



AN OSOM EDUCATION TRUST INITIATIVE

# HATI BONDHU, ASSAM

## FRIENDS OF ELEPHANTS



*"BRINGING ELEPHANTS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER"*

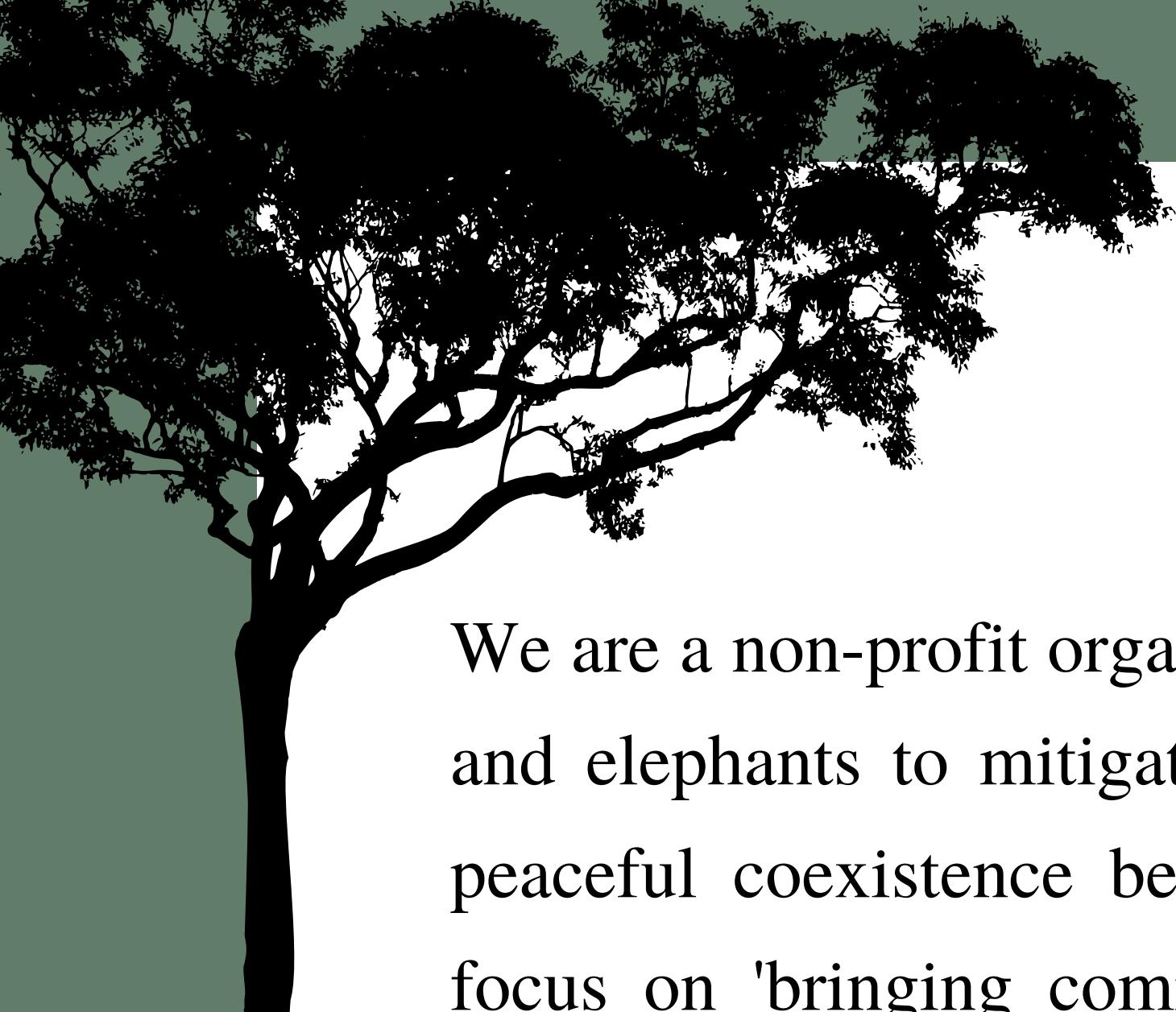


HATI BONDHU IS A LOCAL NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO CONSERVING AND PROTECTING THE WELFARE OF ASIAN ELEPHANTS IN ASSAM, INDIA.



For more information visit our webpage :  
[www.hatibondhu.org](http://www.hatibondhu.org)

HATI BONDHU CAMP & TRAINING CENTRE, Bagheghati,  
Chapanala, Nagaon District, Assam 782135



## About us

We are a non-profit organization working with local communities and elephants to mitigate human-elephant conflict and promote peaceful coexistence between the two in Assam. Our projects focus on 'bringing communities and elephants together' as we believe in finding sustainable solutions that encourage coexistence and address the needs of both local communities and wild elephants in the landscape.

