers were unwilling to talk openly about such entanglements. The standard response to such questions was – “people used to go to the forest a lot earlier but these days It is much less.” Despite such reluctance, the ethnographic method of spending time in the field site allowed the researcher to glean some data about these “illegal” relationships, albeit with far less richness compared to other multi-species relationships.

Hunting

“If we had resorted to legal means [to address illegal hunting at the electric fence], that person would have gotten angry with us. Then the problem would have become worse. You have to speak to them properly...” -Interview, Village Leader

When submitting the interim report following the scoping visit, the researcher believed that hunting may not pose a significant threat to wildlife in Handungamuwa. The sense the researcher got during interviews in the scoping visit was that it was merely a few households who engaged in hunting, and therefore, he did not believe that hunting posed any serious long-term threat to wildlife in the WNP. However, as field work was concluding, the researcher heard the same narrative from two persons in two separate interviews – *there used to be a lot more deer and sambar in and around Handungamuwa, but today they are nowhere to be seen.* The interviewees suggested that these numbers had reduced because of hunting in and around Handungamuwa. **Although there are no official statistics, these anecdotal observations indicate that hunting in Handungamuwa is a serious concern which requires intervention.**

Hunting must be understood more broadly than simply a human killing wildlife. During the scoping visit, it emerged that hunting was part of a *racket*, in which some police officers and DWC officers were allegedly involved. It was suggested that hunters would sell the carcass whole to a third party, minimising the opportunities to apprehend the hunters. These narratives draw attention to wider social, economic, and political processes which create the conditions in which hunting becomes possible. Understood in this light, hunting becomes a socio-ecological practice embedded in local economic and political structures. Unfortunately, hunting draws wildlife within the WNP into these larger human structures with deadly consequences for wildlife.

Untangling such complex networks of relations must be done with care. During a conversation with a village leader, he articulated a response to the threat of hunting, which did not rely on the law. In fact, he asserted that resorting to legal action would only make hunters more stubborn, and more likely to return to the forest. Therefore, he suggested that a non-legal approach was necessary to reduce hunting in the area.

In this context, there appears to be a cultural logic in Handungamuwa which perceives strict law enforcement as counter-productive to reducing illegal hunting. In fact, a purely legal approach to mitigating hunting within the WNP could potentially exacerbate the threat rather than minimize it. Therefore, any interventions to reduce hunting in and around Handungamuwa should explore feasible non-legal avenues in conversation with the DWC, which also resonate with the local community.

Cattle grazing

As the researcher was walking with a strongly-built cattle-herder to an *attalaya* (*hut*) in his paddy field to conduct an interview, the cattle herder stopped as he passed a young calf. He leaned down, gently stroked the calf's chin, and spoke lovingly to it for a couple of seconds, before continuing towards his hut. This small interaction lays bare the multi-species relations of care which bind calf and his master in Handungamuwa.

However, cattle grazing in Handungamuwa is not merely an inter-species relationship, it is a multi-species relationship. Cattle grazing bind humans, cattle, the plants cattle feed on, and even wildlife into complex webs of relations. Many cattle in Handungamuwa are released into the WNP to feed, increasing competition for food sources within the forest. It is likely that this strain on resources within the forest also plays some role in pushing non-humans who rely on the same.

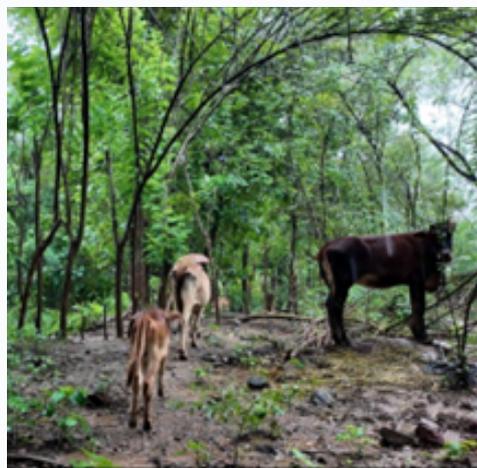


Figure 5 Cattle in WNP

Food source out of the forest and into the village in search of food. This results in still more complex multi-species interactions in the village itself as discussed above concerning elephants.

Like hunting, the researcher initially under-estimated the extent of cattle grazing within the WNP and the serious threat it posed to the WNP. During data collection the researcher gradually became aware of the extent to which cattle grazing takes place in Handungamuwa. One individual claimed that one cattle herder had four hundred cows he released into the WNP for grazing. While the number may have been exaggerated, it nonetheless points to a significantly large population of cattle entering the forest which undoubtedly has an impact on food sources within the forest and has implications for wildlife conservation.

To strictly implement the law and expel all cattle from the forest would push a vulnerable segment of society in Handungamuwa into greater precarity. Such measure will be met with significant resistance from local communities. What is required, as in the case of hunting, is a non-legal intervention which safeguards livelihoods and conserves the environment.

One possible recommendation in this regard would be to explore the availability of suitable lands outside the WNP, in consultation with the relevant state institutions, which could be allocated for cattle grazing. This measure could potentially safeguard the WNP, while also safeguarding local livelihoods.

