

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

Vivek Menon

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Dear Members

I am happy that after the decline of the pandemic, most of us have regained normalcy and resumed our work, commitments and travels. In the second quadrennium of my continuation as Chair of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) a few changes have also taken place. As informed to you in my last communication, Dr. Sandeep Kr. Tiwari has taken over new leadership roles in his parent organisation Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and left his Program Manager role from 1st April 2022. I am happy to inform that Dr. Prajna Paramita Panda ([prajna@wti.org.in](mailto:prajna@wti.org.in)) has joined as Program Manager AsESG. She will be in touch with you all to take forward the activities of the group. I request you to extend her all support. On behalf of the group, I extend our sincere appreciation to Sandeep for his excellent work done during his tenure in the last quadrennium and for holding fort till we had Prajna in our team.

Today, the AsESG is a team of 101 members from 21 countries including all the 13 range

states. This includes the addition of 8 new members as approved by the Chair on advice of the Membership Advisory Committee.

Early this year, in April 2022, the Government of Nepal in collaboration with IUCN SSC AsESG and with the support of the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services hosted the Third Asian Elephant Range States Meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal from 27th -29th April 2022. Eight of the 13 countries were present physically (Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Laos, Malaysia (both peninsular and Borneo) and Sri Lanka) and the remaining five (Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bhutan) attended virtually due to enhanced Covid regulations in their respective nations. As Chair of the AsESG, I had the unique privilege of co-chairing several sessions of this key meet with my range state colleagues. A key product of the meet was the Kathmandu Declaration which outlines the need to complete the nine key priority actions underlined and agreed upon by all range states to attempt and fulfil by 2025. The declaration forms



Third Asian Elephant Range States Meeting, Kathmandu, Nepal.

part of this issue of Gajah. I am happy to share that the AsESG will coordinate with the Asian elephant range states to complete national elephant conservation action plans, establish a pan Asian elephant database and that the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund will assist in financing conservation in range states.

In the last quadrennium 14 Working Groups were formed of which six of the documents have been finalised and two have submitted their documents for review. I profusely thank the entire team of the Working Group led by Dr. Raman Sukumar for finalising the “Guidelines for Creating Artificial Water Holes in Elephant Habitats”, Dr. Sonja Luz and team that finalised the “Guidelines for Welfare and Use of Elephants in Tourism” and Dr. Janine Brown and team that finalised the report on the “Management and Care of Captive Elephants in Musth”. I would also like to thank Mr. Sonam Wangdi and team for finalising and printing the Bhutan NECAP and Dr. Benoit Goossens and team for finalising the Sabah NECAP. Dr. Christy Williams and his team have been instrumental in completing the “Red List Assessment of Asian Elephants”.

At present the “Guidelines for the Reintroduction of Captive Elephants in the Wild as Possible Restocking Option” and the report on “Emerging Diseases Affecting Asian Elephants” are being finalised and the final document will soon be shared. I urge the remaining Working Groups to work on their reports and I will be happy to hold meetings with each Work-

ing Group in the coming weeks to take stock of our progress and complete the task in hand. I would also like to thank the Asian Elephant Transport Working Group, formed jointly with members from IUCN SSC AsESG and IUCN WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group, for publishing the document “Protecting Asian Elephants from Linear Transport Infrastructure: The Asian Elephant Transport Working Group’s Introduction to the Challenges and Solutions”. The group is now working to develop a document on mitigation designs for linear infrastructures.

I am sure you have been waiting for the 11th meeting of IUCN SSC AsESG. The good news is that this will be held at the Corbett Tiger Reserve in India from 14th to 17th March 2023. I look forward to having you all for the upcoming AsESG members meeting, the first one in this quadrennium, and request you to block the dates. I am happy that we will be meeting in person after the long pandemic and the details of the upcoming meeting will be shared shortly by my office.

I would like to thank our partners and donors for financial support to the AsESG. Special thanks to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Asian Elephant Foundation and AZA Elephant SAFE Program (including Lion Safari) and Loro Parque Foundation for supporting the activities of the group.

Vivek Menon  
Chair IUCN SSC AsESG



Elephants at the Corbett Tiger Reserve, location of the next AsESG meeting. Photo by Christy Williams.