

IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

2020 Report



Vivek Menon

Chair

Vivek Menon (1)

Red List Authority Coordinator

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Location/Affiliation

(1) Wildlife Trust of India F-13, Sector-8, Noida 201301, India

(2) WWF-International c/o WWF Myanmar #15/C Than Thaman Road, Dagon Township, Yangon, Myanmar

Number of members

111

Social networks

Website: www.asesg.org



Mission statement

The Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) does not have a mission statement but has developed a mandate for the group: (1) AsESG shall provide the best available scientifically grounded evidence as to the abundance, distribution and demographic status of Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) populations in all 13 range States. It shall also set forth advisory guidelines for range States and assist in capacity building in performing their own assessments; (2) the AsESG shall analyse threats to wild populations and raise awareness by communicating both within and outside the scientific community, and also set forth standards/guidelines for management and welfare of wild and captive elephants, including but not limited to the surveillance of disease interfaces and economic activities that impact elephants; (3) the AsESG shall use its advisory mandate to guide conservation and welfare issues of Asian Elephants by governments, civil society or any other relevant stakeholder. Members will also work within and in collaboration with external experts to outline conservation strategies for Asian Elephants; and (4) the AsESG may choose to meet regularly to share information and conduct its own activities as well as convene gatherings in the form of conferences/workshops on specific themes open to external participants for furthering the protection of Asian Elephants.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Conservation prospect of Asian Elephant across 13 range States improved through collaborative efforts of range countries and AsESG members.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Red List: update the Red List assessment of Asian Elephant.

Research activities: (1) map the distribution of elephants in all 13 range States in Asia; (2) develop Asian Elephant database.

Plan

Conservation actions: produce National Action Plans (NAPs) on elephant conservation for 13 range countries in Asia.

Policy: (1) assist the Viet Nam Government in arresting the decline of the elephant population in Viet Nam; (2) identify select elephant conservation emergencies and plan mitigation measures with technical support from AsESG; (3) organise the 2nd Asian Elephant Range States meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Technical advice: (1) facilitate effective data collection and reporting for the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme; (2) guidelines/protocols for the conservation of Asian Elephants developed by Working Groups.

Act

Proposal development and funding: generate financial resources to support AsESG conservation activities.



Elephants from lower Kinabatangan, Malaysia
Photo: Marc Ancrenaz

Network

Capacity building: (1) support at least 13 young emerging professionals working on Asian Elephants in 2019 and 2020; (2) provide capacity building training for range country officials.

Membership: develop AsESG membership for the quadrennium.

Communicate

Communication: (1) communicate elephant conservation and research on Asian Elephants through *Gajah* journal; (2) communicate elephant conservation and research on Asian Elephants through other publications; (3) communicate information on Asian Elephants and the activities of the group through an updated website.

Scientific meetings: (1) organise two meetings of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group members in 2018 and 2020; (2) organise the 3rd Asian Elephant Range States meeting; (3) take up the elephant conservation issues and mitigation plan in at least three meetings/conventions.

Activities and results 2020

Assess

Red List

i. The Red List team for assessment of the Asian Elephant submitted the information in mid-2019, it was reviewed in early 2020 and was finally published in December 2020. This was possible because of the information generated

from the research and conservation work of our members, other experts, organisations and range countries working on Asian Elephant, which has helped in undertaking the assessment. (KSR #1)

Research activities

i. Mapping of the distribution of elephants in all 13 range States in Asia could not be completed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and delays on part of the team to collect relevant data for undertaking mapping. The team will try to do this in next quadrennium.

ii. The group decided on the need to develop the Asian Elephant database at the AsESG meeting in 2019 and had planned to start in 2020. This, however, could not be initiated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be taken up in the next quadrennium. (KSR #16)

Plan

Planning

i. The National Action Plan for conservation of elephants now exists for Sabah Malaysia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. The plans under preparation are of India, Lao PDR, Peninsular Malaysia and Nepal. Draft plans exist for Thailand, China and Indonesia. Viet Nam is also working to update their plan. The existing plans can be accessed at <https://www.asesg.org/resources.php>. (KSR #18)

Policy

i. The draft plan for arresting the decline of elephant populations in Viet Nam was prepared and is being finalised. The Viet Nam Government is coordinating with AsESG to update their National Action Plan. AsESG is also in discussion with Viet Nam Forest to have the National Red Listing of elephants in Viet Nam. This will be continued in next quadrennium. (KSR #27)

