Yala - ruined by its own popularity?

- Reality check ... and a pragmatic approach to mitigate some of the problems

By Dr. Saman, Managing Director

The Yala Wildlife National Park is situated in the southern part of Sri Lanka, and is one of the most popular national parks in the country. However, it has experienced some issues in recent years due to an increase in visitor numbers.

**Historical significance**

It is said that the area surrounding the current national park was declared a protected area in 1897, where elephants were being herded for back labor in the 19th century. In the early 20th century, the area became a wildlife reserve, and in 1925, it was declared a national park.

The park was brought under the control of the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) in 1998, which is now responsible for managing the park.

**The problem**

The area is not only a popular tourist destination, but also a significant habitat for many wildlife species. The increase in visitor numbers has led to overcrowding in the park, which has negatively impacted the environment and wildlife.

**The solution**

There are multiple solutions to mitigate the problem, ranging from improving the infrastructure, increasing visitor education, and implementing stricter regulations.

- **Improving infrastructure**: This includes constructing new roads and improving existing ones to reduce congestion and minimize disturbance to wildlife.
- **Visitor education**: This involves educating visitors about the importance of protecting the park and its wildlife. This could be done through signs, educational brochures, or guided tours.
- **Implementing stricter regulations**: This could include limiting the number of visitors per day, increasing fines for rule violations, and enforcing stricter guidelines for tour operators.

**Conclusion**

It is important to balance the need for tourism with the need to protect the park and its wildlife. This can be achieved through effective management and education.

- **For tourists**: Be aware of the regulations and guidelines for visiting the park. Be respectful of wildlife and the environment.
- **For the government**: Implement strict regulations and educate both tourists and local communities about the importance of protecting the park.

By implementing these solutions, we can ensure that the Yala Wildlife National Park remains a valuable and enjoyable destination for both tourists and wildlife.