

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

Vivek Menon

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Dear Members

Hope this finds you well and that you and your family are safe from the current pandemic. 2020 was a very difficult time for all of us. I hope with vaccination started, 2021 brings in some respite from the pandemic and we are able to resume our work in full swing and are able to travel to other range states. I hope our governments and people learn from this pandemic and the negative repercussion of environmental damages on our life and take appropriate actions and safeguards to protect our forest and wildlife.

The sudden demise of our friend, member and former AsESG Co-Chair Ajay Desai was a great shock for all of us and for the entire research and conservation fraternity. Ajay was an institution in himself and his dedication for elephants and sense of humour was unparalleled. It is tragic to lose a loved one before their time and his loss to the field of elephant conservation in Asia will be long felt. The greatest homage to Ajay would be to continue working for the conservation of elephants in Asia that was so close to his heart.

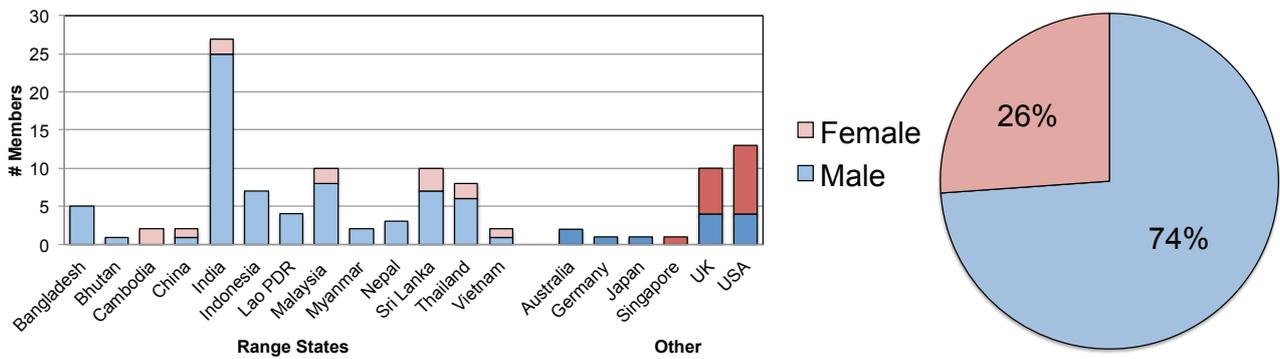
The Red List Coordinator and team were successfully able to update the Red List assessment of the Asian elephant. The information was submitted in mid 2019, reviewed in 2020 and published in early December 2020. This was also possible because of the information generated from the research and conservation work of our members, other experts, organisations and range country governments that has helped in undertaking the assessment. On behalf of the group, I would like to thank all the members who have contributed in the assessment process and Christy for taking the lead. You can download the document at <https://www.asesg.org/PDFfiles/Asian%20Elephant%20Red%20List%20Assessment%202020.pdf>.

As we step into the new quadrennium (2021–2024), we are reviewing the current membership of our group. Although I will formally write to you after the upcoming World Conservation Congress in September 2021, when the new quadrennium will kick in, inter-alia the current members will continue to serve the group till we complete the review process so that the intervening period is not lost. I am happy that most of you (100 out of 111) responded to the self-assessment survey. It has helped us to understand the diverse research and conservation work being done by our members across the Asian elephant range states and the papers published. Thank you for also critically reviewing the AsESG Secretariat and the work of the Chair and the Program Manager. The outcome has been quite encouraging. Your feedback will help us in further improving our work and effective functioning of the group.

For the coming quadrennium we have constituted a new Membership Advisory Committee (MAC) for screening new memberships. The committee consists of Mr. Salman Saaban (Convener), Dr. Peter Leimgruber, Dr. T.N.C Vidya and Dr. Jennifer Pastorini. In our group, we would



**Figure 1.** Ajay Desai (left) posing with other (former) chairs of the AsESG: Raman Sukumar, Vivek Menon and Simon Hedges (left to right).



