

Notes from the Chair IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

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Dear Members

Good to connect with all of you again. I am happy that the AsESG and the Sabah Wildlife Department, Malaysia will be jointly hosting the 10th meeting of IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia from 4th to 6th December 2019. The meeting will be held at Shangri La's Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa, Kota Kinabalu followed by an optional field visit to Kinabatangan Sanctuary on 7th and 8th December. I look forward to having you all for the upcoming AsESG members meeting, the last one in this quadrennium. I am happy that we have been able to stick to our commitment of the members meeting every 18 months.

The Red List coordinator along with the AsESG Secretariat and few other AsESG members has completed the Red List assessment of Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus* and *E. m. maximus*) and this has been submitted to IUCN. The assessment of *E. m. sumatranus* now needs to be taken up.

Let me now dwell on the National Action Plans. The key achievement since the last Gajah is that Bhutan has published its National Action Plan for Elephant Conservation (Fig. 1). The Working Group met in February 2019 to review the draft plan prepared by the Nature Conservation Division, Department of Forests and Park Services, Bhutan and the Department finalised the plan and printed it in August 2019. Indonesia and Sabah (Malaysia) have also made considerable progress and we expect to have these plans ready by the time we meet for our AsESG meeting.

Other than this we have also received final outcome documents from four Working Groups and would request other Working Group

conveners and members to submit their final outcome documents at the earliest, preferably by October 2019.

Following the hands on training for "Elephant Team" from Cambodia and Vietnam on elephant immobilization, human-wildlife conflict, and certain behavioural aspects of wild Asian elephants in November 2018 in India, AsESG is now providing technical support and helping the Cambodia team in radio collaring of two elephants in Cambodia. The Wildlife Trust of India vets guided the team of local veterinarians, community forest staff and the Ministry of Environment (Rangers) of Cambodia on immobilization and radio-collaring.

The AsESG Secretariat and our member Mr Ajay Desai helped the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India

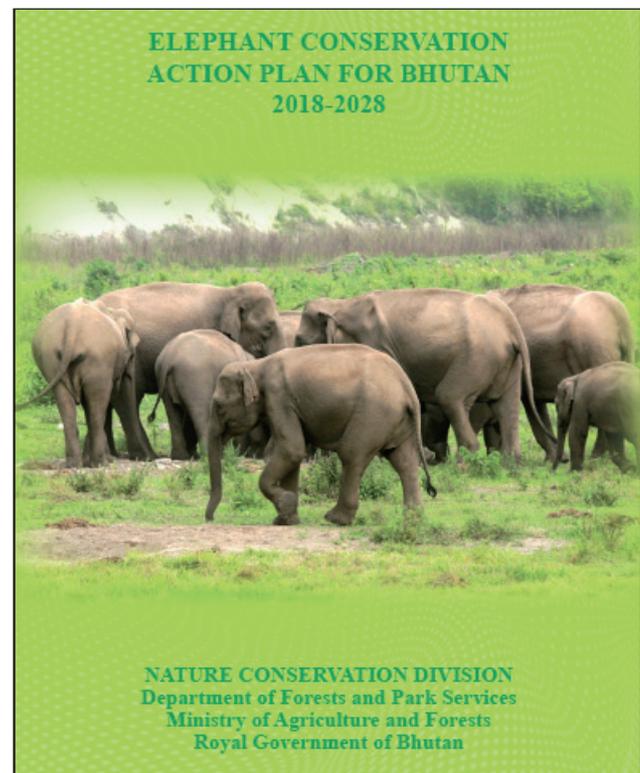


Figure 1. Cover of Bhutan's new Action Plan.

in finalizing the proposal for listing of *Elephas maximus* in the appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), which will now be discussed at the COP being held in India in early 2020.

We have also been active in promoting the AsESG internationally. We had a discussion group at the 29th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2019) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 25th July 2019 on “Challenges confronting conservation of Asian elephants: Securing corridors as a mitigation strategy”. This was organized to identify the successful strategies being followed in range states to secure corridors as a mean to address negative impact of habitat fragmentation and land-use management so as to learn from each other’s experience and explore diverse mechanism to secure the corridors. Six speakers (four from the AsESG) from four range states spoke at the discussion group (Fig. 2).

The AsESG in partnership with IFAW, Elephant Family and WWF also organized a side event on the impact of poaching and illegal trade on Asian elephants at the CITES CoP18 meeting held at Geneva on 22nd August 2019. The conference was addressed by the Director General of Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia; Director General, Department of Wildlife Conservation Sri Lanka; Addl. Director General of Forest, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India; Director of International Wildlife Trade Permission, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand and two independent experts from Myanmar and



Figure 2. ICCB in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Figure 3. Elephant side event at CITES CoP18.

Japan. Issues ranging from poaching and illegal killing of elephants for ivory, elephant skin trade, live elephant trade, enforcement efforts undertaken in different range states as well as the overall illegal wildlife scenario were discussed at the conference. A large number of professionals from various organizations, institutes and range countries attended the conference (Fig. 3).

On the invitation of the Co-chair, IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG), Dr. Sandeep Kr Tiwari, Program Manager AsESG, attended the AfESG members meeting on behalf of the AsESG at Pretoria, South Africa from 14th to 18th July 2019. The Co-chair AfESG and the Program Manager AsESG reiterated the fact that both the groups should interact more frequently to share information and knowledge that would help the conservation of both the African and Asian elephants.

AsESG has submitted a proposal for the IUCN World Conservation Congress to be held from 11 to 19 June in France. This is a joint proposal on “Critical connectivity for giants: Securing wildlife corridors for management of large-ranging mammals” by AsESG in collaboration with IUCN WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group, Elephant Family, WWF International, IFAW, WWF India, Wildlife Trust of India and few others.

I thank you all for taking forward the conservation of elephants in Asia and see you all at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

Vivek Menon
Chair AsESG, IUCN SSC