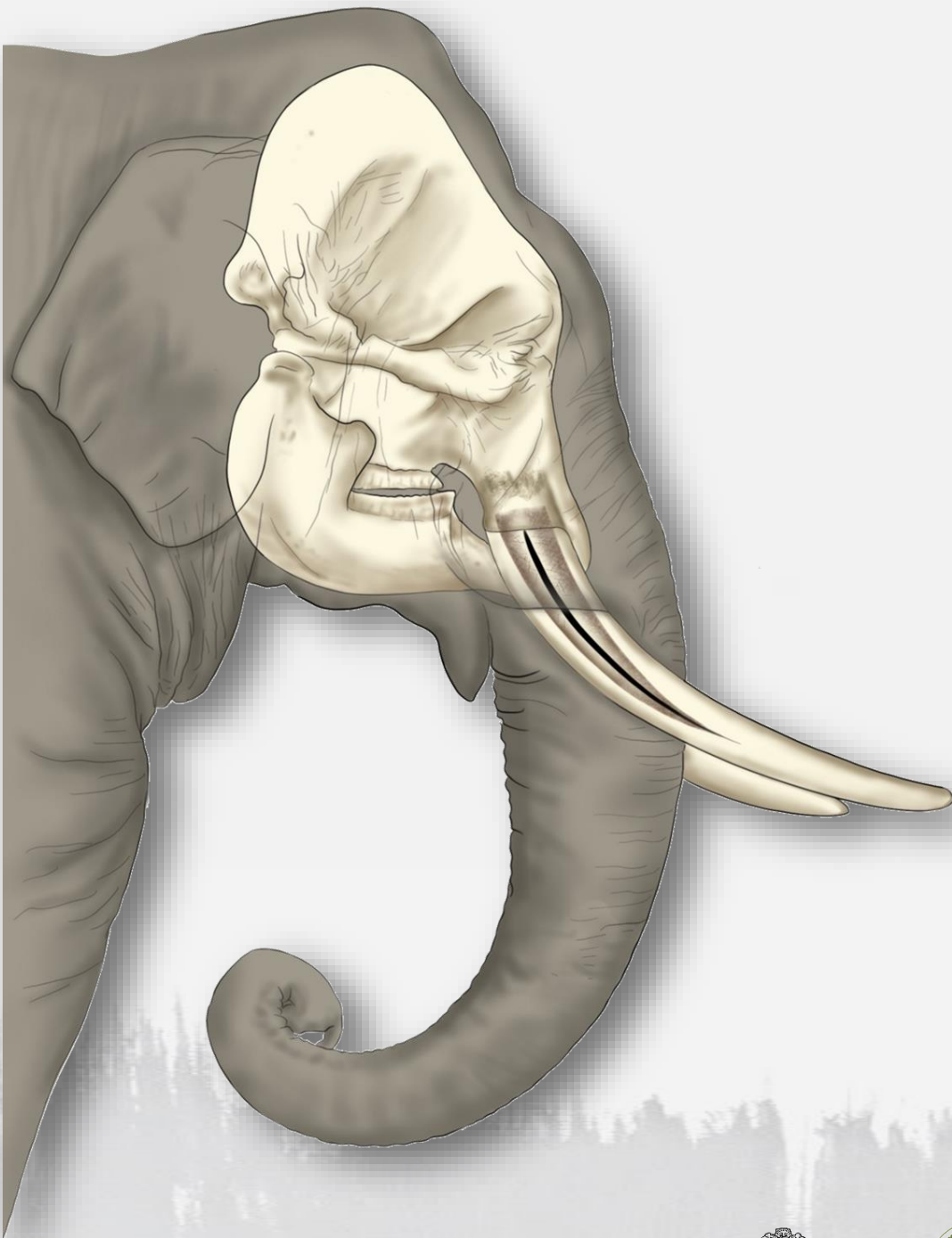


ADVISORY ON TUSK TRIMMING IN CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS 2025



Ministry of Environment,
Forest and Climate Change
(MoEFCC)



ADVISORY ON TUSK TRIMMING IN CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS

Elephant tusks are elongated incisor teeth that grow continuously throughout an elephant's life. Primarily composed of dentine (ivory), tusks serve multiple functions including foraging, defence, and mate selection. While strong, they are susceptible to fractures and other ailments, especially in captivity. Proper tusk care, including trimming is essential for an elephant's well-being. However, improper trimming can cause severe harm, even life-threatening complications. This advisory outlines the key considerations, procedures, and precautions to be followed for safe and ethical tusk trimming in captive elephants.