Technical advice

i. AsESG submitted a detailed report to the CITES MIKE Secretariat in August 2020 for the 73rd Standing Committee report. (KSR #16)

ii. The history of AsESG has been documented. Three Working Group documents are still pending. (KSR #26)

Act

Proposal development and funding

i. USD 25,000 were obtained as a new grant from International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and USD 29,750 as last year's instalment from Elephant Family. (KSR #19)

Network

Membership

i. AsESG has 111 members with diverse skill sets from all 13 Asian Elephant range States. The group also has 15 ex officio government members nominated by range countries and five other ex officio members. AsESG undertook self-assessment of members in December



Kuiburi National Park, Thailand
Photo: Sandeep Kumar Tiwari ASeSG



Elephant in Periyar National Park,
Kerala India
Photo: Vivek Menon

CMS Side event-18th February 2020 to discuss “Elephant conservation beyond borders”
Photos: AsESG archives



CMS side event on “Asian Elephant Conservation prospects and Challenges” on 20th February. Dr Sandeep Kr Tiwari, Program Manager AsESG addressing the meeting
Photos: AsESG archives



2020 to promote fairness and transparency in the membership process for next quadrennium. This was also an opportunity for introspection and feedback on how we have contributed to the conservation of elephants in Asia, our contribution to AsESG and our plans for ourselves and the group in coming years. One-hundred and three of the 111 members (110 now due to the death of one member) responded to the survey.

ii. Anonymous feedback on the performance of the AsESG Secretariat was organised. The feedback will help us to further improve our performance and to bring it closer to the members’ needs and expectations. It will also help in better coordination within the Specialist Group and range States and to achieve our planned targets for the conservation of the species. More than 92% of the members felt that the Chair and Programme Manager should continue serving the AsESG for one more quadrennium.

Communicate

Communication

i. *Gajah* journal has been able to publish two issues every year, covering a wide range of topics concerning elephant conservation in Asia in the wild and in captivity. In 2020, it published *Gajah* Volume 51 and 52 (available at <https://www.asesg.org/gajah51.php> and <https://www.asesg.org/gajah52.php>). (KSR #28)

ii. A minimum of 316 papers have been published by the members at individual levels as reported in the self-assessment by members. (KSR #43)

iii. Our website is updated regularly: www.asesg.org. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. The 3rd Asian Elephant Range States meeting was scheduled to be organised in Nepal in April 2020 by the Nepal Government in collaboration with AsESG. This was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. No new dates have been finalised. (KSR #28)

ii. AsESG took up elephant conservation issues in the following conventions/meeting in 2020: (1) 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS CoP13) in Gandhinagar, India. Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) was included in Appendix I and AsESG assisted in preparation of the proposal; (2) organised two side events at CMS CoP13 in Gandhinagar, India. AsESG along with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change – Government of India (MoEFCC), Wildlife Institute of India, CMS, IUCN Bangladesh and Wildlife Trust of India organised a side event on 18 February 2020 to discuss ‘Elephant conservation beyond borders’. We also partnered with Project Elephant Division, MoEFCC and Wildlife Institute of India for a discussion on ‘Asian Elephant Conservation: Prospects and Challenges’ on 20 February 2020; (3) the Elephant Reintroduction Foundation, Thailand and AsESG also hosted the Elephant Reintroduction Workshop in Bangkok, from 5–7 February 2020. (KSR #28)

Acknowledgements

The AsESG Secretariat would like to thank all the members for actively participating in discussion, assistance and contributing to the overall goal of the Specialist Group. We also acknowledge the support and participation of our members who undertook the self-assessment survey and reviewed the work of the AsESG Secretariat. The feedback will help us to further

improve the performance of the group and the Secretariat. We would like to thank the Working Group convenors and the members who have successfully completed their outcome documents. Thanks to our Red List Coordinator and other members for successfully undertaking the Red List assessment of Asian elephants. The Chair would like to convey his sincere thanks to range States for updating/preparing their National Action Plan for Conservation of Elephants. We are thankful to the editorial board of *Gajah* journal for publishing the issues in time and proactively looking for quality papers. The Chair expresses his thanks to the AsESG Membership Advisory Committee (MAC) and proposal endorsement committee for their proactive support. Special thanks to Elephant Family and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) for supporting the activities of AsESG and financial support. The AsESG Secretariat would also like to thank Prof Jon Paul Rodríguez, SSC Chair, and his team and the IUCN Office for extending all assistance and help to AsESG.

Summary of activities 2020

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 5/5

Assess	3	
Plan	4	
Act	1	
Network	2	
Communicate	5	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 16, 18, 19, 26, 27, 28, 43

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-068

KSR: Key Species Result