

Notes from the Chair IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

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Dear Members

I hope this finds you well and that you and your family are safe from the COVID19 pandemic that has taken a big toll on humanity and has severely impacted our life.

As many of you are aware, we have had a very successful 10th meeting of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia from 4th to 6th December 2019, which already feels like a lifetime ago (please read the report of this on page 33). Many people and organisations contributed to the successful hosting of the meeting and I have several sets of people to thank. I would like to convey my sincere thanks to the Government of Sabah and Sabah Wildlife Department for jointly hosting the meeting and the hospitality extended to the delegates. I would specially like to thank Datuk Christina Liew, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Sabah State Government and Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment for taking keen interest in organising the meeting. I would also like to thank Mr Augustine Tuuga, our own member Dr Sen Nathan and their colleagues from the Sabah Wildlife Department for hosting the meeting and the warm hospitality. Our AsESG members from Sabah, Dr Benoit Goossens, Dr Nurzhafarina Othman and Dr Marc Ancrenaz for all their help and leading few of the technical discussions during the Sabah session. Also a special thank you to all of you who took part and made it the largest meet of our group ever with 148 people, including government representatives from all 13 range countries. I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to our donors; majorly Elephant Family and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) who were the principal sponsors and Ms Nilanga Jayasinghe for support from WWF (US and International) and Dr Martha Fischer from Saint Louis Zoo.

Based on the outcome of the various working groups formed earlier and the meeting in Sabah, the six working groups that have finalized their outcome documents are being dissolved. All working group documents finalized will be peer reviewed and uploaded on AsESG website and could also be published in Gajah. I would request all the members of the groups that have not completed their outcome document especially the convenors to please focus on getting it done as soon as possible, preferably by June 2020. Based on the recommendations of the AsESG meeting in Sabah, we are forming at least two more working groups: Working group on Borneo elephants and working group for drafting the national action plan for conservation of elephants in Peninsular Malaysia.

The AsESG has successfully submitted the assessment of the Asian elephant (except subspecies *Elephas maximus sumatranus*) to the Red List Authorities in September 2019. Based on the assessment, we have received few comments from the Red List Authorities including the suggestion to review the document. The same has been completed and the final document will be submitted soon.

AsESG is also working with the governments of Lao PDR and India for the preparation of their National Elephant Conservation Action Plans. The technical committee constituted by Project Elephant, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India to draft the plan includes three AsESG members and had its first meeting on 26th November 2019. This will be followed by regional meetings for further inputs.

I attended the SSC Steering Committee Meeting as well as the SSC Leadership Meeting at Abu Dhabi from 6th to 10th October 2019, where I

spoke and chaired few parallel sessions. Few other AsESG members also participated at the meeting.

I am happy to inform that the AsESG is in the top four among 160 specialist groups and has been awarded the SSC Chair's Citation of Excellence for its outstanding contribution in delivering the species strategic plan for the 2017–2018 period.

We have also been active in promoting the AsESG internationally. The proposal by the Indian Government for listing of *Elephas maximus* in the appendix I of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) will be taken up for discussion at the CMS CoP13 meeting. The AsESG assisted the ministry in preparation of the proposal. At the same convention, the AsESG, along with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Wildlife Institute of India, CMS, IUCN and Wildlife Trust of India, will be organizing a side event to discuss on “Elephant conservation

beyond borders” that will have speakers from the Indian Ministry, AsESG, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

The Elephant Reintroduction Foundation, Thailand and AsESG were hosting the Elephant Reintroduction Workshop in Bangkok from 5th to 7th February 2020.

The AsESG has published a paper on “Population status of Asian elephants *Elephas maximus* and key threats” in the International Zoo Yearbook 2019.

I thank you all for sincerely contributing to the research and conservation of the species and helping the AsESG in working towards its overall aim of promoting long-term conservation of the Asian elephant.

Vivek Menon
Chair AsESG, IUCN SSC