## Our Mission

We strive to work towards protecting and improving elephant habitats through advocacy and plantation programs. This is one of our prioritized goals as we identify the loss of elephant habitats and subsequent loss of food resources - as one of the primary tipping points of human-elephant conflict in the local landscape.

Furthermore, we also believe that empowering local communities with adequate resources, knowledge, and training to effectively deal with human-elephant conflict is crucial for preserving the status of elephants in the wild. In recognition of the valued role local participation can play in conservation action - Hati Bondhu also strives to collaborate with local communities to create greater ecological awareness, develop dynamic solutions, and bolster conservation efforts towards preserving the status of Asian elephants in the wild and to achieve a sustainable future for all.



## Our Philosophy

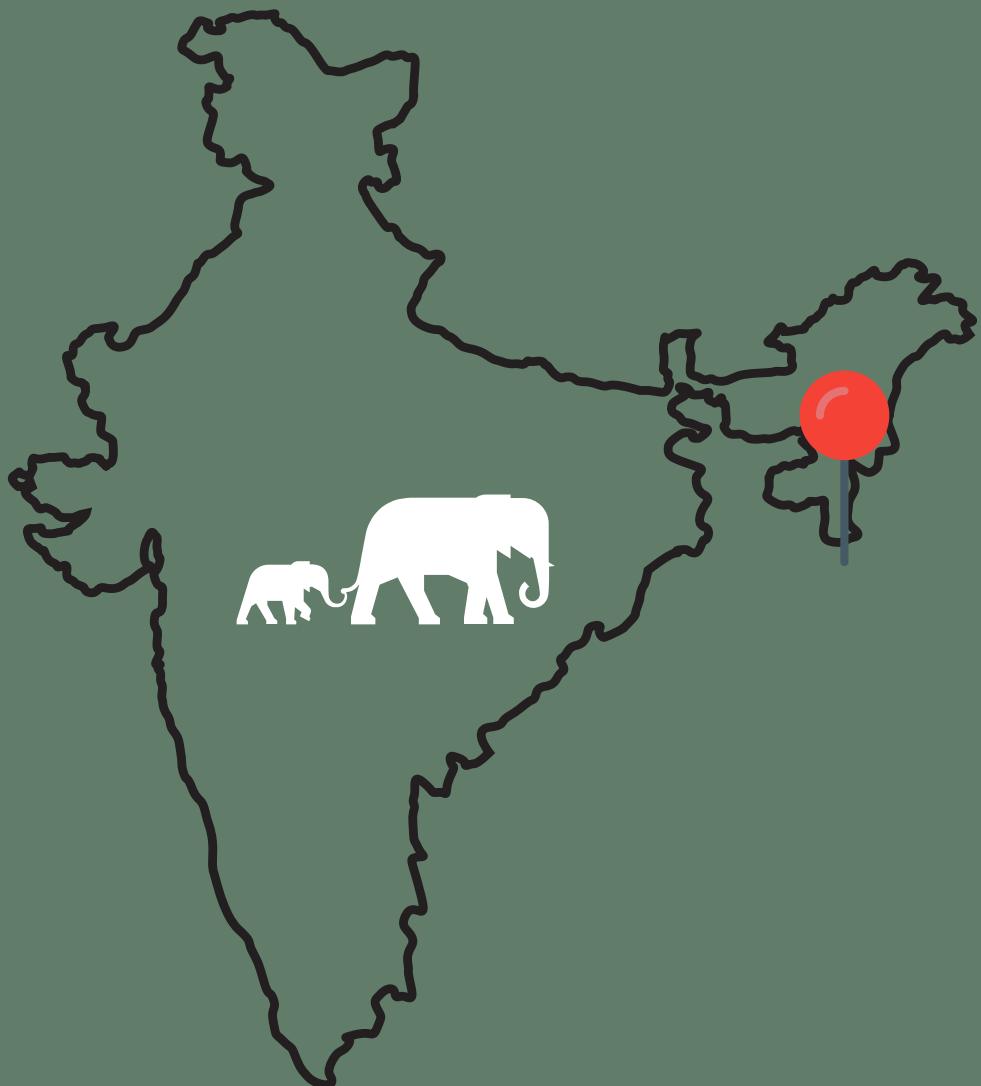
Our philosophy is simple yet notable - it is to spread compassion and tolerance towards our gentle giants.

In our traditional folklore, elephants are known as ‘Sarabjans’ - meaning the wisest and cleverest. We believe that as socially intelligent animals, elephants are receptive to complex social cues and expressions.

By expressing compassion and tolerance towards them through appropriate conservation actions, we can affirm, from experience, that they will reciprocate in incredible ways - thereby paving a shift in the dynamic relationship between man and elephant from aggression and hostility to tolerance and co-existence.



