

IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

2018 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

115

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 best available scientific-ly-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.

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: Red List assessment of Asian Elephants.

Research activities: (1) map the distribution of elephants in all the 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. Technical advice: (1) effective data collection and reporting for the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme facilitated by the AsESG; (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.

Network

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

Membership: develop AsESG membership for the quadrennium.



A small family unit at Kaziranga National Park, India
Photo: Sandeep Kr Tiwari, AsESG

Communicate

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

Scientific meetings: two meetings of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group members organised in 2018 and 2020.

Activities and results 2018

Assess

Research activities

i. The Working Group on mapping has prepared the methodology to be followed to map the distribution of elephants in all the 13 range states, and had a meeting in Myanmar to finalise the plan and work towards implementing it. AsESG plans to produce the first draft of the map by end-2019.

Plan

Conservation actions

i. The Working Groups for the preparation of Sabah, Indonesia and Bhutan National Action Plans are working on the documents and have prepared the draft which is being reviewed. The final document is expected to be ready by 2019.

The Secretariat is also in contact with Government of India and Lao PDR for the preparation of their National Elephant Conservation Action Plan. Both these governments have agreed to prepare the plan and AsESG is facilitating it. (KSR #18)

Policy

i. The Working Group has prepared the draft conservation plan to arrest the decline of elephant populations in Viet Nam and presented it at the AsESG members meeting in Bangkok in April 2018. Based on feedback from members, the plan is being revised. (KSR #27)

ii. One of the major issues impacting elephant habitat in Bangladesh was the influx of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in August 2017. As of September 2018, about 921,000 Rohingya refugees reside in 27 camps covering 6,000 acres of forest area cleared for the camps. The camp area is located in the middle of an elephant corridor and has totally impaired elephant movement between Myanmar and Bangladesh, thereby increasing human-elephant conflict in the region. About 13 cases of human death in and around the camp area as a result of elephants were reported between September 2017 and October 2018. AsESG has formed a working group which, along with Bangladesh Forest Department and IUCN Bangladesh, is working on a mitigation plan to minimise the

impact on elephants and their habitat. The AsESG Programme Manager visited the camp site in January 2018, followed by a Working Group members' visit in October 2018. The mitigation plan is being prepared. (KSR #26)

Technical advice

i. The Chair has formed a Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Working Group to strengthen and improve MIKE data collection protocol and to build better synergies between MIKE and SSC activities in the region. A MIKE regional meeting was held on 28 April 2018 in Bangkok, with support from the AsESG, that brought together members of the MIKE Technical Advisory Group, Range State officials and experts from the AsESG, as well as the staff of IUCN and CITES involved in the MIKE programme. (KSR #16)

ii. All 10 Working Groups presented the draft guidelines/manuals/plans for the conservation of Asian Elephants for discussion during the AsESG members meeting in Bangkok in April 2018. Based on feedback, the guidelines on use of captive elephants for tourism and manuals on management of musth in captive elephants have been finalised and submitted. The other plans are also being finalised and we expect to have them next year. Following the

Vets and other officials from Cambodia and Viet Nam in India for capacity building training
Photo: AsESG



Working Group members at Rohingya Camp Cox Bazar, Bangladesh
Photo: AsESG

AsESG members meeting, the Chair constituted three more Working Groups to help prepare the Bhutan National Environmental Action Plan, minimising the impact of Rohingya camps on elephants and emerging diseases; the groups are working towards the mandate. (KSR #26)

Act

Proposal development and funding

i. The AsESG Secretariat is funded by Elephant Family and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). It also raised money from Wildlife Reserves Singapore, WWF International (The Wildlife Practice), MIKE Asia and Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation for partially supporting the AsESG members meeting. It received support from the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand to host dinner for the members meeting in Bangkok. It is also coordinating with other donor agencies to support AsESG activities. (KSR #19)

Network

Capacity building

i. As part of AsESG's mandate to help in capacity building of range country members for the conservation of the species, AsESG facilitated a training programme on radio collaring of elephants and strategies for mitigating human-elephant conflict for six delegates from Cambodia (including two vets) and three delegates from Viet Nam (including two vets), led by Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) at its Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC), Kaziranga National Park, Assam from 26 November to 2 December 2018. WWF Cambodia and WWF Viet Nam supported the exposure visit-cum-training programme. (KSR #17)

Membership

i. AsESG membership comprises about 110 experts as voluntary members from 19 countries. We previously had no members from Viet Nam. In 2018, about 20 experts from diverse skill sets joined the group, including three from Viet Nam. The group also has 14 ex-officio government members nominated by range countries and four other ex-officio members.

Communicate

Communication

i. Two volumes of the *Gajah* journal (Vol 48 and 49) were published with articles on Asian Elephant research, conservation and developments along with news updates. The Secretariat has also submitted an article on the population status of Asian Elephant and key threats to the *International Zoo Yearbook*. (KSR #28)

ii. The new AsESG website was re-developed and launched. The website was reviewed by the AsESG Communications Working Group, AsESG members and then hosted. This needs to be further improved with more content to make it informative to viewers. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. An AsESG members meeting was organised in Bangkok, Thailand from 25–27 April 2018. In total, 130 people participated in the meeting, including AsESG members, Range Country Government officials from all 13 range countries and other experts. The chief guest of the meeting was General Surasak Karnjanarat, Hon'ble Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Kingdom of Thailand. The minutes

of the meeting were prepared and circulated to AsESG members and range state representatives. All the Working Group conveners presented their outcome documents for review and discussion. Apart from this, other elephant conservation issues were also discussed. The next meeting of the group is in Sabah, Malaysia, in December 2019, and the preparations are in progress. (KSR #28)

Acknowledgements

The AsESG Secretariat would like to thank Elephant Family and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) for supporting the activities of AsESG. We are also grateful to Wildlife Reserves Singapore, WWF International (The Wildlife Practice), MIKE Asia and Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation for partially supporting the AsESG meeting cost in Bangkok. The Chair would also like to extend his thanks to the Government of Thailand, the Hon'ble Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Kingdom of Thailand General Surasak Karnjanarat, the Officials of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand for extending all support for hosting the AsESG meeting in Bangkok. The Chair expresses his thanks to the Range Country Government representatives for coming to the AsESG meeting in Bangkok as well as actively contributing to the conservation of elephants in Asia. We would also like to thank all our members of the AsESG for extending their support. We are grateful to the Working Group conveners and members for working on the issues assigned to them and for developing the guidelines/manuals/plans. The AsESG Secretariat would also like to thank Prof. Jon Paul Rodríguez, SSC Chair and his team for extending all help and assistance to AsESG.

Summary of activities 2018

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 5/5

Assess	1	
Plan	5	
Act	1	
Network	2	
Communicate	3	

Main KSRs addressed: 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 27, 28

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-041, WCC-2016-Res-100

KSR: Key Species Result