



The Lanka Nature Conservationists (LNC) is a voluntary, non-profit Association of wildlife and nature enthusiasts and activists operating in Sri Lanka.

LNC is an Association of past members of the Young Zoologists Association (YZA) of Sri Lanka who have re-grouped for the purpose of providing support for the protection of fauna, flora and the natural ecosystems in Sri Lanka.

Our mission is to stand for the conservation of biodiversity endangered by nature unfriendly economic development activities and destructive human behavior.

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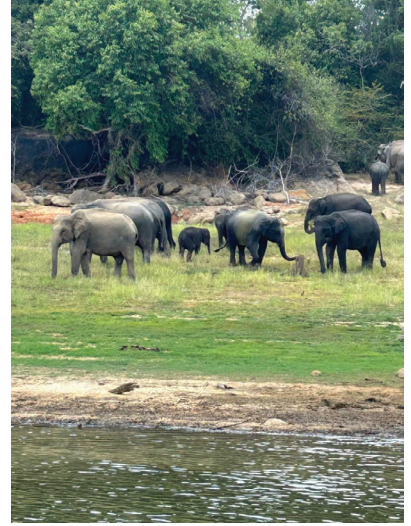
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# LNC Ex-CO Trip To Ekgaloya, Ampara

LNC field trip to Ampara was held from 3 – 5 October, 2025 . They had the good fortune to observe the habitat of wild elephants at Senanayake Samudraya. The group also visited the Buduruwagala heritage site and the ancient Galabadda pond which was used by Queen Sugaladevi.



Those participated had the opportunity to join in a tree planting campaign to enrich the degraded forest area in Paragahakele, Ampara which was organized by Environmental Task Force Ampara through District Coordinator, Mr. M M Asmy.



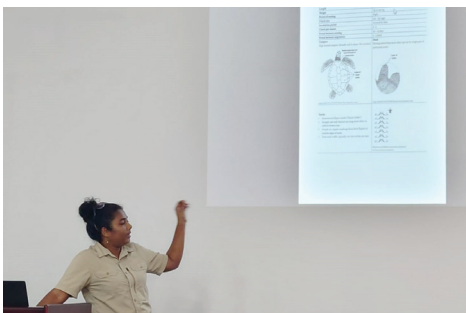
# TACHUP - COASTAL AND TURTLE HEALTH UNITED PROGRAMME ( NEW SEASON 2025 )

TACHUP is a volunteer program by members of five organizations, namely, Lanka Nature Conservationists, Young Zoologists Association, Wildlife and Nature Protection Society, Horizon Campus, and The Wayamba University.

TACHUP plans for the next turtle season was held on 11 October 2025 at WNPS Head Office in Battaramulla.



WNPS along with LNC conducted a training session for the volunteers, for the patrolling during the new season. This was held on 1st of November, at the John Keells Auditorium, No. 186, Vauxhall Street, Colombo. The session consisted of two segments. The first segment was held to educate about the activities the patrollers will be engaged in, what to avoid when encountering a turtle, the safety guidelines that must be followed and volunteers past experience in patrolling.



# Practical Session

A separate practical session was held on the same day at Dehiwala Coast Guard Center. LNC is partnering with other organizations to help conserve our endangered turtles, especially to ensure the nesting turtles and baby turtles along the Colombo coastline.

LNC Exco member, Mr Dilup Chandranimal, the Habitat restoration Adviser led the discussion on beach habitat and vegetation restoration, and the Collection of Turtle eggs and restoration was well demonstrated by Ms Malka and Mr Aravinda from YZA.



# LNC delegation meeting with the Colombo District Secretary

A LNC delegation met with the District Secretary Mr. Prasanna Ginige and Additional GA Land, Ms. Kaushalya on 01 September 2025, to propose the newly created land mass at Galle face to be declared as a sanctuary. However, it was assured that this area will not be given for any construction or such purposes.

