

Elephant Training Workshop  
Kerala 2013

Day 1 Kerala Elephant Training Workshop

# Our first workshop in Kerala has begun!

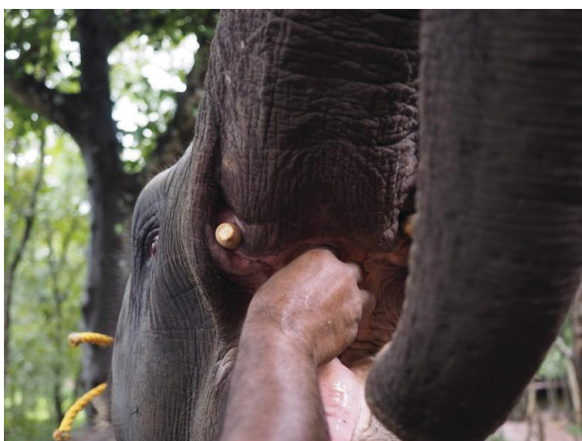
*Andrew's blog:*

Only once before have I been to Kerala in the south of India, that was in 2010 when I gave a lecture on our new approach to elephant training to the various heads of forestry, training and various political personnel. On the other hand I have spent more time in the north in Assam doing hands-on workshops there. The Assam – Kerala dichotomy in elephant training and management is like the French and German divide in horse training, only 10 fold deeper. So Kerala is a new frontier and challenge for me.



*Andrew and Vivek*

methodology followed by 2 demos. The first was a young wild caught calf that was saved from entanglement in barbed wire and subsequently brought to the Neyyar Sanctuary for rehabilitation. That was 3 months ago and so I was to begin this little fellows training, so naturally I thought I'd teach him to step back as that's by far the safest thing to do and will give him a set of brakes that he'll need later. So I began with him and introduced some jaggery (dried sugar cane juice) as reward. When he first took it, (actually I put it in his mouth) he couldn't decide if he liked it or not. He put his trunk in his mouth and tried to remove it from his molars, then decided it was ok and after that I was on a roll. He soon learned to step back from finger pressures on his chest.



*Feeding the young elephant Jaggery*

This 7day workshop at the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary is therefore the first one here in the state of Kerala, and today is demo day where I show the workshop participants and few dignitaries an example of our training. Among them was Vivek Menon, Executive Director of the Wildlife Trust of India, and a famous and highly regarded scientist and leader. It was Vivek's enthusiasm for my work with elephants after the sustained positive effects in Assam that led me to the south here in Kerala. So I faced the usual first-time hurdles. I could feel the guarded suspicion of some of the elders when I gave a short talk on HELPs

My next demo was with a 5 year old male called Unnikarishnan that we call Unni. Unni was angry and disobedient from all reports. He had not yet been trained to be ridden, however in his groundwork he was apparently disobedient, angry and frustrated. Unfortunately his usual mahout wasn't present so another guy stepped in. We went through some groundwork manoeuvres that he apparently knew and I saw he was slow to react and confused. It was a good opportunity to show the early stages of confusion and its consequences. We focused on re-installing the train of 6 basic elements of a trained response: the voice cue, the light pressure, the increase in pressure, the release of pressure, the voice cue (secondary reinforcer) for the reward, and finally the reward itself (jaggery).