# THE NATURE OF HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT IN ASSAM



Assam comprises a population of 5,719 wild elephants in the region and is considered a crucial conservation zone for Asian elephants in India.

However, over the years, Assam has been flagged as a region with high human-elephant conflict cases in the country - thereby posing a significant conservation threat to the remaining population of elephants within its borders.

1

## *Loss of elephant habitats*

Unsustainable clearing of forest areas and extraction of forest resources for agricultural and commercial purposes are increasing conflicts over space between humans and elephants in Assam. It is estimated that between 1990-1998 more than 1500 sq/km (37%) of forest area had been illegal encroached upon and destroyed in the region. Such activities have forced elephants to change their migratory routes and stray towards human settlements in search of food, thus bringing the animals into more frequent confrontations with humans.

2

## *Loss of community crops and local livelihoods*

Elephants foraging on paddy crops cultivated by farmers are a common sight in Assam. Most human-elephant conflicts take place during Nov-Jan - which is the local harvesting season for crops. Due to loss of habitat and subsequent loss of food security, elephants are compelled to forage on community crops to satisfy their nutritional requirements, irrespective of the risks or costs involved. Because Assam is predominantly an agrarian state, such activities adversely impact farmer livelihoods and evoke negative attitudes towards wild elephants locally. Moreover, the economic losses sustained by farmers often drive them to retaliate violently towards elephants to protect their livelihoods - thus, causing high tensions between locals and elephants in the region.

### 3

## *Violent retaliation against elephants*

Vulnerability to crop and property damage causes farmers to negatively perceive elephants as the greatest threat to their livelihoods. Because the losses incurred from crop and property damage are disproportionately high, farmers resort to retaliatory killings of elephants to guard their fields. Some of the retaliatory practices employed are pelting stones, burning bamboo and chillies, bursting firecrackers, and shooting air pellets at migrating herds. Such acts of violence can leave a herd of elephants severely injured and displaced.



# OUR APPROACH FOR HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ASSAM



## 1. Elephant Habitat Enrichment Program

Due to depleting forest habitats and resources, we recognise the lack of food security as a pressing concern for elephants. To aid this problem, we have designed a program focusing mainly on identifying and mapping elephant migratory routes and subsequently improving the quality of those areas through the plantation of favourable grass species such as Tiger broom grass (*Thysanolaena*), Tora (*Alpinia nigra*), Napier (*Cenchrus purpureus*), and fruit trees such as elephants apples (*Dillenia Indica*), and Jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*) - to supplement the nutritional requirements of elephants.

The logic behind this initiative is that by improving food security for wild elephants in their natural habitats, crop raiding behaviours in community crop fields will drastically be reduced.



## **2. Community Paddy Plantation Program**

This is a collaborative program with local communities to initiate paddy plantation for elephants on community land - thereby creating a ‘Food buffer Zone’ to keep elephant herds strategically contained in a demarcated area for a short period and away from primary crop fields during the harvesting season.

This program is currently ongoing and is operational in a remote village area called - Ronghong Village, situated in Assam’s Nagaon district. Sixty-five acres of community land is selected annually to plant paddy crops for migrating elephants to forage, thus preventing them from straying towards community fields in search of food.

This has been one of our most successful projects and has helped inform our study on elephant behaviours.



### **3. Community skill development and training program**

As mentioned earlier, one of our core beliefs is to help empower rural communities to manage human-elephant conflict and manage the subsequent losses that are associated with it.

Our community skill development and training program mainly focuses on agriculture-based vocational training such as bee-keeping, animal husbandry, agroforestry practices etc. The purpose of this training program is to help enrich and elevate local skillsets and support local communities to expand their livelihoods and businesses. By doing so, we empower communities affected by human-elephant conflict to manage their losses effectively and find additional livelihood opportunities that benefit them economically and socially.



#### **4. Sensitisation and awareness program for rural children**

Our sensitisation and awareness program aims to inform and educate young audiences in rural areas on the various environmental challenges existing today such as climate change, forest degradation, illegal poaching and human-wildlife conflict - with a special focus on elephant conservation. The program engages learning tools such as games and simulations, debates, discussions, presentations, and artwork to stimulate young audiences to pave the way for positive environmental change.



# OUR UP-COMING PROJECTS



## Rehabilitation centre for abandoned, orphaned, and old domesticated elephants.

This project is currently in progress and may take 2-3 years to be fully completed. However, our aim is to establish a 'Hati-Bondhu Elephant Rehabilitation Centre (HBERC)' that focuses on the welfare and upkeep of abandoned, orphaned, injured and old retired elephants.

Necessary steps are underway to develop an excellent infrastructure that can accommodate more than 30 elephants, along with appropriate facilities to cater to their dietary, medical, and physical requirements.

