

## Miscellaneous

### IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group - Announcement of new Co-Chairs

Dear colleagues,

The Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) has invited us to serve as interim Co-Chairs of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG), and we have accepted the invitation. This means that the Group will not have a single Chair as before - instead we will share the Chair's responsibilities. The IUCN process of appointments is a formal and time-consuming one; with all Chairs and members being appointed or reappointed in the new quadrennium. Fortunately, the Specialist Group Chair invitations are now complete, and so we can begin the process of (re)appointing the AsESG's members.

A major task for the AsESG is to help mould and guide decisions and policies affecting elephant conservation by providing sound scientific information and advice. The SSC has charged us with delivering the following objectives over the coming year:

1. Establish a new, revitalized AsESG membership;
2. Establish a regular dialogue with the new membership including timely updates in Species, SSC's E-Bulletin, or through a dedicated AsESG publication or website;
3. Provide support and motivation for the members of the AsESG to stimulate their technical input and activity to new and ongoing activities in support of the conservation of Asian elephants, including providing technical support to the upcoming Asian Elephant Range States meeting;
4. Revise and complete an updated version of the Asian Elephant Action Plan;
5. Achieve agreement within the AsESG on plans and priority actions for the Group;
6. Help identify sources of long-term funding support for the core functions of the AsESG;
7. Other actions deemed necessary to build the capacity of the AsESG and its members in South and South East Asia.

We see working with the range State governments to effect better conservation for Asian elephants as a particularly high priority for the group. Here we recognize that the group's advice would be most acceptable if it originates from and has the neutrality of an IUCN Specialist Group behind it. This necessitates that the group be a purely neutral body whose members do not have any vested

interests driving their decision-making. The group will also focus on providing technical support and practical solutions to conservation problems and on increasing the range States' capacities to manage their elephant populations.

We recognize that the Asian elephant situation is precarious in many ways and needs more global/regional attention and support. One way we will be working to achieve this will be by providing a clear global perspective on the status of the Asian elephant, the threats faced by it, and the conservation issues involved. We believe the AsESG should create a 'database' on the status of Asian elephant populations and habitats and link this to a 'strategic plan' that identifies and addresses specific needs and priorities within individual countries. The AsESG will endeavor to provide governments, NGOs, donors and individuals involved in Asian elephant conservation with guidance on how best they can work and contribute at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Furthermore, we recognize that setting research and conservation priorities, funding, institutional capacity, legislation, and captive elephant management are among the many important issues that need the group's attention, but the details of how the AsESG will address these issues are for the group's members working with the Co-Chairs to decide and work on. Achieving the above will be possible only through a membership that is active, representative, and includes managers and scientists alike. Communication will be a priority as the group cannot function effectively without establishing reliable channels of communication. In building the group's membership we will pay attention to the lessons learnt by the IUCN/SSC's other specialist groups. For example, "While long experience has shown that smaller groups tend to be more effective, lasting conservation action in the international sphere almost requires that Groups be more than small coterie of like-minded colleagues." We do realize the group cannot be so large as to include everyone interested in or working with Asian elephants and we have been given important advice on the appointment of members and composition of SGs from the SSC, but we would like everyone to know that we do not look at the AsESG as 'the only' interested party. Others who have technical expertise will be invited to work and contribute through 'Task Forces' that will be constituted to deal with specific technical issues. Additionally, where issues are of a more general nature and require wider consensus we will seek the opinions/views of the wider Asian elephant conservation community before presenting an AsESG perspective on the most important issues.

We look forward to working with you to achieve these aims and to ensure a better future for Asia's elephants.

Sincerely,

Ajay Desai & Simon Hedges

Interim Co-chairs,  
IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

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Photo: Heidi Riddle for International Elephant Foundation (IEF)