

Third Asian Elephant Range States Meeting, Kathmandu, Nepal

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Introduction

With a remaining population of about 50,000 individuals, the Asian elephant is endangered and at risk of local extinction in some range countries. Threats such as habitat loss and degradation, fragmentation of elephant populations, human-elephant conflict (HEC) and the illegal killing of elephants require significant effort to find solutions to mitigate these threats to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Asian elephant across its range.

An international workshop held in Malaysia in 2006 brought together representatives from all 13 Asian elephant range states to conduct a threats assessment and identify limiting factors affecting population abundance in Asian elephants. This workshop was followed by the *2nd Asian Elephant Range States Meeting* in 2017 in Jakarta, Indonesia. At this meeting, all Asian elephant range states (with the exception of Nepal, who was unable to participate due to national elections) sent two high level delegates to Jakarta to improve collaboration and cooperation amongst countries. This meeting, hosted by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Republic of Indonesia, took place in Jakarta from 18. – 20. April 2017.

The primary output of the 2017 meeting was “The Jakarta Declaration for Asian Elephant Conservation” signed by all delegates at the conclusion of the meeting. This is the first time that all Asian elephant range states declared a common vision to promote Asian elephant conservation range-wide, affirming their intent to cooperate based on the principles of sustainable development, science, education and training, fund raising, as well as other activities relevant to Asian elephant conservation and development within the range states.

The 2022 Range States Meeting

After a 2-year delay due to the Covid pandemic, the *3rd Asian Elephant Range States Meeting* was held 27. – 29. April 2022 in Kathmandu, Nepal. As some countries still had Covid-related travel restrictions in place, the meeting was a hybrid with half the range countries (Bangladesh, India, Lao PDR, Malaysia Peninsular, Malaysia Sabah, Nepal, Sri Lanka) sending delegates in person, and the other range countries (Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam) participating via Zoom. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, facilitated by the



Range state delegates with Hon’ble Minister Ramsahay Prasad Yadav.

Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) of the IUCN-SSC, and supported by the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Technical support was provided by the National Trust for Nature Conservation, Nepal.

The highest priority topics of discussion identified by the range states delegates for the 2022 meeting included HEC, habitat management and transboundary issues. New topics highlighted were the impacts of linear infrastructures, management of elephant corridors, emerging diseases in Asian elephants, and funding support for Asian elephant conservation. During the meeting, the delegates agreed to strengthen international collaborations, improve scientific

monitoring to help restore the species' habitat, and create transboundary agreements.

The Kathmandu Declaration

The outcome of the 2022 meeting is the “Kathmandu Declaration for Asian Elephant Conservation” which builds upon and updates the Jakarta Declaration and where delegates agreed to add a timeline for initiating or completing priority items. Through the Kathmandu Declaration, Asian elephant range states call upon the international community to join them in protecting the Asian elephant and their forest habitat. Saving Asian elephants is a global challenge requiring strong government partnerships and a cohesive regional strategy.



The Kathmandu Declaration for Asian Elephant Conservation Kathmandu, Nepal April 29, 2022

We, the representatives of the government agencies from Asian Elephant Range States including the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Kingdom of Bhutan, Kingdom of Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Malaysia, Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, declare our common goal to conserve the Asian Elephant within its Range States, and:

Recognising that the Asian Elephant, a seriously endangered species and one of the most iconic animals, faces a challenging future with the loss of its habitat, fragmented populations, high levels of human-elephant conflict, illegal killing, as well as other factors that have resulted in population declines in some of the Range States, and that we should have a common vision to promote Asian Elephant conservation;

Acknowledging that the Asian Elephant is a keystone species and an umbrella species whose conservation helps ensure the conservation of myriads of other species. Asian Elephants are also culturally significant across Asia. A failure to protect Asian Elephants and their habitat will therefore not only result in the loss of elephants but also the loss of biological and cultural diversity and the tangible and intangible benefits provided by elephants and the ecosystems they inhabit;

Noting that while elephant conservation is primarily a national responsibility, there is an urgent need to synergize national actions with international cooperation amongst the Range States for the long-term conservation of Asian Elephants. The reversal of the crisis facing Asian Elephants is additionally dependent upon political, financial, and technical support from the international community;

Understanding the role of international agreements on the conservation of biological diversity and protection of rare and endangered species, including the Asian Elephant, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS);

Acknowledging the presence and support of other governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other supporters of Asian Elephant conservation;

Building upon the Jakarta Declaration for Asian Elephant Conservation of the second Asian Elephant Range States Meeting of 2017

Thus, we declare:

- To enhance cooperation between the thirteen Range States both bilaterally and multilaterally, promoting transboundary conservation of the Asian Elephant, and sharing and learning to enhance national conservation measures;
- To promote coexistence by minimizing the negative impacts of humans on Asian Elephants and their habitats, address the root causes of human-elephant conflict, and develop long term solutions to minimize such conflict; engage with local communities to gain their participation in biodiversity conservation and land-use planning; and provide sustainable and alternative livelihoods through financial support, technical guidance and support, and other measures;
- To ensure effective law enforcement across the species' range to prevent illegal killing of Asian Elephants and the illegal trade in live Asian Elephants, ivory and its derivatives, and other elephant body parts;
- To promote and ensure the welfare of captive elephants is maintained at all times;
- To strengthen international collaboration, coordination, cooperation and communication based on bilateral and multilateral agreements where relevant, involving specialized expertise from national and international organizations, including but not limited to AsESG, IUCN SSC, CITES, INTERPOL, CBD, CMS, UNEP, ASEAN-WEN, SAWEN, and UNODC;
- To set up through appropriate mechanisms an Asian Elephant Fund, accessible to Range States and Range State civil society, to promote conservation of the species and its habitat;
- To develop an appropriate data sharing mechanism among Range States;
- Commit to develop, where necessary, and where applicable implement National Asian Elephant Conservation Action Plans that include, but are not limited to, the priorities listed in the annex to this Declaration.

And call upon the international community to join us in addressing the challenges facing Asian Elephants and achieving a harmonious coexistence between humans and Asian Elephants.

Annex: Priority Commitments by 2025

- Promote the maintenance and connectivity of large Asian Elephant conservation landscapes where new permitted developmental activities such as linear infrastructures are elephant- and biodiversity-appropriate;
- Promote the development of national guidelines on wildlife friendly linear infrastructure, including elephant, based on those developed by the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN SSC and Connectivity Specialist Groups after Range States consultations;
- Develop bilateral transboundary agreements, protocols or understandings in relevant countries to ease movement of Asian Elephants through appropriate corridors and transboundary protected areas;
- Collectively develop, where relevant, and coordinate captive Asian Elephant registration programs in relevant countries, based on scientific research including, where appropriate, microchipping and/or DNA-based systems, and ensure cross-border movements of captive Asian Elephants are in compliance with all national and international laws and regulations;
- Ensure that all Range States have a National Asian Elephant Conservation Action Plan;
- Promote the development of national guidelines on Human Asian Elephant Conflict mitigation based on those developed by the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN SSC after Range States consultations.
- The Range States support the development of range-wide Asian Elephant Conservation Plan by the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN SSC;
- The Range States initiate the establishment of a national Asian Elephant Database with the technical support of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN SSC and CITES MIKE/ETIS;
- The Range States jointly initiate the creation of an Asian Elephant Fund assisted by the Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN SSC;

DONE in Kathmandu, Nepal on the Twenty Ninth Day of April in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty Two, in a single original copy in the English language.