

A study on selected characteristics of three age groups of captive elephants in Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage, Sri Lanka

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Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage (PEO) is one of the world recognized Ex-situ conservation center for Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*) in Sri Lanka. Present study was conducted from March to September 2017 to collect information on three age groups of captive elephants (n=24), namely calves (n=2) below the age of 6 years and adult females (n=17) and males (n=5) between 06-27 years of age. Relationships between height, weight with the age and gender of elephants, their food preference and the ecto-parasites on their skin were studied. Questionnaire based interviews were conducted with curators and mahouts to record information on diet and specific behavior patterns of the study elephants in PEO. Data on height, weight, age, sex, presence of skin hairs and ecto-parasites were recorded during the study period. According to the findings, height ($P<0.0001$) and weight ($P<0.001$) were positively correlated with the age of elephants. Although there was no significant difference, female elephants of the study group tend to be taller and heavier than the males. Body hairs of study elephants tend to decrease with the age of elephants especially in male elephants when they get old. Their most preferred diet is jaggery palm (42%). An ecto-parasitic insect, *Haematomyzus elephantis* was recorded from all elephants below the age of 10 years (n=4) emphasizing the importance of effective parasitic control programme in captive elephants. Findings of the present study can be used to improve the captive breeding and ex-situ conservation in PEO.

Keywords: *Elephas maximus*, *Haematomyzus elephantis*, Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage

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