## Mahout (*Elephant trainers*) Training workshops facilitated by Ms Parbati Barua.

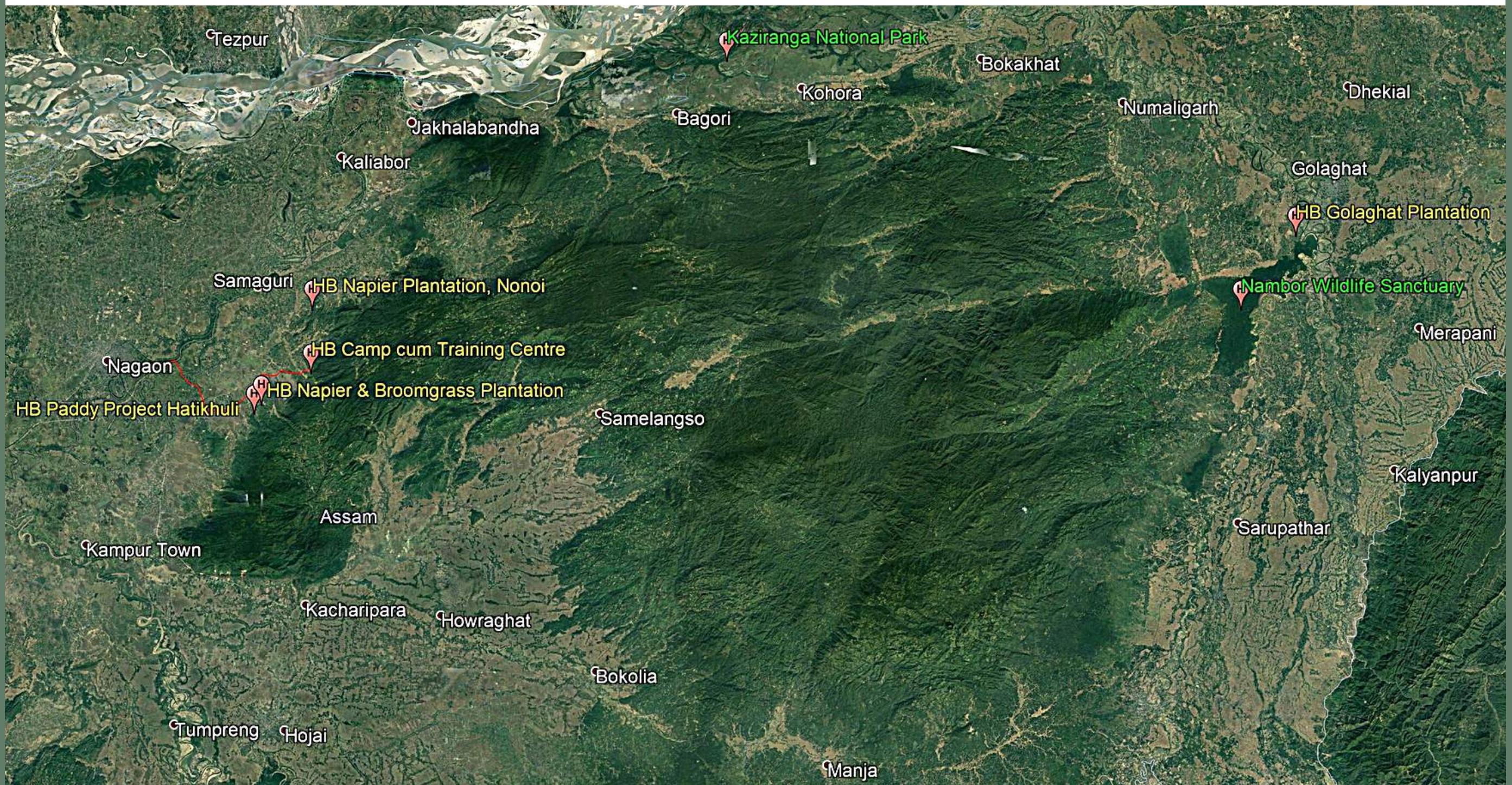
This program is designed in collaboration with the forest department of Assam and with Miss Parbati Barua, India's renowned and only female Mahout. The program aims to train young mahouts (elephant trainers) on the dietary, medical, and physical requirements of domesticated elephants, along with appropriate methods of handling and maintaining them.

This program is currently underway and we aim to conduct our first workshop between December 2021- March 22



*Image: Renowned elephant trainer Parbati Barua (left) and Hati Bondhu President Pradip Kumar Bhuyan (Right) stand alongside two domesticated elephants in Hatikuli, located in Assam's Nagaon District.*

# FIELD OPERATIONS 2021-22



## Community Plantation in Golaghat, Assam

Golaghat has always been an active human-elephant conflict zone in Assam. Increasing human populations, demands for cultivable lands and conversion of forest habitat to human habitation and cropland, has resulted in serious conflicts between locals and elephants in the area. Marked by ruthless violence, aggression, injuries, and high cases of human and elephant deaths annually - Golaghat is in urgent need of human-elephant conflict management.

