

USE OF HABITAT BY ASIAN ELEPHANTS (*ELEPHAS MAXIMUS*) IN THE BUXA TIGER RESERVE AND ADJOINING AREAS OF NORTHERN WEST BENGAL, NORTH EASTERN INDIA

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The elephant habitat in northern West Bengal, in the northeastern part of India belongs to the Eastern Himalayan range, latter being regarded as one of the biodiversity hotspots in India. The habitat is affected severely by high degree of habitat fragmentation and acute human-elephant conflict (Sukumar et al. 2003). The study was carried out in Buxa Tiger Reserve and Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary that together constitute a 1074 sq km area and harbour ~300 elephants (Sukumar et al. 2003). VHF tracking units fitted to nine elephants (five family herds and four bulls) in the Buxa Tiger Reserve and adjoining areas of northern West Bengal provided information on habitat use during 2001-2005. We used MCP (minimum convex polygon) to interpret vegetation usage by elephants. We used White & Garrot (1990) for our habitat utilization analysis. The areas of habitats were calculated from digitized polygon from arc view. The Mixed Vegetation, Mixed Plantation, Semi-Evergreen & Evergreen are preferred while Tea Garden, Cultivation & Settlement are avoided. In dry season they show preference to Mixed Plantation, Mixed Vegetation, and Semi Evergreen and Evergreen habitats where as in wet season no such strong preference was found to be associated with any of the habitats.