This meeting was arranged by our EXCO - member Mr Prakrama Fernando, was attended by Major General Ajith Rupasinghe and Ms Manoja Weerakkody, (Secretary of LNC)



## COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP DAY AND NATIONAL MARINE RESOURCES CONSERVATION WEEK – 20TH TO 26TH SEPTEMBER, 2025 ORGANISED BY MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY (MEPA)

Marine pollution is a critical global challenge, with rising volumes of plastic and solid waste entering the oceans each year. As an island nation, Sri Lanka is particularly vulnerable, with polluted coastlines threatening marine ecosystems, fisheries, tourism, and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Addressing this concern requires collective commitment and collaboration of all sectors of society. The National program was held at the Panadura Beach Park on 20th September 2025, with the participation of government officials, school children, university students, NGOs, and coastal communities. This project coordinated by the Environment Task Force (ETF) from Kalutara district, Mr M.A.D.J. Samarasinghe and Mr. M.D.A.S. Kumara. There were 50 young student volunteers, parents and teachers, from the district schools who took part in the garbage collection and sorting effort under the guidance of the LNC members.



A TACHUP Turtle Awareness Program was conducted for students of the ICBT (International College of Business and Technology) Campus, to encourage volunteer participation for beach patrol during the next Turtle season.



# Protecting Our Marine Turtles - Professor Erandi Pathirana

This article looks at the global picture of marine turtles in the face of human impacts on the marine environment and how we should systematically investigate into the cause of death of an individual turtle or a population of marine turtles.

## Why are marine turtles unique?

Marine turtles are a fascinating group of marine reptiles. Unlike most other turtles and tortoises, marine turtles cannot retract their head and limbs into their shells, in threatened situations. They can be found in all oceans except in the Polar regions. During their nesting season, female turtles swim ashore to lay eggs on sandy beaches. After an incubation period of 50-60 days, baby turtles hatch out, dig through the sand, and crawl to the sea. This is a magical sight which needs to be witnessed by anyone who loves the sea and its wonderful creatures. Sri Lanka is recognised as one of few places in the world to observe the natural habitat of marine turtles thus, numerous foreign and local tourists visit each year to witness this fascinating natural behavior of marine turtles.



Baby Turtle hatching

At present, seven species of sea turtles are reported to exist in our blue planet and Sri Lanka is home to five of those species, the green turtle, olive ridley turtle, hawksbill turtle, loggerhead turtle and leatherback turtle. Overall, six of the seven species of sea turtles are listed as either vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered in the Red List of Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The leatherback, claimed to be the largest of those five species, is critically endangered and is reported to be rare in Sri Lankan waters. It is therefore important and timely to study the reasons for the threats of existence of these amazing creatures and the solutions to prevent their potential extinction from this planet.



Baby Turtles returning to sea

## Threats to marine turtle life



To date, several threats have been identified for the existence of marine turtles. Different coastal communities of the world hunt sea-turtles as a source of food, adding more pressure on the numbers of this threatened

creature. The use of turtle shells in the production of ornaments and turtle-oil in the production of cosmetics and medicine have added to this threat. Though many countries have banned the collection of Turtle eggs, illegal harvesting is not uncommon. According to research carried out by the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) of Sri Lanka, the collection of marine turtle eggs from the rookeries for human consumption and also for marketing to turtle hatcheries have been identified as major threats to the existence of marine turtles in Sri Lanka.

Globally, longline and trawl fishing have been accused of accidental capture of marine turtles. Thousands of turtles (covering all species) get killed in shrimp trawls, longline fisheries, and large numbers get drowned in gill nets. Of all threats faced by the Turtles, the marine debris and chemical pollution in the marine environment have captured the greatest attention. Accumulation of plastics in the marine environment is a growing environmental concern. Annually,

over 1 million marine animals are estimated to be killed because of plastic debris in our oceans. Marine turtles are particularly vulnerable because of the risk of ingesting plastic debris which can become lethal to these animals. It is a well-known fact that leatherback turtles cannot distinguish between a jellyfish (which is one of their prey) that is swimming in the sea, from a floating plastic bag. Moreover, entanglement by marine debris, including discarded or lost fishing gear and netting materials, and plastic onion sacks have resulted in the loss of many marine turtles.

### **Mass mortalities of marine turtles in our beaches**

Unlike the individual stranding of marine turtles reported in various beaches of the world, the alarming mass mortality outbreaks of marine turtles have gotten much attention. The occurrence of mass stranding of marine turtles in our beaches soon after the X-Press Pearl vessel accident created a significant focus on the marine turtles in Sri Lankan waters.

