

# Asian Elephant Conservation Fund



*Asian elephant and calf* USFWS



In the United States, Asian elephants are best known as familiar circus attractions. Yet throughout their homeland, captive elephants are primarily beasts of burden. 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 savannas of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild—about half of which are found in India.

With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive. 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 killed 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 “tuskless.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskless males is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tuskless 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.



Top right and bottom: *Asian elephant* Mini Nagendran/USFWS

*The 2008 Congressional appropriation of \$1.4 Million to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund allowed the Service to support 30 crucial elephant conservation projects in Asia, including:*

- Support to collect and analyze baseline data on distribution and status of and threats to elephants, and assess human-elephant conflict in Bhutan.
- Support to continue an integrated action-based environmental curriculum based on wildlife protection, habitat protection, pollution prevention, and sustainable livelihoods, and deliver program to around 3,000 students aged 6-15, in Cambodia.
- Support to continue to promote reduction of human-elephant conflict and elephant poaching, train forest rangers in design and implementation of peer-reviewed sampling-based survey methods and effective methods to reduce human-elephant conflict, in Indonesia.
- Support to monitor seasonal movements of elephant herds and prepare a GIS map, prioritize and protect key corridors, strengthen community participation by way of self-help groups, provide deterrents to keep elephants away from village premises, and set up nurseries to grow local, native plant species for habitat restoration and re-establishment of elephant corridors, in northeast India.
- Support to initiate surveys to assess human-elephant conflict and begin mitigation measures around Endau-Rompin State Parks, Malaysia, and continue programs in training and capacity building.
- Support to minimize the spread of TB to wild elephants by minimizing or eliminating TB in captive elephants, build capacity of local veterinarians, and develop a Nepal Elephant TB surveillance and Control Program as a model for Asian elephant range countries.
- Support to establish a network of functioning community groups as active members of Salakpra Elephant Conservation Alliance, develop a system of community rights, responsibilities and regulations covering the use and protection of forest resources in designated areas, and provide alternative income-earning options, decreasing the dependence on forest, in Thailand.
- Support to deploy GPS collars on elephants that travel between Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in China and Nam Ha National Biodiversity Conservation Area in the Lao PDR to understand the migratory movements and behaviors of these herds, design and establish safe corridors and cross-border protected areas, and build the capacity of the nature reserves in China and Lao PDR.



*Asian elephant herd* Belinda Stewart-Cox/ZSL

Asian Elephant Conservation Funding History from 2004 through 2008	
Total Number of Grant Proposals Received	220
Total Number of Grants Awarded	143
Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants	100%
Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress	\$6,999,154
Total Funds Distributed through Grants	\$6,581,895
Total Funds to Administration of Grants	\$417,259
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$9,324,701

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