

# IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

2019 Report



Vivek Menon

## Chair

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## Number of members

111

## Social networks

Website:

[www.asesg.org](http://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: 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) 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.



## Bornean Elephant Action Plan for Sabah



2020-2029



Sabah Wildlife Department  
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment

## MYANMAR ELEPHANT CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN (MECAP) : 2018 – 2027



## ELEPHANT CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN FOR BHUTAN 2018-2028



NATURE CONSERVATION DIVISION  
Department of Forests and Park Services  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Royal Government of Bhutan

### 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) help to 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 2019

#### Assess

##### Red List

**i.** The updated Red List assessment of the mainland Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), except the Sumatran subspecies, was submitted in September 2019. We have received few comments from the Red List Authority and the assessment will be re-submitted in early 2020. (KSR #1)

##### Research activities

**i.** The group presented the detailed methodology to map the distribution of elephants in all 13 range states in Asia at the AsESG meeting in Sabah, Malaysia, in December 2019, and the Working Group is working on the data collection protocol. The data is being collected; the map has not yet been prepared.

**ii.** The group confirmed the need to develop the database at the AsESG meeting in 2019 and will initiate the process in 2020. (KSR #16)

### Plan

#### Planning

**i.** Bhutan, Sabah (Malaysia) and Cambodia have published their National Elephant Conservation Action Plans (NECAP). The Sumatra NECAP has also been drafted and the public consultation is ongoing. On request of the AsESG Secretariat, the Government of India and Lao PDR have also formed technical committees for the preparation of their National Elephant Conservation Action Plan and the consultation process is in progress. The links to the NECAP are available on the Resources section of the AsESG website (<https://www.asesg.org/resources.php>). (KSR #18)

#### Policy

**i.** The draft plan for Viet Nam has been prepared. The Viet Nam Government and AsESG are in consultation to draft their NECAP, so that a definite course of action can be planned and implemented. The Working Group on Viet Nam has drafted the plan for arresting the decline of the elephant population and this plan was presented. (KSR #27)

**ii.** A major issue impacting elephant habitat in Bangladesh has been the influx of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in August 2017 and their resettlement in 27 camps. Over 8,200 acres of forest have been cleared for the camps. The camp has also hindered elephant movement between Myanmar and Bangladesh, thereby increasing human-elephant conflict in the region. A total of 14 human deaths and 46 human injuries were reported between 2017 and November 2019 caused by elephants in and around the camp area. 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 working group suggested the following long-term management needs: (1) to

collect information on group size, seasonal use of habitat condition, corridors used by elephants, human-elephant conflict status, etc.; (2) radio-collaring of a few elephants; (3) secure the patch of elephant corridor; (4) further enhance the capacity of the Forest Department and Elephant Response Team; (5) engage the local villagers in human-elephant conflict management; (6) fence off the camp area to prevent human-elephant conflict; and (7) trans-boundary dialogue be initiated between Forest Department of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The IUCN Bangladesh Office along with Bangladesh Forest Department has undertaken various mitigation measures to minimise conflict. (KSR #26)

#### Technical advice

**i.** AsESG connected MIKE with all the 13 range countries and also provided a platform during the 9th AsESG meeting in Bangkok to organise their regional meeting on 28 April 2018. Following this, MIKE organised a similar South-east Asia Sub-regional Meeting on 29–30 October 2019 in Bangkok for Southeast Asian countries, where three AsESG members as well as ex officio members participated. The MIKE Regional Meeting for South Asian countries was organised in Bhutan on 1–2 December 2019 and four AsESG members and four ex officio Government representatives participated. (KSR #16)

**ii.** Six Working Groups assigned to prepare the guidelines/plan have finalised their outcome documents and presented them at the AsESG members meeting in Sabah, Malaysia, in December 2019. These documents will be soon reviewed, finalised and updated on the AsESG website: Bhutan National Elephant Conservation Action Plan, Sabah National Elephant Conservation Action Plan, Guidelines for

creating artificial water holes in elephant habitats, Guideline for welfare and use of elephants in tourism, Guidelines for management and care of captive elephants in musth, and Guidelines for the reintroduction of captive elephants in the wild as a possible restocking option. Five Working Groups are still working on the outcome documents; two of these were formed in mid-2018. (KSR #26)

## **Act**

### **Proposal development and funding**

**i.** The group has received support from Elephant Family and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) for AsESG Secretariat and group activities. Sabah Government and Sabah Wildlife Department provided the logistical support to host the AsESG members meeting in Sabah, Malaysia in December 2019. It also received funds from WWF International and Saint Louis Zoo to support the AsESG group meeting. (KSR #19)

## **Network**

### **Capacity building**

**i.** During the 10th meeting of AsESG in Sabah, Malaysia, in December 2019, a separate session was organised: the Young Professionals workshop and capacity building training. The session was organised to provide a forum for young researchers and conservationists working on Asian elephants but who are not members of AsESG to present their work to the AsESG members and range officials. This also provided them an opportunity to interact with subject experts and Range State officials as well as conservation partners to support their research/conservation activities. Six youths from three countries presented their work and were also provided with training on proposal writing, the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting

Tool (SMART), and human-elephant conflict. The participants were supported by AsESG for their travel, stay and conference participation. (KSR #18)

**ii.** Capacity building training of veterinarians and field teams from Viet Nam and Cambodia on radio collaring of elephants and human-elephant conflict mitigation was conducted by AsESG-Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) in Kaziranga, India, from 26 November–2 December 2018. Following this, IFAW-WTI veterinarians went to Cambodia to assist the WWF Cambodia team in radio collaring of elephants from 26 July–7 August 2019 and train the team. (KSR #17)

### **Membership**

**i.** The group has 111 experts as voluntary members from 19 countries, including from all 13 range countries. In 2019, about 28 experts from diverse skill sets were selected to join the team, including three from Viet Nam. However, only 22 applicants completed their registration process. The group also has 15 ex officio Government members nominated by range countries and five other ex officio members.

## **Communicate**

### **Communication**

**i.** The *Gajah* editorial team has published one volume (Vol. 49) covering a variety of research, conservation work and developments along with news updates. (KSR #28)

**ii.** AsESG has published a paper on the population status of Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*) and key threats in the 2019 issue of *International Zoo Yearbook*. (KSR #43)

**iii.** A four-page brochure on AsESG was printed and circulated among members during the AsESG meeting in Sabah, Malaysia, in December 2019. (KSR #28)

**iv.** The AsESG website ([www.asesg.org](http://www.asesg.org)) is updated with all details and stories. (KSR #28)

## **Scientific meetings**

**i.** The 10th meeting of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) was held at the Shangri La's Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, from 4–6 December 2019 and was jointly hosted along with Sabah Wildlife Department. A wide range of issues were discussed, including standards and guidelines for the management and welfare of elephants in the wild and in captivity, wildlife emergencies, national action plans, Red Listing of Asian Elephants and challenges for the conservation of elephants in Sabah. The meeting was attended by 148 people including 62 AsESG members, 17 Government officials from all Asian elephant range countries, three other ex officio members, 36 invitees from across the globe, as well as 20 organisers and 10 exhibitors. The meeting also provided a forum for AsESG members and young professionals to present their work. A partners' meeting between AsESG partners and range country officials was also organised to explore the possibilities of supporting priority conservation activities of Range States. (KSR #28)

**ii.** The 3rd Asian Elephant Range States meeting is scheduled to be held in Nepal in 2020. The AsESG Chair, Deputy Director General Nepal and other members of the organising committee discussed the plan during a side meeting in Sabah (during the members meeting in December 2019). The Range State meeting, originally scheduled for April 2020, was rescheduled to a later date in 2021. (KSR #28)

**iii.** AsESG organised a session at the 29th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2019) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 25 July 2019, jointly with IFAW and Elephant Family, on 'Challenges confronting conservation of Asian Elephants: Securing corridors as a mitigation strategy'. (KSR #28)

Mr Vivek Menon, Chair of the AsESG, addressing the audience at the 29th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2019) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 25th July 2019  
Photo: AsESG archives



Audience at the AsESG side event at CITES CoP18  
Photo: AsESG archives



Participants at the AsESG members meeting in Sabah, Malaysia  
Photo: AsESG archives



Dr Sandeep Kr Tiwari, Program Manager, updating members of National Action Plans at AsESG members meeting in Sabah, Malaysia  
Photo: AsESG archives

**iv.** AsESG organised side event at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP18) in Geneva on 22 August 2019, in partnership with IFAW, Elephant Family and WWF, on 'Impact of poaching and illegal trade on Asian Elephants'. (KSR #28)

**v.** AsESG WCPA proposed Transport Working Group: A meeting of the proposed linear infrastructure Working Group with members from World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group and AsESG was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 8 April 2019, to discuss the formalities and Terms of Reference. (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 Group. We would especially like to thank the Working Group convenors and the members who have successfully completed their outcome documents and other groups that are working to their outcome document. Thanks to our Red List Coordinator and other members for successfully undertaking the

Red List assessment of Asian Elephants. The Chair would like to thank the Government of Sabah, especially Datuk Christina Liew, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Sabah State Government/Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment and the Sabah Wildlife Department for jointly hosting the 10th meeting of the group in Sabah, Malaysia, and the hospitality. The Chair expresses his thanks to the Range Country Government officials for coming for the AsESG meeting and actively participating in the discussion. 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 Saint Louis Zoo, WWF International and WWF US for the financial support to organise the members meeting in Sabah. We would also like to thank our other partners for coming to the Sabah meeting and actively participating in the Partners' meeting. The AsESG Secretariat would also like to thank Jon Paul Rodríguez, SSC Chair, and his team for extending all assistance and help to AsESG.

### Summary of activities 2019

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 5/5

Assess	3	
Plan	5	
Act	1	
Network	3	
Communicate	9	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 27, 28, 43

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-068

KSR: Key Species Result