To address this, we are expanding our mitigation operations in the area and have identified strategic locations to initiate mass plantation of Napier grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) - thereby creating natural buffers for elephants that stray towards local villages in search for food. Our operations will commence during the peak human-elephant conflict period, which is between Nov - Jan (2021-2022) , with full support from local volunteers, and stakeholders.

## Habitat Enrichment Program in Hatikuli, Assam



According to our field survey, Hatikuli, which falls under two districts - Golaghat and Karbi Anglong, is marked as an important and frequent migratory route for wild elephants. However, expansion of agricultural and industrial activities have left forest areas in Hatikuli barren and depleted. To address this issue, we initiated a Napier (*Pennisetum purpureum*) and Tiger Broom grass(*Thysanolaena*) plantation program in Hatikuli - which has been ongoing since May 2020. Both Napier and Tiger broom grass are endemic to the area and are characterised as fast-growing grass species with high regenerative capacity. For this program, we planted 100,000 saplings of Napier and Tiger Broom grass (each) on approximately 70 acres of barren land in Hatikuli.



Based on our field observations and report, plantation of such fast-growing - yet favourable grass species - was a significant step forward towards supplementing food security and enriching the quality of elephant habitat in the area. Due to the program's positive outcome in Hatikuli, we intend to extend our habitat enrichment model to other suitable and neighbouring locations by 2021.

## Community Paddy plantation in Ronghong Village, Assam

Farming communities in Ronghong village located on the foothills of Karbi Anglong experience high levels of crop raids and property damage by elephants annually- thereby causing frequent conflicts between local farmers and wild elephants in search of food. Both locals from the area and elephants have suffered fatal injuries and in some cases - death, due to rising tensions between the two.

As a part of our initiative to mitigate human-elephant conflict, we started a paddy plantation on 68 acres of community-owned land for elephants in Ronghong Village in 2018. After twenty sessions of stakeholder meeting and focus group discussions, Hati Bondhu was able to convince farmers from Ronghong village to work towards the cause of elephant welfare and gained their support for the paddy plantation program.

The project outcome revealed that the intervention was effective as herds of approximately 350 elephants feasted on the paddy plantations and remained confined in the plantation site for three days during the - typically tense harvesting season. This outcome enabled farmers from Ronghong Village, and neighbouring villages to harvest their paddy crops without any external disturbances. Our field study and observations revealed that 10,000 acres of community agricultural fields benefitted from this intervention. Due to our program success, we have continued our program operations in Ronghong village and are expanding our paddy plantation activities in the fringe areas of Karbi Anglong, with help from our local partners.



## **Skill development and Training workshops in Chapanala, Assam**

Our ongoing skill development and training workshops focus on developing vocational skills and improving livelihood opportunities for rural communities living in fringe areas. Often, due to lack of good employment opportunities, exposure, training, and consistent income - communities living in remote forest areas resort to illegal activities such as logging, poaching, and stone quarrying. These illegal activities impede conservation efforts and cause a major threat to the sustenance of natural habitats and local wildlife. Moreover, many rural communities experience substantial economic losses due to crop and property damage caused by elephants. Such losses fuel aggression and violence towards elephants locally.

To address this, we have - and continue to - organise workshops in the fringe areas of Chapanala, located in Assam's Nagaon district, to empower isolated and low-income communities through vocational skill development and training workshops three days a week. Hati-Bondhu provides agriculture-based training with government-supported schemes and facilities to help create better economic opportunities for those who require it and are economically affected by human-elephant conflict. Our community skill development and training program is ongoing and we aim to continue improving the livelihood status of rural communities and help mitigate economic losses sustained from human-elephant conflict.

### **Sensitisation and awareness program for rural school children in Chapanala, Assam.**

As part of our mission to protect elephants in the wild, we have organised a series of activity-based workshops for rural school children focusing on environment and wildlife conservation in our Hati Bondhu base camp, located in Chapanala, Assam. The workshops allow us to inform young audiences of different age groups on the various environmental challenges that confront our society today. Our sensitisation and awareness workshops are conducted in the Hati Bondhu training centre, once a week. We engage learning tools such as games, plays, discussions, and presentations to stimulate students from different academic backgrounds.

This year, we are expanding our program outreach by extending our scope of participation to senior students studying in neighbouring colleges and universities near Chapanala. The goal is to create dialogue amongst the youth living in rural areas on multiple environmental issues - especially human and elephant conflict. Our program also sponsors resource persons - such as local environment entrepreneurs, activists, conservationists, practitioners - to help facilitate workshops and impart their field knowledge and experiences.