According to the reports of the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), Sri Lanka, annually an average of 5 turtle deaths are reported in our shores, excluding the death of baby turtles. In the year 2020, three dead turtles were reported before the vessel MT New Diamond caught fire in our seas, and fifteen dead turtles were reported following this fire. More than 170 dead turtles were reported following the devastation of the MV X-Press Pearl vessel. The investigations of the death of those marine turtles washed ashore, still remains unclear. Is it an aftermath of the fire in X-Press Pearl? If so, what actually did happen to the turtles? What can be the cause of this mass mortality outbreak? After all, it was our marine turtle population that was dying.

### **Harmful algal blooms (HABs)**

Toxic or harmful algal blooms (HAB) have been reported to cause mass mortalities in marine turtles in various parts of the world including Florida, USA, and in the Gulf of Mexico. A mass stranding of 318 marine turtles were reported in one such outbreak on the west coast of Florida, USA, during 2005, 2006. High concentrations of the algal toxin were recorded in the stomach contents of more than 90% of both live and dead stranded animals tested positive for the toxin produced by the single-celled algae *Karenia brevis*. It was also thought that when the turtles came to the surface for breathing, they inhaled the toxins blown in the air by the action of wind and waves which was. The scientists suggested the presence of suspected HABs around the fire-stricken X-Press Pearl, however, the association of a HAB with the mass turtle stranding in our shores in 2022 was unable to confirm and to prove.

### **Impact of chemical pollution in the marine environment**

Besides the possibility of a toxic algal bloom, the X-Press Pearl was reported to have carried loads of hazardous toxic substances and plastic nurdles. A variety of fish species, dolphins and whales were also reported dead on our shores following this tragic incident of X-Press Pearl. While the impacts of chemical pollution on marine life such as that of whales, seals and fish, are well-studied, the threats of chemical contamination of the marine environment on turtles are mostly understudied. Could there had been an adverse impact of these hazardous chemicals on our marine turtles?

With the increased interest and attention in the potential association between seawater contamination and mortality in marine turtle populations, it is particularly important to follow correct procedures when collecting samples from stranded turtles, for toxicologic analysis. Apart from potential, short-term toxicities, bioaccumulation of hormone-mimicking chemicals such as atrazine, lead, zinc and copper have been proposed to alter reproductive hormones (oestrogens and testosterone) in turtles, potentially reducing the reproductive capacity in nesting turtles.

Studies have shown varying levels of heavy metals such as copper, cadmium, lead, and mercury in marine turtle populations depending on the species, region, stage of life cycle and tissue type sampled. Considering the concentration of toxic substances found in the top-level predators (carnivorous fish such as tuna) in the marine food web, there is a high risk of chemical contaminants in the marine environment which could get accumulated in the tissues of turtles, with their long life spans, that occupy different levels in the marine food web. This can lead to long-term impacts on marine turtles, such as reduced reproductive performances, which will further aggravate the existing threats experienced by these animals. Research has also shown that chemical contaminants can pass down to the next generations of turtles, through eggs.

### **Legal protection to marine turtle life**

What measures have been taken to protect this threatened animal population? Marine turtles are protected by law in most countries, including Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, marine turtles are protected under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance administered by the Department of Wildlife Conservation since March 1, 1938 (amended in July 20, 1972) and the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 1996. Relevant permits are required for any investigation including post-mortem examinations, on these animals. Independent organizations such as the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) are actively working on marine turtle conservation strategies through education, research and community participation. Considering the threats faced by marine turtles, it is a challenging task for veterinarians, marine scientists and other responsible parties to investigate the cause or causes of mass mortality outbreaks in marine turtles, within a legal framework.

### **Post-mortem examinations**

One of the main approaches taken in solving the mystery of the mass stranding of marine turtles in beaches, is to conduct post-mortem examinations followed by laboratory examinations for further diagnosis. Unfortunately, the diagnosis of the cause of death through post-mortem examinations is hampered by numerous factors. By the time the dead turtles are found ashore, most had undergone severe post-mortem changes, making it difficult to identify the true cause of death and assess the damages to the carcasses, by both gross and microscopic examinations of body tissues of the dead turtles. The degree of decomposition can be grossly assessed from the external appearance of the shell, corneal opacity in the eyes of turtles, colour changes/darkening and sloughing of the skin, pooling of blood in lower parts (dependent parts) of the body of the turtle, degree of swelling, and odour. In fresh marine turtle carcasses, while the eyes can be sunken due to dehydration, bulged out eyes indicate post-mortem changes. It should be noted that though veterinarians face practical limitations and difficulties in examining these large marine creatures in the coastal environment, all possible investigations are done to determine the cause of death.

