

Report on the Side Event of the IUCN SSC AsESG at the CMS CoP14

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Deforestation, linear infrastructure and poor connectivity across boundaries has resulted in elephants residing in small, fragmented pockets and elevating the risk of human-elephant conflict. To protect Asian and African elephants, the elephant range countries must protect and restore ecological connectivity between elephant habitats and accelerate transboundary conservation through international cooperation.

Addressing this concern, the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) in collaboration with IFAW organised a side event at the “Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals” (CMS COP14) held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The side event “Room to Roam for Elephants: Conservation and Connectivity in Africa and Asia” took place on 15th February 2024 involving three elephant range countries, i.e. India, South Africa and Malawi, to deliberate on promoting transboundary cooperation and protection for long – range movement of elephants. This was a step to address one of the nine targets outlined in the Kathmandu Declaration signed by all Asian elephant range countries in 2022 to “Develop bilateral transboundary agreements, protocols, or understandings in relevant countries to ease movement of Asian elephants through appropriate corridors and transboundary protected areas”.

The African Elephant Action Plan also highlights the need to establish fora for exchanging information between and among range states for better monitoring of transboundary movements of elephants and outlines the critical need for transboundary movement.

Taking the way forward, the side event brought together the Asian and African range countries

and discussed on ways to protect, restore and connect elephant habitats locally, regionally and continentally to facilitate unhindered elephant movement, increase genetic diversity and help in meeting the 30% conservation target of the “Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework”. IUCN SSC AsESG also discussed on the upcoming handbook on “Mitigation for Roads and Railways in Asian Elephant Landscapes” being developed in collaboration with the Connectivity SG.

The session achieved its objectives in highlighting the importance of connectivity for large mammals such as elephants. The discussions shall foster synergistic efforts, transboundary agreements and collaborative partnerships to work together to ensure unhindered movement of elephants across boundaries, both national and international. This also facilitated the elephant range countries in understanding the need to adopt site specific wildlife friendly linear infrastructures that could eventually lead to reduced human-elephant conflict and shall help in fostering coexistence between humans and elephants in the long run.

The side event was well-attended and received positive feedback from range countries and institutions and organisations working on connectivity of mammals across landscapes.

