

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

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Dear Members

The current pandemic has created an unprecedented situation that has affected us all – our families, our work and our way of life. I hope you and your families are keeping well. Our hearts are with those who have been affected personally by the outbreak of corona virus and wish them speedy recovery. The current pandemic has, however, opened up new ways of working and communications and this has kept us all connected despite of the travel restrictions.

After a successful Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) members meeting in Sabah, Malaysia in December 2019 and based on the recommendations of AsESG meeting in Sabah, two new Working Groups have been formed; one on Borneo elephants to decide if this should be considered as subspecies and its Red-listing and the second for drafting the National Action Plan for conservation of elephants in Peninsular Malaysia. The Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP), Peninsular Malaysia has planned to evaluate the implementation status of existing plan this month based on which the formulation of the new plan could be initiated early next year.

The Working Group documents that have already been submitted are being reviewed and will soon be available on the AsESG website. Summaries of two of these guidelines are being published in this volume of *Gajah*. Other Working Groups that have not completed their outcome document yet are requested to finalise them soon.

I am happy to inform that after the AsESG members meeting in Sabah last year, two new National Action Plans for elephant conservation (NECAP) were published. Both, the Asian Elephant Conservation Action Plan for Cambodia and the Borneo Elephant Action Plan for Sabah are

available at <<https://www.asesg.org/resources.php>>. Lao PDR and India are also working to draft their NECAPs. Lao PDR has produced the draft plan which is being internally reviewed. India is currently having regional consultations with State Forest Department and elephant experts for threat analysis and proposed action points and intends to complete the consultation by mid October 2020, after which the technical committee formed by the Ministry will draft the plan.

As most of you are aware, *Elephas maximus indicus* was recently included in Appendix I of the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) at CMS CoP13 in February 2020 and the AsESG assisted in preparation of the proposal. This is the first international victory for the AsESG on a policy front and we must be happy in this being achieved. The AsESG along with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Government of India (MoEFCC), Wildlife Institute of India, CMS, IUCN Bangladesh and Wildlife Trust of India also organized a side event at CMS on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020 to discuss “Elephant conservation beyond borders”. It also partnered with Project Elephant Division, MoEFCC and Wildlife Institute of India for a discussion on “Asian elephant conservation: Prospects and challenges” on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

The Elephant Reintroduction Foundation, in collaboration with the Department of National Park, Plant and Wildlife Conservation, the IUCN-SSC AsESG and the IUCN-SSC Conservation Translocation Specialist Group, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Chiang Mai University and National Elephant Institute conducted the Workshop on Open House Elephant Reintroduction Project Thailand in February 2020 in Bangkok, Thailand. The objectives of this workshop were to share and exchange the

knowledge of elephant reintroduction, as well as evaluate and enhance the elephant reintroduction method. There were 70 participants from 8 nations including scientists, veterinarians, governmental and non-governmental staff, elephant camp owners etc. Our senior member, Dr Chatchote Thitaram took the lead in organizing the meeting.

Finally as this quadrennium draws to a close I wish to remind the AsESG members of the way forward. In all possibility, with the postponement yet again of the IUCN World Conservation Congress, the statutory bits will be done online in January. This means that the membership of this group for the AsESG closes with that and the process for a new membership starts of. Jon Paul, Chair of SSC is already confirmed to retain his place as he is unopposed to the post. He has asked me, if I wish to continue as Chair for the next term. I have replied that personally I will accept one more term, if all of you as members wish me to continue. With that I have requested Sandeep to circulate to all of you a questionnaire survey on Survey Monkey that will take a few minutes of your time. I would request you to fill that in, which will be an assessment of the last quadrennium and of the functioning of myself as Chair and Sandeep as Program Manager. Please be frank as we wish to get feedback from all of you on this idea of continuity of our positions, going forward for one more term and also the ways we can improve functioning if you feel that

this is the right decision. If we receive reasonable consensus on that, I would also address all of you in the need to identify two new Deputy Chairs for the quadrennium going forward. This is essential for leadership succession as I don't intend in any case to run for a third term after this one if possible. Please assist me in this as well

At the end of this quadrennium, the AsESG would like to convey its sincere thanks to the editor and editorial board members of *Gajah* for all their efforts to ensure the journal is published in time and for maintaining its quality. I would also like to thank all the contributors of *Gajah* for sharing their research and conservation achievements and encourage others to publish their papers in *Gajah*. Our sincere thanks to our institutional partners, the Elephant Family and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), for their generous support to the AsESG and helping us to undertake the activities of the group and to the Chairs office in Caracas and the IUCN Secretariat staff at Gland for their manifold assistance and guidance.

Thank you once again. I wish you all health and happiness in the remaining part of 2020 and going forward.

Vivek Menon  
Chair IUCN SSC AsESG



Tusker and termite mound  
Bandipur National Park