# OUR FOOTPRINTS

Assam's 'Jumbo Khet' fends off man-wildlife conflict



A group of 12 villages in the central Assam's Nagaon district has created a 'Jumbo Khet' or Elephant farm. The jumbo khet is basically a meal zone where crops like paddy, banana, and even Napier grass are grown for the Elephants to feed on. It is a rather innovative method of restricting movement of Elephants to the designated area and avoid them from wading off to fields of these

 PATH - Future for Conservation  
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NGO Hatibondhu managed to convince the locals of Ronghang-Hatikhuli village to grow crops for the elephants.

GUWAHATI: In a unique departure, the locals at a village in Assam village have started cultivating paddy, themselves, instead of fighting, easy to set aside land especially

The concept is unprecedented in An NGO, Hatibondhu, managed Hatikhuli, a Karbi (tribe) village to grow crops for the elephants. They are being aided by the state's and agriculture departments.

The villagers are also growing Napier Grass, commonly referred to as elephant grass. "We had received a proposal from Hatibondhu for logistics. It requested us for paddy seeds. When I shared the NGO's concept with the department of agriculture, it agreed to provide s

OTHER STATES

## Assam villagers donate land for elephant meal zones

Rahul Karmakar



GUWAHATI, AUGUST 13, 2019 01:30 IST  
UPDATED: AUGUST 13, 2019 20:26 IST

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## Assam village grows paddy for jumbos first

NGO Hatibondhu managed to convince the locals of Ronghang-Hatikhuli village to grow crops for the elephants.



Published: 28th July 2019 10:35 AM | Last Updated: 28th July 2019 10:35 AM



Villagers plant paddy for elephants in Ronghang-Hatikhuli in Assam | Express

## Guided by an 86-year-old man, young couple in Assam turns saviour for farmers to check conflict with wild elephants

According to data provided by Assam forest department, 359 people died in 1,165 human-elephant conflicts between 2015 and 2019

## A Friendly Barrier: Assam's Innovative 'Elephant Meal Zone' Plan Spurs Hopes of Peaceful Coexistence With Wild Pachyderms



A local couple and an NGO have spearheaded the unique project that has allowed thousands of farmers in the Nagaon district to live in harmony with the tuskers, ending years of conflict that has claimed the lives of hundreds of humans and elephants.

- NEWS18
- LAST UPDATED: NOVEMBER 24, 2020, 18:52 IST
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TULIKA DEVI

## 200 Bighas Paddy For Elephants

By Pratidin Bureau — Last updated Oct 2, 2019

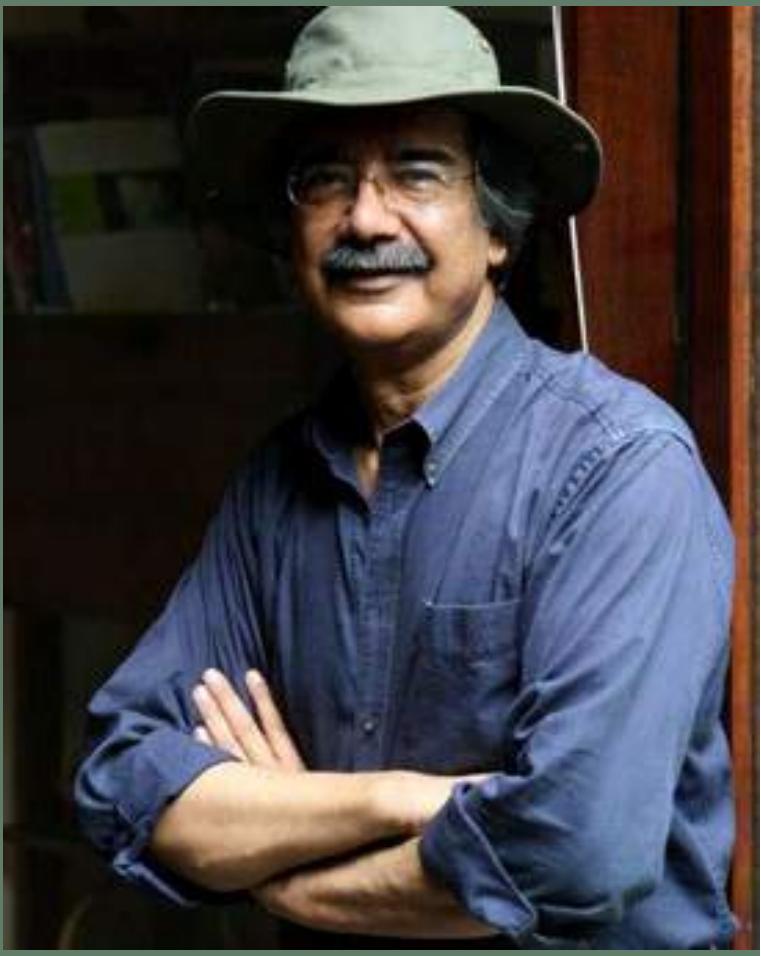


Ronghang-Hatikhuli, a village in Assam's Nagaon district has started growing crops for wild elephants. Fighting off the wild elephants, the locals had started cultivating paddy, first for the jumbos and then for themselves under the aegis of Hatibondhu – an NGO in the state.

