

WORLD ELEPHANT DAY

is observed annually on August 12, and is a global celebration dedicated to raising awareness about the conservation and welfare of elephants.



Founded in 2012, this day aims to :

- Educate people about the importance of protecting elephants and their habitats.
- Support conservation efforts and anti-poaching initiatives.
- Highlight the impact of human-wildlife conflict and habitat loss on elephant populations.
- Promote compassionate and sustainable co-existence with these majestic creatures.

Project Elephant

Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change,
Government of India,
Indira Paryavaran Bhavan,
Jor Bagh Road, New Delhi - 110003



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India

On occasion of
WORLD ELEPHANT DAY, 2026

GAJ GAURAV AWARDS, 2026





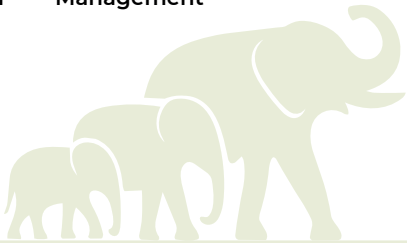
THE GAJ GAURAV AWARD

In the 16th meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant held on April 29 2022, chaired by Shri. Bhupendra Yadav, Hon'ble Minister, Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of India, it was decided to recognize the good practices adopted by the captive elephant owners and outstanding works done by field officers, frontline staff and private custodians in elephant conservation. To recognize the efforts towards elephant conservation, awards based on the extraordinary efforts put in overall elephant conservation in elephant bearing areas as well as for elephants kept in captivity in the following fields are given :

- Species Protection
Elephant Habitat
Management
- Human -Elephant
Conflict
Management
- Elephant Trade Control/
Patrolling/Wildlife
Crime Detection etc.
- Local community
Participation for
Elephant Conservation
- Captive Elephant
Welfare and
Management

The awards are presented in the following 2 categories :

- Category I - Frontline Staff
Forest Guard/Watchers/Trackers/Zoo Keepers/
Mahouts of Forest Department/Forest Vet.
- Category II - Communities for
protection and conservation of
elephants and its habitats



LATE SHRI
JUGAL NAIK
SQUAD MEMBER, INTENSIVE
PROTECTION CRITICAL ENDANGERED
AREA, ANGUL DIVISION

Category I Odisha

Late Sri Jugal Naik, IPCEA was a hardworking, sincere and dedicated Intensive Protection Critical Endangered Area (IPCEA) of Angul Forests Division. His performance in the field of management of elephant depredation, man-animal conflict and protection work is highly commendable. He displayed immense and exceptional courage during tracking of elephants, controlling the public in the forest area as well as human habitat area during man-animal conflict. On 25th June, 2025, in the process of executing duty for driving elephants from human" habitat area, he confronted with a wild elephant and sacrificed his life. His selfless service, brave act and devotion towards duty under extreme circumstances is praiseworthy for recognition as Gaj Gaurav Award.



SHRI
**PRABHUDATTA
BEHERA**
PERSON FROM
LOCAL COMMUNITY

Category II Odisha

Sri Prabhudatta Behera, a member of the local community from Saintala, has made valuable contributions towards elephant conservation by assisting the Forest Department in monitoring elephant herds through drone operations in elephant movement areas. With great dedication, he has worked beyond his duties, often during both day and night, to support the safe movement and conservation of elephants and reduce human–elephant conflict. He has been tracking elephant movements, creating awareness among villagers, preventing disturbances from noise and firecrackers, and ensuring safe crossings between forest patches. His dedication, courage, and commitment have significantly helped in ensuring safe elephant movement and reducing human-elephant conflict in Saintala Forest Range.



SHRI
**SAMHARUDEEN
BAIGA**
FOREST GUARD

Category I Madhya Pradesh



SHRI
AJIBUL HAQUE
MAHOUT (DAILY WAGES)
JALDAPARA WILDLIFE DIVISION



SHRI
AJIT GABUR
MAHOUT (CONTRACTUAL)
JALDAPARA WILDLIFE DIVISION



SHRI
MAMTAJ ALAM
MAHOUT (DAILY WAGES)
JALDAPARA WILDLIFE DIVISION



SHRI
**RAKESH
BAIGA**
FOREST GUARD

Category I Madhya Pradesh



SHRI
DILIP MUNDA
MAHOUT (DAILY WAGES)
JALDAPARA WILDLIFE DIVISION



SHRI
RAJIV ORAON
MAHOUT (DAILY WAGES)
JALDAPARA WILDLIFE DIVISION



SHRI
BIKASH KHARIA
MAHOUT
(CONTRACTUAL)



SHRI
AMASUR KHERIYA
MAHOUT (CONTRACTUAL)
JALDAPARA WILDLIFE DIVISION

Joint Award

Category I

West Bengal

The seven Gaj Gaurav Awardees from West Bengal, comprising experienced Mahouts and frontline elephant handlers from the Jaldapara Wildlife Division, have demonstrated exceptional dedication to captive elephant welfare, wildlife conservation, and forest protection. Their service extends beyond routine elephant management to supporting anti-poaching operations, wildlife rescue, habitat protection, and emergency response across challenging forest landscapes. During the unprecedented Torsa River floods of 5 October 2025, the awardees played a critical role in safeguarding captive elephants and supporting one of India's largest Greater One-horned Rhinoceros rescue operations. Working tirelessly under hazardous conditions for several weeks, they assisted in tracking, tranquilizing, and rescuing displaced rhinoceroses, while ensuring the safe movement and welfare of captive elephants in flood-affected areas. Their courage, professionalism, outstanding field skills, and unwavering commitment to wildlife conservation exemplify the highest standards of frontline conservation service and make them worthy recipients of the Gaj Gaurav Award.

Joint Award

Shri Samharudeen Baiga and Shri Rakesh Baiga, Forest Guards in Burhar Range, South Shahdol Forest Division, have made significant contributions to human–elephant conflict (HEC) management through their exceptional dedication in monitoring and managing elephant movements in the Shahdol landscape. During the movement and prolonged presence of elephant herds in Burhar Range during 2025–26, they carried out continuous day-and-night surveillance, intensive night patrolling, and close coordination with local communities to ensure public safety and facilitate the safe movement of elephants. They conducted awareness activities, disseminated timely information on elephant movements, assisted in the evacuation of vulnerable families, and coordinated with the Revenue Department for prompt compensation to affected households. Their timely interventions and sustained field presence enabled the elephants to move safely towards the Anuppur landscape while preventing any human casualties or injuries to elephants and minimizing damage to residential property. Their exemplary commitment, courage, professionalism, and effective conflict mitigation efforts have significantly strengthened elephant conservation and promoted peaceful coexistence between people and elephants.