Eco-tourism to protect Sri Lanka's elephants

By Harishanee Jayasekera

Sri Lanka Tourism in its efforts to promote eco-tourism in the country released eight baby elephants in the Udawalawe National Park (UNP) recently, jointly with the Department of Wildlife.

Speaking at the event Managing Director Sri Lanka Tourism Dilhup Mudalige said, "Sri Lanka is the only island with elephants of this size and they play an important role in projecting the beauty and uniqueness of the country. In our efforts to promote Sri Lanka as a popular tourist destination we play the part of creating awareness in the world about this unique event of releasing elephants into the wilderness of UNP.

"Mudalige told that the objective of Sri Lanka Tourism of tying up with the Elephant Transit Home is to protect the exclusivity of the country and to promote nature and natural lifestyles of animals that are significant in encouraging tourism in the island.

He also added that this kind of events promoted can create more jobs through which some extra income could be generated.

Sethita Mudalige, Chief Executive Officer of FirstBuild Group Hotels said, "We have not used elephants to adorn Sri Lanka enough as a tourist destination. We need to focus more on the elephant because it is a flagship animal of the country."

He also revealed that Sri Lanka's elephant population of 29 per cent represents a high density, when compared to the area covered. He said that out of the total elephant population in the island 50 per cent of them are wild, which makes it another significant aspect which tourists can be attracted.

Adding up to the risk of losing this unique animal in the island Dr. Shantha Jayawardena told the gathering that despite the increasing elephant population, the country annually loses 150 elephants to death in all parts of the country due to various reasons and that at least five baby elephants are rescued each year.

The Elephant Transit Home (ETH) managed by the Department of Wildlife released eight baby elephants including one taller to the UNP that have been rescued and brought up to face natural situations of the wilderness.

"The cost of managing this place is very high. The expense only for milk adds up to Rs. 9,000 (60) per month and there are other expenses as well, such as medication and all other managing costs.

Potter parents' contributions of elephants basically cover the milk cost but all the other costs are borne by the Department of Wildlife," Acting Deputy Director of the Wildlife Health Department Dr. Thamika Perera explained.