"Paddy for Elephants" – a brain-child of Pradip Kumar Bhuyan, director of Hatibondhu and it is being supported by the state's forest and agriculture departments.

ASSAM | PR

## MESSAGES



**Mike Pandey**

AWARD WINNING WILDLIFE FILMMAKER &  
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST

Hati Bondhu's strategy to avoid Man-Elephant conflict is undoubtedly the most effective and successful programme I have seen in the country or even in Africa . Tireless efforts and motivation provided by one man ...Pradip Bhuyan brought the communities together not only to put their shoulders in a joint community effort but they also offered their ancestral land to create the most amazing buffer of " lure crops " between their crops n the wild elephants. Enabling smooth harvesting... No loss of life has been reported since the begining of this unique project. The entire credit goes to Pradeep Bhuyan's Hathi bandhu ...the passion dedication of one man whose tireless commitment has resulted in saving human lives n property. ...A viable solution that can be replicated in man animal conflict areas across the country . A viable solution and a win win for man and India's elephants.



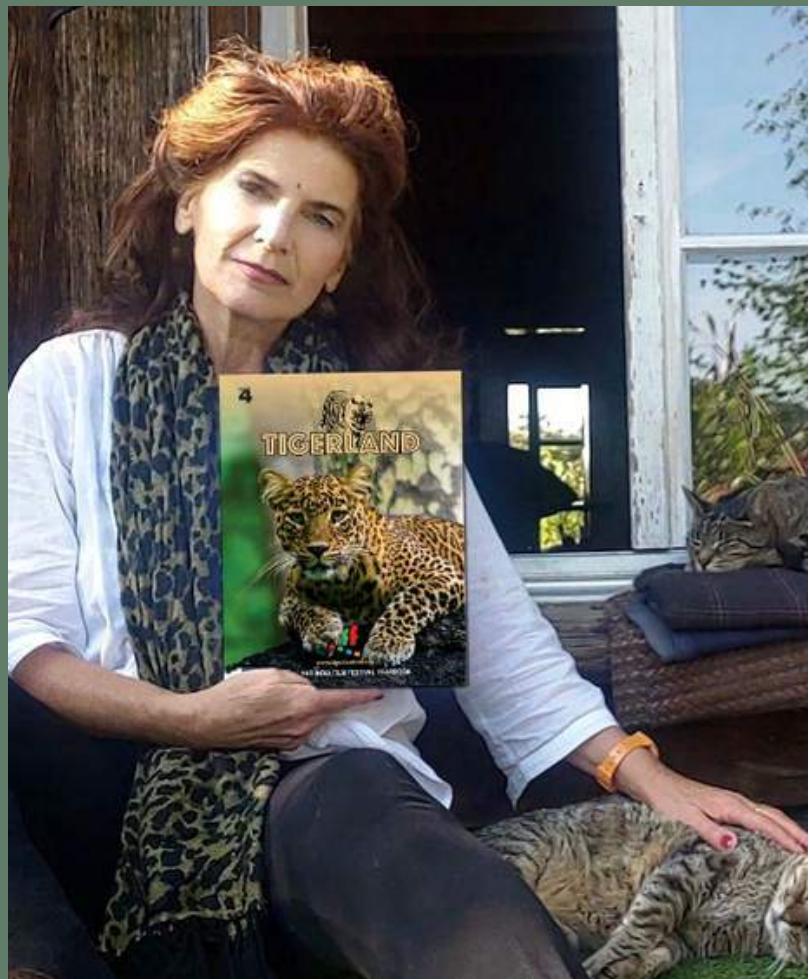
**Papon**

SINGER & COMPOSER

Till the day I went to stay at the Hati Bondhu Camp, I didn't realize how unique and effective it is, what they have done! My friend Roon's father, Mr Pradip Bhuyan, has been tirelessly working to find solutions for man – elephant conflicts at the age of 85, along with local wild life activists like Dulu Bora. And what they have achieved in 3 years is no less than a miracle! There has been literally no conflict and loss of life in just, such a short period of, an idea and a project taking off! The villagers who would almost hate elephants for the loss of their crop and the mess they thought the elephants created are now, "Hati Bondhus"- friends of the elephants!

