

IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

2016-2017 Report



Vivek Menon

Chair

Vivek Menon (1)

Red List Authority Coordinator

A. Christy Williams (2)

Location/Affiliation

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

(2) World Wildlife Fund, Myanmar

Number of members

90

Social networks

Website:

www.asesg.org



Mission statement

The Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) does not have a mission statement, but had developed a mandate for the group: (1) AsESG shall provide best available scientifically-grounded evidence as to the abundance, distributions and demographic status of Asian elephant 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.

Main activities by Key Priority Area (2016 & 2017)

Communications

■ Communication

i. The mandate for the *GAJAH* journal was finalised and two issues were published per year. The journal is intended as a medium of communication on issues that concern the management and conservation of Asian elephants both in the wild and in captivity. It is a means by which everyone concerned with the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), whether members of the AsESG or not, can communicate their research results, experiences, ideas and perceptions freely, so that the conservation of Asian elephants can benefit. It publishes at least two issues every year, covering a wide range of topics (research and conservation) concerning Asian elephants. Issues of *GAJAH* are available on the AsESG website (www.asesg.org). (KSR #28)

ii. Communications strategy for AsESG developed, the logo for AsESG was finalised and website redesigning is in progress and expected to be ready by July 2018. (KSR #28)

■ Synergy

i. A Working Group developed the mandate for AsESG, derived from the four objectives outlined by the SSC: (1) assess and monitoring biodiversity, (2) analyse the threats to biodiversity, (3) facilitate and undertake conservation action and (4) convene expertise for biodiversity conservation.



Asian elephant, Sri Lanka
Photo: Simon Hedges

Conservation action

■ Proposal development and funding

i. The Chair is working to generate funds to support the activities of the AsESG. Elephant Family is supporting the AsESG Secretariat and along with IFAW and a host of zoos (Antwerp Zoo, Rotterdam Zoo, Emmen Zoo, Amersfoort Zoo, Amsterdam Zoo, St Louis Zoo and Zurich Zoo) provided financial assistance to support 2016-17 activities. Kira Mileham, from SSC Chair's Office, helped raising support from zoos. In 2017-18, Elephant Family and IFAW provided financial assistance to support AsESG activities. The Chair and the Program Manager are also developing the work plan and funding strategy to support AsESG's activities and will seek IUCN SSC and others to raise funds. (KSR #19)

■ Technical advice

i. With completion of the mandate of four working groups (WG) formed in 2016, the Chair has formed 10 more WG in 2017, ranging different topics: assisting in preparation of National Elephant Action Plans for Sabah and Indonesia, arresting decline of elephant population in Viet Nam, developing guidelines/protocols for rehabilitation of captive elephants in wild as possible restocking option, management and care of captive elephants in musth, welfare and use of elephants in tourism, best practices in addressing/mitigating human

elephant conflict, mapping elephant distribution, creating water holes in elephant habitats and monitoring the illegal killing of elephants. The outcomes of these groups will be discussed in 2018's AsESG meeting and finalised. (KSR #26)

Increasing diversity of SSC

■ Membership

i. Current AsESG membership consists of 90 members from 19 countries, plus 12 ex-officio members as government representatives dealing with elephant conservation from range countries. Of the 90 members, 54 were reappointed, while 36 new members have joined from 14 countries. About 1/4th of the members are female and 3/4th males. Average age of the group is about 47.8 years old, with a maximum of members on the age group of 41-50 years old. More than 56% of the members are doctorate and post doctorates and the membership has diverse skill sets. The Chair is also working to expand the membership to have representatives with diverse skill sets from all range countries.

Policy

■ Policy advice

i. The 2nd Asian Elephant Range State meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Government of Indonesia and was

facilitated by the AsESG. The meeting was locally organised and technically supported by Regain Foundation, International Elephant Foundation, Forum Konservasi Gajah Indonesia. The meeting was attended by 12 Range Government officials along with the Chair and few AsESG members. Key outcome of the meeting was the "Jakarta declaration for the conservation of Asian Elephants" agreed by all Range States. The report detailing the decision/suggestions of the meeting was also published and is available at: www.asesg.org/PDF-files/2017/AsERSM%202017_Final%20Report.pdf. (KSR #26)

ii. Helped CITES in providing information on "Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*): Status, threat and conservation actions" for their report for the 69th meeting of the Standing committee. The report can be downloaded at: <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/69/E-SC69-51-01-A.pdf>.

