

Estimating a Conservation Tax for Elephant Conservation: A Case of Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage

DCK Madhushani¹, RMW Rathnayake^{2,*}

^{1,2}Department of Tourism Management, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

*warath1@gmail.com

Human-elephant conflict (HEC) is a major issue in the dry zone of Sri Lanka due to competition for space among the elephants. Destruction of forests through logging, encroachment, slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation, and establishment of monoculture tree plantations like mahogany, teak, Eucalyptus are the major threats to the survival of elephants. Cost of human-elephant conflicts is of three types: direct, indirect and opportunity costs. Crop damage and human death and injuries are the major direct costs found in the human elephant conflict. Scholars have calculated that an average farmer in elephant affected areas of Sri Lanka losses over USD 300 annually for crop damage. Meanwhile wildlife lovers and nature lovers are worried about the loss of elephant deaths due to Human Elephant Conflict (HEC). Due to HEC, a certain number of baby elephants are orphaned, and they are kept in Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage. The Government of Sri Lanka allocates a considerable amount of money for conserving these orphaned elephants in Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage which gets thousands of foreign and local visitors for 'elephant watching'. This case study aims to estimate a 'conservation tax' which can be spent for elephant conservation in addition to the entrance fee for observing elephants at Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage. The researcher carried out a Choice Experiment to estimate local visitors' willingness to pay for elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. About 384 visitors to Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage were interviewed, using a pretested questionnaire. The conservation tax was calculated in terms of willingness to pay for elephant conservation. Six major choices were recorded and the WTP per household were LKR 147/-, LKR 147/-, LKR 130/-, LKR 125/-, LKR150/- and LKR 155/- for each the above choices respectively. The finding of the study shows that majority of people are willing to pay conserve elephants and mitigation of human elephant conflict. The estimated WTP can be used for the conserve elephants, not only in Pinnawala elephant Orphanage, but also for the national parks in Sri Lanka. The conservation tax will be useful for the future survival of elephants and conservation biodiversity.

Keywords: Human-Elephant Conflict, Asian Elephants, Elephant Conservation, Choice Experiment, Willingness to Pay