Objective:

To provide guidelines on the safe and ethical trimming of tusks in captive elephants, ensuring their well-being while complying with animal welfare standards and legal regulations.

Rationale for tusk trimming:

Tusk trimming is essential for the well-being and safety of captive elephants. Key reasons include:

- Preventing injuries to handlers and other elephants especially from long or sharp tusks.
- Managing overgrown tusks that hinder mobility, feeding, or daily activities like lying down and getting up.
- Correcting abnormal tusk growth that interferes with trunk movement or causes functional asymmetry.
- Treating broken or damaged tusks to prevent infections and further complications.

Procedures for tusk trimming:

In India, procedures followed for trimming elephant tusks are provided below

- Length-Based Measurement:** The distance from the base of the inner canthus (corner of the eye) to the premaxillary tusk alveolus is measured. This length is retained, and the excess tusk is trimmed.
- Circumference-Based Measurement:** The tusk's circumference is measured near its base around the lip line. The trimmed tusk retains this

measurement plus an additional two inches, with the remaining portion removed.

While these methods are widely practiced, tusk growth varies significantly due to genetics, age, individual differences and across landscapes due to environmental factors. **A standardized "rule of thumb" approach may not always be safe.** Age-specific factors must be carefully considered, as tusks contain nerve endings and active blood flow. Improper trimming can cause severe complications, especially in juveniles, sub-adults, and young adults. Thus, a cautious and individualized approach is crucial to ensure safe and ethical tusk trimming. The safest option to locate the pulp cavity before trimming is to take radiograph of each tusk if possible.

Operative MoEF&CC guidelines:

As per the guidelines issued under Project Elephant, MoEF&CC (No. 9-5/2003-PE dated 08/01/2008), clear procedures for the trimming of tusks in captive elephants have been outlined. These guidelines must be strictly followed to ensure proper care and management in compliance with animal welfare standards.

- The owner of the tuskier shall apply for permission from the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW), or an officer authorized by the CWLW at least one month in advance. The application must be submitted via registered post and should include the location where the tusk trimming will be conducted, along with the name of the competent person who will perform the procedure.
- The Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) shall grant permission for tusk trimming within a maximum period of three weeks. The procedure shall be conducted in the presence of an officer not below the rank of Forest Range Officer (FRO/RFO/RO), Forest Veterinary Officer (FVO), or Assistant Forest Veterinary Officer (AFVO), as directed by the CWLW.
- The authorized officer shall submit a detailed report to the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) specifying the length and weight of the tusks trimmed.
- If permission for tusk trimming is not granted, the owner shall be informed in writing, citing the reasons for rejection.
- Upon receiving a written request with relevant details, the CWLW shall issue a certificate to the owner, allowing possession of the trimmed

tusks as per the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

- vi. Trimming tusks too short, resulting in the exposure of the horn cord/pulp, shall be considered an act of cruelty to elephants and is prohibited.

Recommended procedure:

The procedures for tusk trimming should be conducted in alignment with established best practices for elephant management. Ethically and scientifically sound handling techniques must be followed to ensure minimal stress and maximum safety for the elephants and handlers.

- i. **Professional Expertise:** The entire process must be carried out by a team led by a trained veterinary professional with experience in handling captive elephants.
- ii. **Health Assessment:** It is mandatory to conduct a thorough health check-up to ensure the elephant is fit for the procedure. Tusk trimming might take several hours, which the elephant should be able to withstand. This has to be assessed before commencing the trimming.
- iii. **Site selection:** Tusk trimming should be carried out in an area that the elephant is familiar and comfortable with. The area should be calm, shady and have ready access to water. This is critical to minimize stress and also to take care of emergency water needs. Mornings are preferred as elephants are expected to be calm and care takers will be energetic by that part of the day.
- iv. **Training elephants for tusk trimming:** Tusk being an organ of offence and defence most elephants don't readily allow handling and manipulation of tusk. Hence, to avoid difficulties during trimming, routine training can be given that includes handling, tapping, and gentle scratching of tusk mimicking the trimming process with positive reinforcement.
- v. **Positioning/restraining of the elephant for tusk trimming:**
 - Trimming is not a painful process, and most elephants co-operate well provided they are trained for the process. Lateral recumbency is preferred one considering the safety of the personnel's involved in the process.
 - Trimming can also be done in standing position with a safety pole in place between

the elephant and person trimming the tusk.

