



# Final Day of our 2014 Workshop

October 17

Jonna and I arrived at the elephant camp in the National Park at 6.30 am. This morning's training is our last in Assam, as we head to the airport in mid-morning. Today we are without a translator as Dr Bhaskar had to leave last night and go back to Guwahati. In addition we said goodbye to Christine Townend, our HELP Patron who has been excellent company throughout our time here in Assam. Christine also had to leave to get back to her animal shelter in Jaipur.



*The behaviour grading form. I've asked for a translated copy so I can suggest some changes*

Dada on the other hand was making big progress despite having missed out on a day's training. The mahout decided he was ready to mount and so the mahout gradually habituated him to the weight and in half an hour he was on. The mounting process was repeated another 4 times. Not bad for only his 5th session. He also improved in picking up and holding the stick this response is well on the way. He's a very much more alert elephant than the placid Rabi Prasad. This workshop is a refresher workshop so our intention wasn't to have the elephants ridden in this short time, but instead to use the workshop and go through all the stages for teaching purposes. In previous workshops the elephants have been ridden free by day 6.

So our work here today was a little difficult without a translator but nevertheless we made a start with Rabi Prasad who was there waiting for us as usual. It always amazes me how the elephants hang around for the training sessions. We have no way of restraining them if they don't want to stay and they're free to roam this giant Park. Having said that, it looked like Dada hadn't turned up (again), however on closer inspection he was behind the mahout's quarters munching on some shrubs.

We put Rabi Prasad through his paces and he managed everything easily from voice commands. The mahout decided to put the rope around his girth again and they felt he would be ready to mount in a day or so. He is so much bigger than Dada so the girth helps the mahout to climb aboard, and as with horses, it needs habituating to.



*Dada mounted for the first time. We were fortunate in both workshops at each end of India to have exceptionally enthusiastic and skilled students.*



Human Elephant  
Learning Programs



*As a present one of the mahouts made me a rope to take home made of locally grown jute*

Unfortunately we ran out of food treats, so we had to say goodbye to the elephant camp a little earlier than we had hoped. Nonetheless in 3 and a half days we had laid out all the steps for both the elephant's future. So we headed back to the guesthouse and packed then began the journey back to Guwahati for the airport. As I had intended, we dropped in to see The Deputy Park Director, Dr Sonali Ghos at her house in her hometown, Barpeta. She was very welcoming and we discussed again the solution to the mahout's extremely low wages, poor conditions and lack of job satisfaction as a result. Dr Ghos made a firm commitment to help solve this firstly with a government approach and secondly to get the mahout school on the road. She was full of enthusiasm for the mahout school and fully embraced the idea that the school should eventually include all aspects of elephant management, elephant biology and book keeping among other possibilities. This is really the beginning of the long-term solution so I felt very pleased that on the last day we could see a sustainable future for the mahouts, the elephants and the indispensable work they do in eliminating the menace poachers from Indian forests.

Now I'm off to Denmark this evening for the Global Dressage Forum which begins on Monday. I have to try to remember to replace the word elephant in my vocabulary with horse! Jonna flies back to Australia tonight.

