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THIRD PRIZE, CLASS D
IN THE 2009 COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION

THE MOST EXCITING DAY OF MY LIFE

We had been travelling for over two hours in the park. By the word "Park" I don't mean a children's park or playground, I mean the Uda Walawe Wildlife Sanctuary. I had been in such parks with my dad, an environmentalist, from the time I was in my mum's stomach so this was not so much my second home but more my first home! I loved the parks and every encounter with the wild elephants there but I never realised that this would be my luckiest day ever. Later, I thought it might have been so special because it was the last day of the old year, the thirty first of December 2008.

From the moment we entered, it had felt like animals galore were coming out to see us. I had recorded over a hundred elephants in my log and a host of beautiful peacocks proudly holding their heads up high. Pond herons fished and cormorants swam suddenly diving when they spotted another fish for dinner.

The first animals we had seen were three lone male elephants meandering around (amongst Asian elephants, adult males do not ravel with the herds). A few minutes later we had sighted a herd of twenty elephants including three babies, amongst them was a rather naughty two-year old that kept jabbing his trunk at the older elephants and then running off. He reminded me of my baby brother. The herd had obviously just finished its evening bath and was eating the short, sweet "mana" grass around.

All this had been exciting enough when we saw a herd of seventeen, walking along a bund. Amongst them was a baby tusker. In Asian elephants a tusker is extra special because to be a tusker it must be fathered by a tusker and its mother must also be the daughter of a tusker. How exciting it seemed. I was looking at new hope for the elephants. A baby tusker! I was so excited.

On the other side of the bund was a clear, sparkling, blue tank where king fishers of all kinds and colours searched the water for their prey. If they noticed even a tiny movement of a fish it was "Hello!" to the next meal. We turned to head home as dusk fell, when we were stopped suddenly by a herd of eight elephants. An elephant came rushing at us to chase us away. She obviously wanted to protect the young of her herd from what she considered was a threat. Then it happened, my single most exciting moment.

She prepared to charge us, to chase us and I stretched out my hand. Perched in the back of our open vehicle, I could almost touch her. I was trying to ask her not to worry, not to charge and my out stretched hand seemed to be enough. She stopped. She looked at me and it seemed like her head moved. I think she understood me because she backed off. Had I really, made contact with a wild elephant? She kept her eye on us but she didn't try to charge us again. I was thrilled.

My dad is well known for his relationship with wild elephants and I have always wanted to be like him. Now I felt proud that I was starting this magical journey. I know we'll share many more exciting times in the park but secretly I think this will always be the most exciting day of my life – the first day a wild elephant and I actually communicated.