

'Plan Bee' gets Indian elephants to buzz off railways

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Indian villagers look at the bodies of two elephants killed after being struck by a train in 2017

Indian Railways have come up with a novel way of getting elephants to buzz off from train tracks: speakers that play the sound of bees to scare the jumbos away.

Almost 70 elephants were killed by trains between 2013 and June this year, mostly in the north-eastern state of Assam and northern West Bengal.

But nearly 50 buzzing amplifiers have been deployed as part of "Plan Bee" at a dozen "elephant corridors" in the vast forests of Assam state, home to nearly 6,000 elephants, 20 percent of the country's total.

"We were looking for means to stop the elephants from coming on to the tracks and our officers came up with this device," Pranav Jyoti Sharma, an Indian Railways spokesperson, told AFP.

The buzzing is played as trains approach vulnerable points and can be heard up to half a mile (600 metres) away, the spokesman said.

The devices were tested for efficiency in 2017 on domesticated elephants, and then wild ones, before they were deployed for real last year.

The novel approach has won the team accolades from animal conservationists and on Tuesday an award for "best innovative idea" from Indian Railways for regional operator Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR).

Elephants have long been known to be frightened by the buzzing of bees and stings.

Villagers in the southern Indian state of Kerala have been using "beehive fences" to scare away marauding elephants.

When elephants touch the fences, bees inside boxes attached to the fences storm out angrily to defend their colonies.

Besides the dangers posed to elephants and trains alike on railways, India has also witnessed an increase in man-animal conflict that conservationists blame on the shrinking of habitat for the wild animals.

Nearly 2,300 people have been killed by elephants in the last five years, according to official figures released in June.

The [elephants](#) too are paying a heavy price with around 700 fatalities in the last eight years.

Most were killed by electric fences, poisoned or shot by locals angry at [family members](#) being killed or crops being destroyed, and accidents on [railway](#) lines cutting through migratory routes.

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