As much as I read about stuff around the world this design is so unique and fruitful, that it should surely be adopted by all other places in India where there is man – elephant conflict. The villagers willingly give one crop to the elephants annually, and the elephants in return come down to their designated area only and leave after they eat their favorite paddy. They no more head towards the rest of the land or the village! And in just a short period of 3 years, the elephants acknowledged this gesture by the villagers! It's no less than a miracle. I am so happy to be a part in motivating Hati Bondhu volunteers to do more and convince other areas to do the same, which they plan to now. Hope I can help, in any way. Roon Bhuyan and Dulu Bora to augment what Pradip Bhuyan uncle envisioned.

## MESSAGES



**Brigitte Kornetzky**

SWISS - GERMAN WRITER, ARTIST &  
FILMMAKER, ELEPHANT ACTIVIST

We all are here to help unfold the divine purpose of nature only. This is done by pure heart and love for the elephants and nature. And, it depends on the collaboration of the brave villagers who have put enormous efforts and believe into it. The villagers have shown all the same big love, compassion and trust for their elephants, and believed the guidance by Pradip Bhuyan Sarabjan sir and Roon Bhuyan, and by Dulu Bora & Meghna Hazarika who do the fantastic work in the field. God bless your all good spirits. May this project be an example for all the conflict areas inside the country of Assam and across borders, and reunite people who struggle about their crops with love and compassion for elephants and nature. I have never seen such a successful and loving project before. Elephants do remember us.



**Sanjay Upadhyay**

ADVOCATE SUPREME COURT AND  
MANAGING PARTNER, ENVIRO LEGAL  
DEFENCE FIRM, INDIA'S FIRST  
ENVIRONMENTAL LEGAL FIRM.

For me, Hathi Bondhu is not a program but a movement led by the Octogenarian, Activist, Social Worker, Environmentalist, Naturalist, Philanthropist.....Shri Pradip Bhuyan. A movement where Dulu Bora, Roon Bhuyan, the Osom Educational Trust have played a key role and framed the rightly coined “Elephant Haven Habitation Project”. It is my fortune that I have been associated with the program since its inception more as a well wisher and a policy guide and seeing it grow from a humble program to a movement that has now attracted global attention.

The Policy makers, the Forest Department of Assam, the MOEF& CC are all aware of the Program in such a short span of time. I wish this program becomes a flagship movement in the history of Elephant conservation in India where, tradition, culture, ecology, music, wildlife science all merge into a coalition of efforts to save these magnificent and gentle giants... symbolically the Lord Ganesh.

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**HATI BONDHU**  
an initiative of Osom Educational Trust

**Human-Elephant Conflict Mitigation Program.**

Bringing communities and stake holders together

Hati Bondhu Camp & Training Centre  
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"OUR OWN HEART IS OUR TEMPLE. THE PHILOSOPHY IS KINDNESS"...DALAI LAMA

**ELEPHANT HABITAT ENRICHMENT PROGRAM**

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"WE ADMIRE ELEPHANTS IN PART BECAUSE THEY DEMONSTRATE WHAT WE CONSIDER THE FINEST HUMAN TRAITS: EMPATHY, SELF-AWARENESS, AND SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE. BUT THE WAY WE TREAT THEM PUTS ON DISPLAY THE VERY WORST OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR."  
— GRAYDON CARTER

**ELEPHANT HABITAT ENRICHMENT PROGRAM**

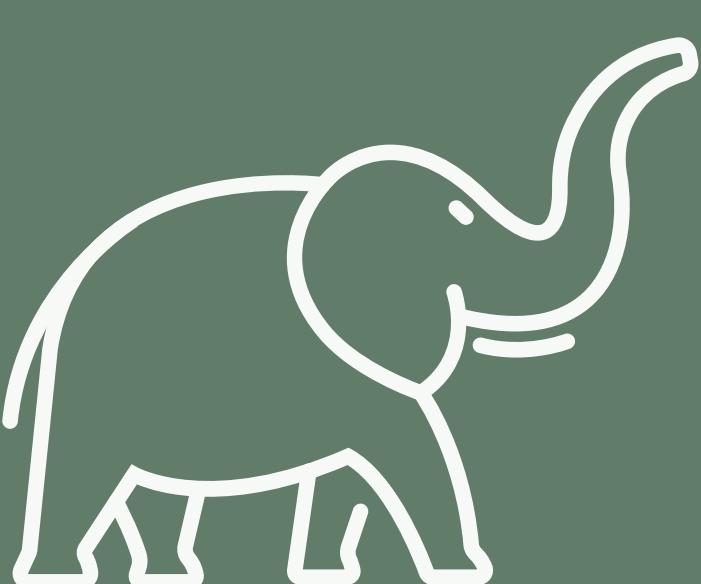
Elephant footprints - paddy plantation site Napier Plantation

Hati Bondhu plants about 70 acres of paddy for the elephants and for 21 days, over 250 elephants forage the paddy allowing the nearby communities to harvest their crops.

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