

STORY OF BABY DILMAH

Humans and elephants have shared Hambantota since time immemorial. The two parties have often come into conflict; however, human elephant conflict was about to escalate to a level never before experienced in the region - the construction of the Mattala airport began in 2009, and a population of about 500 elephants were evicted from their homelands in Hambantota.

Clashes between humans and elephants intensified during this period as the displaced elephants began wandering into human settlements. The elephants bore the brunt of these confrontations. Many elephants left the region; however, about 300 elephants remained trapped within Hambantota. Their numbers slowly dwindled, and only small herds remained.

'Veena' was a large cow elephant that lived in one of these small herds. In September 2017 she gave birth. The rest of her days were spent protecting her calf and overcoming the numerous obstacles to life in the region with her herd. In April 2018, with the dawning of the Sinhala new year disaster struck...



Baby Dilmah with her deceased mother in Mattala



Baby Dilmah (Right) at the Elephant Transit Home in Uda Walawe National Park

Along with new year's fireworks, a strange sound resonated the air – Veena had fallen victim to a huntsman's 'jaw-bomb'. Her wounds were severe and worsened each day. Separated from her herd and unable to feed, she was soon no longer able to go on and collapsed. Wildlife officials along with the help of local villagers made valiant and tireless efforts to treat Veena and her distressed calf.

Unfortunately, her wounds were too serious, and her condition slowly deteriorated. The way she suckled her calf whilst struggling for life brought tears to the eyes of all those around her. Veena drew her last breath in a paddy field in Mattala. The only hope left for her bereaved calf were the wildlife officials present that day.

The calf was taken by them to the Elephant Transit Home (ETH) in Uda Walawe where Dilmah Conservation immediately pledged to care for it. On the 26th of September 2018, we will be celebrating the 1st birthday of this calf who is now fondly known as 'Baby Dilmah'.

Baby Dilmah will be released back into the wild after her 5th birthday. Her story, unlike for many other unlucky calves in that situation, will continue. Celebrate World Elephant Day by following the story of Baby Dilmah.