

## Notes from the Chair IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

Vivek Menon

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Dear members

I am happy to connect with all of you again and also extremely pleased to inform you that the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group is now a strong team of 112 likeminded specialists from across the globe. Recently, in July 2018, 22 new members have joined our group allowing us to score our century in membership.

Also, now that we have had a very successful 9th meeting of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group at the Avani Riverside Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand from April 25 to 27, 2018 (please read the report of this on pages 40–45) and that many of you could attend that meeting, I am confident that the group is going from strength to strength.

For the smooth conduct of the meet I have several sets of people to thank. First of course all of you who took part and made it the largest meet of our group ever. Secondly, I wish to thank the Thai Government (Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation) for hosting the meet so graciously. Thirdly our donors; majorly Elephant Family and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) who were the principal sponsors but equally MIKE Asia (for partially

supporting the travel and stay of officials for the AsESG meeting), Mr. John Edwards (for the support from Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation), Dr. A. Christy Williams (for support from WWF International), The Wildlife Practice and Dr. Sonja Luz (for support from Wildlife Reserves Singapore). It was a fun and productive meeting.

Based on the recommendations of AsESG meeting in Bangkok, I have constituted three more working groups i.e. the working group to manage the Rohingya elephant crisis in Bangladesh, the working group to assist in developing the National Action Plan for Bhutan and the working group on emerging diseases affecting Asian elephants.

I know that a few more working groups have been suggested but I am hoping that with a few others ending by December, we can initiate new ones. Currently I would want the secretariat to focus on winding up existing ones after achieving the desired outcomes. It is when we start publishing the reports, guidelines, action plans and protocols coming out of these groups that I think the work of the AsESG will achieve a more permanent footing. I would request all the members of the



Group photo of the AsESG meeting in Bangkok.



AsESG Chair Mr. Vivek Menon addressing the meeting.



The Hon'ble Minister of Natural Resources Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand.

groups especially the facilitators and convenors to please focus on getting as many of these done before we meet again.

We are now currently in discussion with the four members who had verbally suggested hosting the meet in their countries. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia (Sabah) and China were proposed but we would look to see what is convenient for most members in terms of logistics as well as what hosting support we would get from the host government and our members in situ. I hope that by the end of the year we can decide on the venue and dates for the next meet.

Soon after the Bangkok meet, I also had the privilege of attending the China-ASEAN Wildlife Conservation Training Workshop from 19th–23rd June 2018 at Chengdu, China on the invitation of the Chinese government. Apart from presenting an overview of Asian elephant conservation and the role of AsESG, I also discussed the elephant

conservation challenges with senior officials of the Chinese Forestry Department and offered the support of AsESG experts for the conservation of elephants in China. I also gave a talk on the Asian elephant at the Beijing Normal University.

Meanwhile the AsESG Secretariat has also been working hard in helping some of the working groups but also in helping the CITES in providing information on “Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*): Status, threat and conservation actions” for their report for the 70th meeting of the Standing Committee submitted in June 2018. The Secretariat also provided information for the SSC Annual Reports for the years 2016 and 2017. The website should also go live in a few weeks.

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Ex-officio members with the AsESG Secretariat.



Paying attention to the Chair's report.