

Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Awards | Miscellaneous

Why in News?

Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026 was conferred on the National Celebrations on World Elephant Day 2026

- **Aim** - To honour recognising exemplary frontline service and outstanding contributions to Asian elephant conservation and management.
- **Instituted by** - Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in 2022 during the 30-year commemoration of *Project Elephant* (launched in 1992).
- **Purpose** - To honor field officers, frontline forest staff, mahouts, captive elephant owners, and indigenous communities working directly in elephant protection and rescue.
- **Presentation** - Conferred annually as part of national World Elephant Day celebrations (August 12).

Recent Highlights (2026 Edition) Conferment

- **Key Awardees** - 7 mahouts from Jaldapara National Park (West Bengal) were honoured for rescuing stranded captive elephants during floods and guiding displaced wild rhinos to safety.



THE GAJ GAURAV AWARD

is the third category of the leading Conservation of Forests & Elephant Habitat award (Gaj Gaurav Awards). Initiated in 2012 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India in collaboration with the Elephant Family, the Awards recognise outstanding contributions in the protection, conservation and welfare of elephants, their habitats and communities. These awards honour individuals and organisations making a lasting impact on elephant conservation and human-elephant co-existence.



Science, Protection
Elephant Habitat
Management

Category 1:
Protection, Management,
Research and Digital
Innovation



Human-Elephant
Conflict
Management

Category 2:
Human-Elephant
Coexistence



Elephant Trade Control/
Preventing Illegal
Capture, Detention etc.

Category 3:
Conservation of
elephants in Captivity



Local community &
Participation in
Elephant Conservation

Category 4:
Community
Conservation



Captive Elephant
Welfare and
Management

Category 5:
Welfare of Captive
Elephants



**Life Time
JUGAL NAIK**
Wildlife Biologist &
Elephant Conservationist
Assam

Category 1 Golden

Late Sri Jugal Naik, PCCF (retd.) is a frontline field biologist whose dedication to elephant conservation spanned over four decades. His work in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has been instrumental in mitigating human-elephant conflict, rescuing and rehabilitating elephants in distress, and mobilising local communities for conservation. He played a key role in radio-collaring of elephants, early warning systems, and awareness campaigns and has authored several reports on elephant behaviour and conservation science. Even in his post-retirement years, he remained deeply involved in protecting Assam's elephants and their habitats.

Joint Award*

Category 2	Wild Ranger
 Late AJIBUL HAQUE Master I Grade (Rtd.) Assam Forest Service	 Late DILIP MUNDA Master I Grade (Rtd.) Eastern Railway Service
 Late AJIT GABUR Master I Grade (Rtd.) Assam Forest Service	 Late RAJIV ORAON Master I Grade (Rtd.) Eastern Railway Service
 Late MAMTAJ ALAM Master I Grade (Rtd.) Assam Forest Service	 Late BIKASH KHARIA Head Asst. Railway (Rtd.)
 Late AMASUR KHERIYA Master I Grade (Rtd.) Assam Forest Service <i>*Awarded posthumously</i>	

The seven Gaj Gaurav Awardees (from forest and railway services) lost their lives in the line of duty protecting wildlife in Assam, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha. In the face of dangerous situations involving wildlife and human-elephant conflict, they displayed unparalleled courage, dedication and selfless service. Their work in rescuing elephants, ensuring safe passage, and building awareness is a testament to their commitment to conservation and community safety. The Gaj Gaurav Awards honour their sacrifice and pay tribute to their legacy, acknowledging their immense contribution to wildlife protection and the conservation of the Asian elephant.



**Late
PRABHUDATTA DEHIRA**
Range Forest Officer
Odisha Forest Service

Category 2 Silver

Sri Prabhudatta Dehira, a valiant RFO from Keonjhar Range, Odisha, lost his life while on duty responding to a human-elephant conflict situation in the Ghatagaon area on 30th April 2025. He was known for his unwavering dedication to wildlife conservation and community safety. His courage, commitment and deep sense of responsibility continue to inspire colleagues and local communities alike. This award is a tribute to his selfless service and enduring legacy.



**Late
SAMHARUDEEN BAIGA**
Forest Guard

Category 2 Railways Finisher



**Late
RAKESH BAIGA**
Forest Guard

Category 2 Railways Finisher

Joint Award*

Category 2	Railway Forest Guard
Late Sri Samharudeen Baiga and Sri Rakesh Baiga, forest guards in South Eastern Railway (Chakradharpur Division), lost their lives on 1st April 2025 in an elephant trampling incident while discharging their duty in the Rajkharawan area of Jharkhand. Their courage, sense of responsibility and dedication to wildlife protection and railway safety are truly commendable. Their selfless service and sacrifice in the line of duty will always be remembered and honoured. This award is a tribute to their brave hearts and unwavering commitment to conservation and community welfare. It acknowledges their immense contribution towards the protection of wildlife, especially elephants, and reflects the profound respect and gratitude for their significant role in human-elephant conflict mitigation and ensuring safety along railway operations and protected areas. <i>*Awarded posthumously</i>	

- **Key Policy Launches** - The event featured the launch of
 - Regional Action Plan to address human-elephant conflict in Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, as well as the
 - Release of the publication "30 Giant Steps".
- The Plan focuses on
 - Habitat connectivity,
 - Corridor conservation,
 - Early-warning systems,
 - Conflict mitigation infrastructure,
 - Habitat restoration,
 - Community participation,
 - Research and monitoring,
 - Rapid response mechanisms,
 - Capacity building and
 - Strengthened interstate coordination.

33 Elephant Reserves, 150 scientifically identified elephant corridors and nearly 60% of the world's wild Asian elephant population, India continues to play a leading role in elephant conservation.

Project Elephant

- **Launched in** - 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- Project Elephant has completed more than 3 decades of dedicated efforts towards protecting

elephants, their habitats and corridors, addressing HEC and ensuring the welfare of captive elephants.

Reference

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