

Notes from the Chair IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

Vivek Menon

Chair's e-mail: vivek@wti.org.in

Dear Members

It gives me a lot of satisfaction and pleasure to sit down to write this note as this is the last chair's note of the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) that I will pen. It has been an honour and privilege to lead our committed band of elephant expert volunteers over the last decade and as I prepare to hand over to the new chair by the end of this month, I look back at the past 10 years with happiness.

The impact report that has been published and launched at our last meeting in Vietnam encapsulates the story of our group during this period. Major impacts during this period are three successive range state declarations (the Jakarta declaration in 2017, the Kathmandu declaration in 2022 and the Siem Reap declaration in 2025) co-led by the AsESG, listing of the Asian elephant under the Convention on Migratory Species in 2020, the revision of the Red List Assessment for it in the same year and putting a new subspecies, the Bornean elephant, on the Red List in 2024. No less important is the fact that we were able as a group to work with the range states and develop 10 range state action plans out of the 13 countries in which the elephant exists in the wild.

The membership has responded wonderfully and formed nine working groups which produced key outputs such as the volumes on mitigating impacts of roads and railways on Asian elephants, protecting Asian elephants from linear transport infrastructure, rehabilitation of captive elephants as an option for augmenting wild populations, emerging diseases affecting Asian elephants and guidelines on artificial waterhole management with relation to Asian elephant management. Two outputs on captive elephants were also released which were the ones on management and welfare of captive Asian elephants used in tourism and the guidelines on management and care of captive elephant bulls in musth.

When I took over in 2015, the group was facing challenges of internal communication and trust. We decided together that we needed in person meets for us to come together again and I am happy that we were able to raise the resources for five meets: The 8th meeting in 2016 at Guwahati, India, the 9th one in 2018 at Bangkok, Thailand, the 10th in 2019 at Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, the 11th in 2023 at Delhi, India and the last in 2025 at Bien Hoa, Vietnam. The membership which stood at 90 when I took over has increased by nearly 50% to 130 span-



Figure 1. Asian Elephant Range States Meeting in Siem Reap, Cambodia.



Figure 2. Eighth Asian Elephant Specialist Group Meeting in 2016 at Guwahati, India.

ning 21 countries. Most importantly we have members now from all range states and equally all range state governments have become ex-officio members. The diversity indices of our membership can be made better as only a third of the members are females and the median age being 54.2 years. Both these can move just a little bit to the centre with parity among genders and a little more increase among younger members being most welcome.

It feels good to have received three Citations of Excellence from the IUCN SSC Chair Jon Paul Rodriguez for the group in 2009, 2021 and 2024! I must dedicate this to the entire membership but particularly the leadership team of Heidi Riddle, Christy Williams, Ee Phin Wong

and Jennifer Pastorini for having helped me steer the group. Prajna Panda the program manager bore the brunt of getting things done and without her help the group would not be in such a strong position.

I leave the group in the able hands of Heidi Riddle as the incoming Chair of the AsESG and her leadership team and wish them and the group all the very best. I will of course remain an active member of the group and also in my new role as IUCN SSC Chair will assist the group in any way I can

Vivek Menon
Chair IUCN SSC AsESG
Chair IUCN SSC



Figure 3. Twelfth Asian Elephant Specialist Group Meeting in 2025 at Bien Hoa, Vietnam.