Plant-based livelihoods

The researcher found it extremely difficult to obtain data on the relationship between humans and plants within the WNP. As noted above, villagers were reluctant to admit that anyone went into the forest. Initially, the only livelihoods reliant on plants in the forest the researcher encountered were related to plucking various fruits in season and selling them. Beyond this though, it appeared that there were no other livelihoods which relied on forest resources - certainly, none that sought to add value to forest resources and sell the products on the market. Additionally, it appeared that there was no conception whatsoever among villagers about the possible opportunities within the forest to develop a livelihood around among villagers in general.

In such a context, if a livelihoods-based, community-inclusive conservation intervention is being considered, it would be beneficial to conduct a study within the WNP to identify specific plant species which may be sourced to develop particular local livelihoods in Handungamuwa.

Towards the latter stages of data collection, the researcher finally encountered two livelihoods which relied on forest plants. The first pertained to weaving. On the last day of data collection, the researcher with some difficulty found and interviewed an elderly lady who used to collect *pan* (reed grass) and *kalu ehe kola* from the forest and wove various goods with them. She said that she had initially received a training through the DWC and thereafter wove mats, hand-bags, pouches, baskets, and hats using resources from the forest. However, she no longer engages in this livelihood. She also noted that no one from the younger generation engaged in weaving for their livelihoods.

Therefore, it will be useful to get a better sense of the specific livelihoods people would be willing to engage in.

Even though weaving may not have interested the younger generation, there are other opportunities still for intervention. The second livelihood reliant on plant species within the WNP was an enterprise in the neighbouring village of Kumbuk Oya, where a group of women had come together to make compost using, among other inputs, invasive species from the WNP. It was learned that they had produced compost with the support of two entities. One the DWC. The other is a private company. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to explore this livelihood in greater detail as the woman he met demonstrated some hesitation to engage with us. Her hesitation arose out of a bitter experience with the private company who had made no effort to purchase the compost or make arrangements to sell it after they had produced it.

Her suspicion towards the researcher while absolutely justified, also raises an important factor to consider in any intervention with a focus on livelihoods. Even though it may be useful to equip villagers with skills to develop particular livelihoods, it is equally important to provide avenues to the trained individuals to access markets and sell their products.



Figure 6 Traditional weaving craft



Artisan showing their traditional weaving craft

CONCLUSION

The stories we tell are important.

The stories we tell shape the ways in which we understand the world, the ways in which we live in the world, the kinds of interventions we make in the world, and how we make such interventions.

Telling a familiar story about Handungamuwa differently, from multi-species perspective, invites further ethical and political reflection about the conservation work LEF hopes to do in and around the WNP. In as much as a farmer constantly makes decisions about life and death in his paddy field, LEF's intervention too will necessarily make similar decisions regarding the ecologies in and around WNP.

It is hoped that the findings in this study would have raised new questions for LEF in the important work they do and will enable their intervention to promote greater flourishing of humans and non-humans who share space in Handungamuwa and WNP.

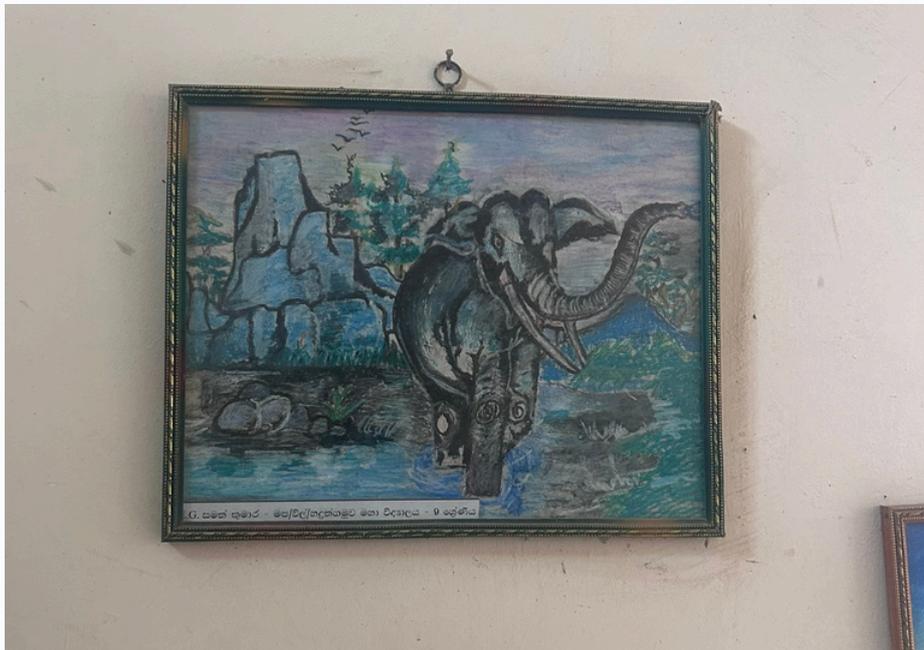


Figure 7 Student drawing of elephants at the Zonal Education Office

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