### **Ingestion of marine plastics**

What observations have been made by veterinarians and marine biologists during post-mortem examinations of dead marine turtles? Accidental capture of marine turtles in fisheries results in damages to the gut following the ingestion of fishing lines which is visible even without opening up the gut. However, deaths caused by ingestion of marine plastic debris require thorough post-mortem examination before confirming the cause of death. Sometimes, plastic bags protruding from the cloaca/back of the turtle can be observed during preliminary examination of the carcasses. Globally, it has been estimated that about 52% of all marine turtles have ingested plastic debris in their gut. Deaths can

also be due to the impacts of plastic ingestion, even with a single item of plastic, such as, perforation or obstruction of the gut by the plastic item ingested. Both the structure of the marine turtle gut and the composition of debris that have been ingested play a role in mortality. The gut of marine turtles is prone to accumulation of debris, unlike most other animals, as they cannot vomit the food/debris they have ingested. On the other hand, rather than passing out ingested plastic items, as it is, soft plastics ingested at different times can get merged into a single compact item, resulting in obstruction and damage to the gut. While small plastic particles can remain in the gut of a marine turtle up to four months, a plastic sheet can remain even up to six months. Thus, the results of plastic ingestion may be seen long after the plastic item has been ingested. When attempting to study the gut contents to find out the cause of death, the contents of the gut has to be sieved to extract any plastics present. Marine turtles of different age groups can be exposed to different types of debris. Adult turtles living in the coast might encounter larger plastic debris that has recently washed into the ocean, while young turtles living in the open sea (pelagic region) might get exposed to smaller fragments that have been degraded.

### **Routine post-mortem observations**

In addition to the observations made on the damages by ingested plastics, marine turtles can exhibit changes in skin colour (red/purple) due to infections or bleeding in the scutes (bony plates of the shell of a turtle), burns (dead, sloughing or black skin) and in toxicities (reddening or discoloration of the skin). Marine turtles, like other reptiles may show black spots in their liver when their liver cells take in foreign substances. This black colouration may increase with the increasing amount of foreign materials. Histopathological samples from liver, kidneys and lungs are good candidates to identify suspected toxicities coupled with laboratory testing for any suspected toxins.

### **Way forward**

With the ever-increasing amount of pollution and frequent accidents happening in our marine environments, there is an increasing role to play by veterinarians in diagnosing the various environmental factors threatening the marine aquatic life. Yet there are numerous knowledge gaps that needs to be bridged in order to better understand the impacts of the present-day marine environment, on the health of marine turtles. Overall, a holistic (One Health) approach promoting collaborative research among veterinary diagnosticians, marine biologists, environmental scientists, oceanographers and chemical scientists, is essential to improve our knowledge and to combat the multiple threats faced by this amazing marine creature to ensure its sustainability in this blue planet.

**Prof. Erandi Pathirana** BVSc (Peradeniya) MSc (Osaka) PhD (Sydney) FSLCVS

Head, Department of Aquatic Bioresources

Faculty of Urban and Aquatic Bioresources

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Email: erandi@sjp.ac.lk

# A Few Of Our Free Ranging Elephant Population

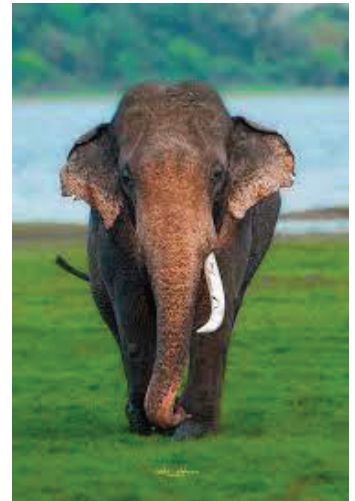
The Schedule of the Batticaloa Night Train has been amended from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. from Colombo Fort, as a measure to reduce elephant-train collisions (30 July 2025).

The Veddha Chief, Uru Warige Wannila Aththo, has urged the Government to implement stronger measures to prevent the killing of elephants and protect Sri Lankan wildlife. He said elephants are being driven out of their natural habitats as people increasingly settle in forest areas, thus elephants are forced to enter human settlements. (04 August, 2025 Daily Mirror).