■ Scientific meetings

i. The 8th AsESG Members Meeting was organised in India in November 2016; a decade after the previous meeting. During this meeting AsESG discussed the challenges, priorities and strategies for the conservation of Asian elephants in its range states. The meeting also provided a forum for experts to provide insights into and help formulate solutions to the



IUCN AsESG Chair's and members meeting with officials of Sabah Forest Department, Malaysia
Photo: AsESG



Chairs meeting with AsESG current and potential members from Indonesia
Photo: Dr. Sandeep Kr Tiwari

complex issues that confront Asian elephants today. The Range Government officials met with AsESG members and exchanged knowledge for species conservation. A total of 77 experts from 15 countries attended the meeting. Minutes of the meeting were developed and shared with members, IUCN office and donors. (KSR #28)

■ Synergy

i. Dr. Sandeep Kumar Tiwari was selected as Program Manager for AsESG to assist the Chair. Dr Tiwari has a PhD on elephant and has been working for wildlife conservation for almost two decades, especially on connectivity conservation.

Acknowledgements

We thank Elephant Family, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Antwerp Zoo, Rotterdam Zoo, Emmen Zoo, Amersfoort Zoo, Amsterdam Zoo, St Louis Zoo and Zurich Zoo for supporting members meeting in 2016. We also thank Elephant Family and IFAW for supporting other AsESG activities in 2016-17 and 2017-18. We extend our thanks to the Range State Government officials for participating in AsESG members meeting in 2016 and 2nd Range State Asian Elephant meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia. We are thankful to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Government of Indonesia for hosting the Range State meeting and Dr. Wahdi Azmi and Heidi Riddle for organising the meeting. Thanks to the Convenors and members of various Working Groups formed to develop mandate/guidelines/protocols for conservation of Asian elephants. Thanks to

Dr. A. Christy Williams for taking charge as Red List Authority coordinator. We would like to thank Prof. Jon Paul Rodríguez, SSC Chair and his team for extending all help and assistance to AsESG. Thank you Kira Mileham for helping us raise support for 2016 AsESG meeting and further support. The Chair would also like to thank all AsESG members as well as ex-officio members for actively participating in group activities and valuable discussions.

Targets for the quadrennium 2017-2020

Bolster work at national scales

Policy advice: assist Viet Nam government in arresting decline of elephant population in Viet Nam and work towards increasing the population through the development and implementation of a national plan.

Capacity building

Capacity building: About 13 young emerging professionals working on Asian elephants supported in 2019 and 2020.

Communications

Communication: (1) communicating elephant conservation and research on Asian Elephants through biannual *GAJAH* journal; (2) communicate information on Asian elephants and activities of the AsESG through an updated website.

Conservation action

Conservation activities: (1) National Action Plans (NAP) on elephant conservation for 13 range countries in Asia produced; (2) distribution of elephants in all the 13 range states in Asia mapped; (3) effective data collection and reporting of CITES-MIKE facilitated by the AsESG; (4) Asian elephant database developed with information from all 13 range countries.

Policy advice: identify emerging threats to Asian elephant conservation and provide technical support to range states to address them.

Proposal development and funding: generating financial resource to support AsESG conservation activities.

Technical advice: produce at least 10 guidelines/protocols for the conservation of Asian elephants developed by working groups.

Increasing diversity of SSC

Membership: have members from all 13 Asian elephant range countries, with diverse skill sets. Also have ex-officio members from government officials from all 13 countries.

Policy

Scientific meetings: two meetings of the AsESG Members Meetings organised in 2018 and 2020.

Projected impact for the quadrennium 2017-2020

Conservation prospect of Asian elephant across 13 Range States improved and decline of the elephant population in Viet Nam arrested through collaborative efforts of range countries and AsESG members.



Elephants In Sabah, Malaysia, sighted during the visit of Chair AsESG in April 2017
Photo: Dr. Sandeep Kr Tiwari

Summary of activities (2016-2017)

Key Priority Area ratio: 4/7

Key Priority Areas addressed:

- Communications (3 activities)
 - Conservation action (2 activities)
 - Increasing diversity of SSC (1 activity)
 - Policy (4 activities)
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Main KSRs addressed: 19, 26, 28

Resolutions 2016 WCC: 035, 060

KSR: Key Species Result