- Only in extreme case where the elephant is not cooperative, under the specific recommendation of veterinary officer, tranquilization can be done to do the trimming process in standing position.
- vi. **Physical and chemical restraint:** While using sharp projectiles and blades, there is a risk of injury to elephants if the animal is not calm and comfortable. For elephants that are not cooperative, tranquilizers have to be used to ensure safe trimming under the specific recommendation of veterinary officer. When tranquilizers are not used, mahout's comfort level in restraining the animal should be properly assessed before starting the trimming process.
 - vii. The trimmed part of the tusks needs to be weighed and measured and properly noted with photographed at the site itself. The same need to be furnished with the report submitted to the CWLW after completion of the exercise
 - viii. **Equipment:** Only thoroughly sanitized, rust-free, specialized tools designed for tusk trimming should be used. Personnel should be trained to slowly but steadily cut the tusk while cautiously ensuring no damage to blood vessels.
 - The portion to be trimmed should be marked and cut to the marked level neatly.
 - Water can be poured on the trimming area during trimming to flush out the fine grains of tusk, thereby facilitating faster trimming.
 - Equipment required include hack-saw blades with handle/frame, rasping file, and hoof knife for removing chips.
 - ix. **Post-trimming care:**
 - Post trimming care should be taken to apply petroleum jelly on the cut surface to avoid cracking and chipping.
 - After trimming, the trimmed edges can be shaped, blunted with file by gentle rasping.
 - Apply antiseptic to the trimmed area to prevent infection.
 - Care takers should monitor for signs of discomfort or behavioral changes.
 - x. **Post-procedure monitoring:**
 - Observe the elephant for at least 48 hours after the procedure.
 - Provide additional care as needed, including pain management if advised by the veterinarian.

- Record the procedure and outcomes for future reference.

Reporting and Documentation:

- Maintain detailed records of the procedure, including the date and location of the procedure, names of the personnel involved and health status and observations post-procedure.
- Submit a completion report elaborating the procedures followed and the outcome of the tasks in a detailed manner to the CWLW through proper channel

Custody of the trimmed tusks:

Under section 39(1) (c) of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 the elephant tusk is the property of Government. Under Section 40(2A) of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, no person other than a person having a certificate of ownership, shall, after the commencement of the

Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002 acquire, receive, **keep in his control, custody or possession** any captive animal, animal article, **trophy or uncured trophy** specified in Schedule I, **except by way of inheritance**. Thus, the trimmed tusks (including the chipped portions) should be handed over to the CWLW of the respective State (where the tusk is trimmed) or the authorities nominated by the CWLW.

Drafting Sub-Committee constituted vide PT&E Division, MoEFCC, GoI letter no. 14-2/2019-PE (Part II) dated 3rd December 2024 as per the decision of 4th Captive Elephant Healthcare & welfare Committee (CEHWC) meeting held on 7th August 2024: [Chairman: Dr. Giridas P.B., Member: Dr Lakshminarayanan N., Dr Bhaskar Choudhury, Dr Rajesh Kumar and Dr. Aju Mathew George / Coordinator (s): Dr Parag Nigam, Dr Dheeraj Mittal, Sh. Suneet Bharadwaj/ Advisor: Sh Ramesh Pandey]

Project Elephant Division
Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change
Government of India
6th Floor, Jal Block, Indira Paryavaran Bhawan
Jor Bagh Road, New Delhi 110003, INDIA
Website: <https://moef.gov.in/project-elephant-pe>
Email: projectelephant.moef@gmail.com



Ministry of Environment,
Forest and Climate Change
(MoEFCC)

