

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund

Asian elephants are best known in the United States as familiar circus attractions. Yet throughout their homeland, captive elephants are primarily beasts of burden. And, in some nations elephants hold important religious significance. An estimated 16,000 Asian elephants are presently tamed and used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Ironically, it is the destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture, and the encroachment of human civilization that pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia's wild elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests and savannahs of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants still exist in the wild—about half of which

are found in India. Mature bulls can weigh as much as 11,000 pounds. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day. And, each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles.

When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassava, bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are poisoned or shot each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants, in connection with crop raids.

Poaching, the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones, poses a serious threat as well. Among Asian elephants, only males have tusks. Asian elephant ivory is highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants has left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tusker.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskers is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tusk-less males known as “mukhnas.”

To combat these threats, the United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for protection of the Asian elephant and the conservation of its habitat.



Asian elephants

Highlights from 28 projects funded from the 2005 appropriation of \$1.4 million include:

- Providing emergency support for elephant conservation following the tsunami disaster in Aceh, Indonesia. Funds are assisting local people in integrating environmental concerns into post-disaster recovery programs, and strengthening the capacity of local conservation departments to protect the Ulu Masen forest complex and its globally important elephant population.
- Erecting fences around villages along the southern boundary of the Lahugala Kitulana National Park in Sri Lanka, as a novel and sustainable solution to elephant crop raiding both for humans and elephants. This method of fencing the villagers in and the elephants out not only protects villagers but also allows elephants to use lands both within and outside the parks.
- Deploying captive elephants to help protect the habitat of North Sumatra's last wild elephant herd. Captive elephants are not only used for frequent patrols of the park, but also to create public awareness of elephant needs.
- Establishing an elephant conservation working group that will be involved in management planning and elephant conservation at Kuiburi National Park in the Tenasserim Range of Thailand.
- Decreasing human-elephant conflict by using chili powder as a deterrent in villages around Way Kambas and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Parks in Sumatra. The chili powder, and other agricultural activities that are unpalatable to elephants such as bee-keeping, are promoted through this program as non-lethal, low-cost deterrents to crop raiding.
- Promoting eco-tourism with elephants as the main attraction in Sri Lanka, where the profits generated by the project are used by the community to maintain an early warning tripwire protection system. The system greatly reduces elephant damage to crops and resulting human-elephant conflict.
- Estimating the numbers of elephants and their habitat needs in South-Eastern Sabah, Malaysia, using dung-DNA extraction techniques and satellite tracking. The project also ground truths the area for logging, land conversion, and satellite imagery mapping.
- Increasing the capacity of the field staff at Kaziranga National Park in India for anti-poaching operations by providing anti-poaching training, and distributing a basic ranger kit (including backpack, flashlight and batteries, rain gear, shoes, sleeping bag, and water bottle) to the 550 individuals who take the training course.

Asian Elephant Conservation Funding History from 1999 through 2005	
Total Number of Grant Proposals Received	263
Total Number of Grants Awarded	146
Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants	92%
Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress	\$6,900,500
Total Funds Distributed through Grants	\$6,522,165
Total Funds to Administration of Grants	\$378,335
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$8,727,078



Tusker in forest
USFWS/Dave Ferguson

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January 2006