A web-mobile based application using a geofencing approach has been developed by scientists from South Eastern University and the Open University of Sri Lanka to detect elephant intrusions and mitigate human-elephant conflict. This system has demonstrated a high detection rate for elephant intrusions on village boundaries, railway tracks, roadsides, expressways, etc.

(<http://ir.lib.seu.ac.lk/handle/123456789/6504>)

**Sumedha**, the celebrated tusker, known for his majestic presence in the "Majestic Gathering" of elephants at Minneriya National Park was sighted roaming near Minneriya with two baby elephants and appears to be healthy.



## Fall of Giants



**Bathiya**, the revered wild tusker who roamed the forests of Kalawewa in the North Western Province in Sri Lanka, who had been battling for his life over the past few days from a devastating blow of a trap gun injury, died 15 July 2025 in Polpithigama, despite the relentless efforts of veterinary surgeons, wildlife officers, and personnel from the police and army. The majestic elephant had been lying on his side in a muddy pit, suffering from multiple injuries and serious medical complications.

**Kandalama Hedakaraya** (The handsome pachyderm "Kandalama") – The majestic tusker, estimated to be between 25 and 30 years old, had been in critical condition after sustaining a fatal gunshot wound to one of its front legs. He had been shot on several previous occasions in the past as a result of the ongoing human–elephant conflict in the area.



<https://asianmirror.lk/news/7524/tusker-bathiya-dies-despite-rescue-efforts/>

<https://ceylontoday.lk/2025/07/23/echoes-of-a-fallen-giant-tusker-bathiyas-death-and-the-future-of-conservation/>

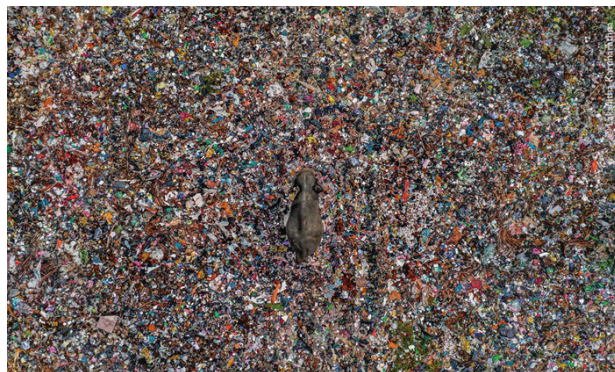
<https://www.adaderana.lk/news.php?nid=111445>,

<https://www.themorning.lk/articles/7r3GwXeInIz6128CVcCq>

# "Nature needs protectors, we step forward"

# Award Winning ‘Toxic Tip’ photograph of a Sri Lankan wild elephant

Sri Lankan Wildlife photographer Lakshitha Karunaratna Wins the Prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2025 Award. His photograph ‘Toxic Tip’ is selected among 100 award-winning photographs for the 61st Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award Ceremony scheduled on 13 October 2025 at the Natural History Museum in London.



Lakshitha Karunaratna’s photograph depicting a solitary elephant, captured in Sri Lanka’s Ampara District, navigating its way through a waste disposal site in Sri Lanka has been selected from a staggering and record-breaking 60,636 submissions from more than 120 countries, made for the award. Often called the Oscars of Wildlife Photography, #WPY has once again reminded the world that photography is not only art, but also a voice for the voiceless.

Lakshitha Karunaratna is the first Sri Lankan photographer to receive multiple awards in the competition’s impressive 61-year history. Speaking on the recognition, Lakshitha said: “This award is not just for me. It is a reminder of the urgent need to address how our waste and lifestyles affect wildlife. As Sri Lankans, elephants are part of our cultural identity, and protecting them is protecting our heritage.”



<https://www.newswire.lk/2025/09/02/toxic-tip-sri-lankan-shot-among-worldstop-wildlife-photos/>

<https://www.sayart.net/news/view/1065670805910191>

<https://buzzer.lk/sri-lankas-lakshitha-karunaratna-awarded-at-the-prestigious-wildlife-photographer-of-the-year-2025/>

## Vehicle Congestion At National Parks

Vehicle congestion at popular parks such as Yala, has become a growing concern with no concrete solution in sight.

Vehicle congestion poses significant threats to wildlife and the natural environment, and also affects the experience of visitors. The increasing number of vehicles entering these parks increase the pressure on the delicate ecosystems, raising concerns among environmentalists.

