



# SEMINAR

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Hosted by Dr Zeehan Jaafar

## A Battle for Survival: Elephants and Leopards in Human-Dominated Landscapes of Sri Lanka



**By Enoka Priyadarshani Kudavidanage**

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Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka & Tropical Ecosystem Research Network*

### About the Speaker

Enoka P. Kudavidanage is a Professor in Conservation Biology at Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, where she has served since 2001. She holds an M.Sc. in Environmental Sciences from the University of Colombo and a Ph.D. from the Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on wildlife crime mitigation, Leopard ecology and conservation, protected area management, and the use of biological indicators to assess land-use change. Enoka co-founded the Tropical Ecosystem Research Network (TERN), a non-profit organization supporting conservation, through which she leads several community-based conservation initiatives. She is also the Country Coordinator for the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) Asia-Pacific Chapter. Co-chair of the Wild Cat Conservation Committee in the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (WNPS), Advisor to the WNPS-LOLC Multiregional Leopard Research and Conservation Project, a Trustee of the Federation of Environmental Organizations (FEO) and jointly executes the TERN- Memphis Zoo Conservation, Awareness, Research and Education (CARE) project in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka, though small in size, is a biodiversity hotspot rich in endemic species, including iconic large mammals like elephants and leopards. The island's diverse habitats—from cloud forests to dry plains—support this unique wildlife, but growing human activity is threatening their survival. Habitat loss, deforestation, encroachment, poaching, climate change, and weak enforcement of laws have escalated human-wildlife conflict. The Sri Lankan elephant and leopard are facing a crisis. Each year, around 400 or more elephants die, with causes ranging from electrocution, gunshot wounds to railway accidents. Leopards, often caught in snares or targeted due to livestock predation and fear of their presence, are also under threat. As the apex species, their decline poses serious ecological consequences. Over the past 12 years, my team and I, in collaboration with several universities and organizations\*, have conducted research on the ecology and behavior of these species in protected areas and the nature of their interactions with people in human-dominated landscapes. Our work combines scientific data collection, education, outreach, capacity building, and habitat enrichment. Findings underscore the need for maintaining habitat connectors, strengthening law enforcement, ending the bushmeat trade, and enhancing public awareness. Empowering communities through coexistence training and conservation education remains central to our mission to protect Sri Lanka's extraordinary wildlife.

*\*These will be acknowledged in the presentation.*