

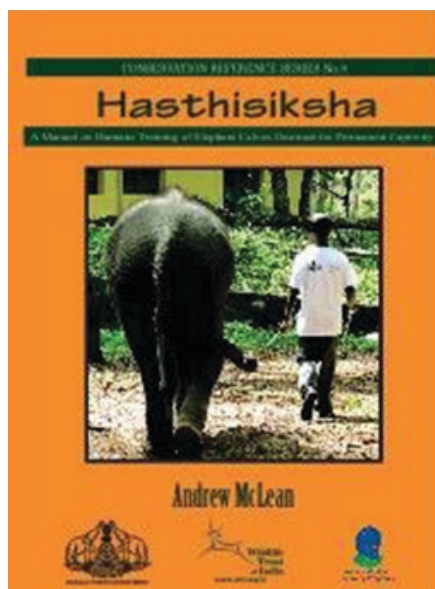


I've just received news from Andrew about our first of our workshops for the 2014/2015 season!

He has had trouble obtaining an internet connection as international phones have been blocked due to insurgency threats from the fringe of Northern India that he was writing from. However it sounds although things have been progressing well. Reports from the WTI (Wildlife Trust of India) who are our partners for our training project in India have reported success from both north and south previous workshops, so it was decided that Andrew would re visit and conduct refresher workshops over 3 days in both places. Here's the first part of Andrew's news.

*Andrew:*

We left Australia for Kochi in southern India. When I say we, I mean Jonna (my brother) and I. Jonna came with me to learn the ropes of training elephants so that when I am unavailable at certain times of the year, he might continue. We landed in Kochi late in the evening in and checked in to our hotel and met up with Wiebke Hendriksen our HELP Chairman. Then at 4 am next day we left for the 6-hour drive to Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala.



*The book cover*

The purpose of being in Trivandrum today (Oct 9) is to launch the book I have written on elephant training. Its basically a manual, more or less recipe-style on how to train an elephant to be ridden and to do various things like picking up and giving objects. The book is called "Hasthisiksha" (translation: Training of the Elephant") and the English version is "Elephant-Friendly Training For The Working Elephant" (available on Amazon). I donated the book to the WTI, who are publishing it in 5 languages (Hindi, Assam, Malayam, Tamil and Kannada) and the first edition is in the Malayalam language, (the official language of Kerala) because our first workshop begins in Kerala in in 2 days time. Fortunately I'd packed a coat and tie (because I am presenting at the Global Dressage Forum in a weeks time!); I didn't realise that the book launch would be such a big deal. Wiebke used this a great opportunity to network and enable us to plan for the future.

We went to the Press Club in Trivandrum and discovered that the book was to be launched by none less than the Minister for Forest & Environment, Mr Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan. Vivek Menon CEO of the WTI reminded me just how incredible this was. For the book to be launched by the Minister meant we had the approval of the Indian Government and this would facilitate great progress of our methods across this vast subcontinent. As a result of this, there were 4 TV stations and few newspaper and radio reporters there too so my book and our work with HELP revived great publicity.

The next morning we were picked up by our driver for the trip to the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary to begin the refresher workshop. There were 23 mahouts who arrived for the workshop. Our first task was to find out how much of what they had learned last time had been remembered and utilised. It was encouraging to hear senior mahouts who had been training the traditional way for such a long time telling of their success with using combined reinforcement (mix of positive and negative reinforcement). One of those mahouts was resident at this particular camp we asked for a demonstration of his training. The elephant was Sundari, the young elephant we had begun last December in our 2013 workshop. Sundari behaved perfectly operating entirely from voice commands.



*Sundari returns*

After lunch we had a new recruit for the workshop. This new calf Rana was a 2 year old so we were not going to be able to train him to be ridden, but we could begin his training of stop, go etc. and begin training him to respond to pressure/release and food rewards. Jonna and I had our hands full keeping everything flowing smoothly and arranging an suitable training environment. Things were a little chaotic at first with too many commands, late rewards and wrong positioning of cues. Gradually things improved and with the help of some senior mahouts who attended last year, we made progress with the young elephant learning the basis of stop and go and also to touch



*Rana, the elephant calf*

a stick in preparation for picking it up later in the workshop. We then retreated to the classroom to discuss the day's events and to ensure that tomorrow we would progress even further. We returned to our quarters where Ben and I stayed last year. Beautiful setting overlooking a bluish lake and a magnificent garden. Somehow this setting made the lack of hot water, the thin mattresses, the lack of sheets, blankets and towels and the omnipresent mosquitoes somewhat ok.