**Figure 2.** Country and gender of the 111 members at the end of the last quadrennium (2020).

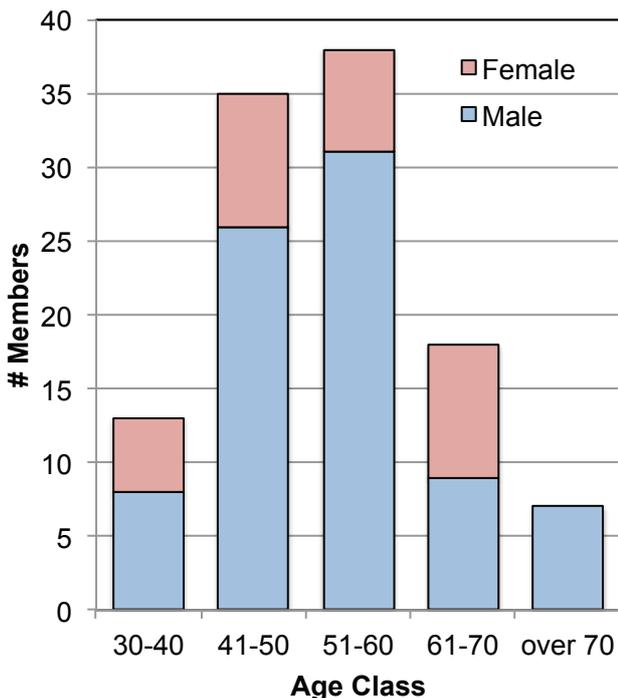
like to have gender parity (Fig. 2), balance amongst youth (Fig. 3) and experience (Fig. 4), geographical balance (Fig. 2), more members from the countries that currently have less than five (Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Lao PDR and China) and more representation in skill sets that are poorly represented. I request you all to proactively look for potential members and ask them to apply. They could submit the application to the Program Manager in the designated application form endorsed by two sitting AsESG members.

As informed earlier, I have also decided to depute two Deputy Chairs for the group as an essential step for leadership succession. I am glad that a few of you have indicated your willingness to take the responsibility. The AsESG and SSC are

reviewing the applications and we will soon be able to decide on the names.

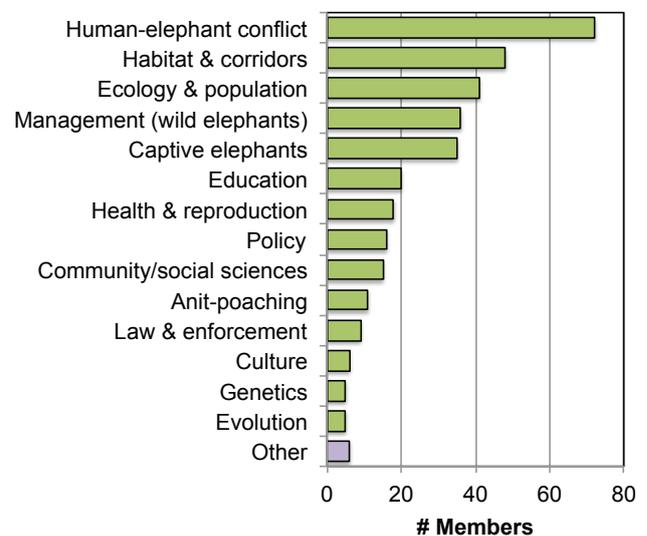
For the new quadrennium we would also like to formulate targets for the group. Based on your feedback, the AsESG Secretariat has produced tentative targets and a workplan and we will soon share this with the group for your comments and suggestions.

I thank you all for sincerely contributing to the research and conservation of the species and helping achieve the target of the group. I am looking forward to working with you again this quadrennium. I would also like to thank Gajah’ editorial board, our institutional partners (Elephant Family and IFAW), range state officials and the SSC Chair office for all their support and assistance. Stay safe and wishing you all good health.



**Figure 3.** Age class of the 111 members.

Vivek Menon  
Chair IUCN SSC AsESG



**Figure 4.** Area of expertise of 97 members.