

Sri Lanka begins 1st countrywide elephant census

August 12 2011



In this photo taken Thursday, Aug. 11, 2011 a herd of Asiatic wild elephants gather at a national park in Minneriya, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) from Colombo, Sri Lanka. Thousands of wildlife officials and volunteers have taken up positions on treetop huts near reservoirs and watering holes for Sri Lanka's first national count of its dwindling wild elephant population. The Wildlife Department says the three-day census through Sunday night is aimed at gathering information to help the government formulate a plan to protect the elephants. (AP Photo/Chamila Karunaratne)

(AP) -- Thousands of wildlife officials and volunteers have taken up positions on treetop huts near reservoirs and watering holes for Sri Lanka's first national count of its dwindling wild elephant population.

The Wildlife Department says the three-day census through Saturday is aimed at gathering information to help the government formulate a plan

to protect the elephants.

But conservation groups allege the count is a smoke screen for capturing and domesticating the remaining wild elephants and have refused to participate.

Up to 4,000 wildlife workers, farmers and villagers have spread out to more than 1,500 locations across the country to physically count elephants as they come to drink from water holes and reservoirs.

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