

Report on the 12th Meeting of the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group

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Introduction

The IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) meeting is a consultative meeting of the members of the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, government officials of the elephant range countries and other conservation organisations to identify priorities and challenges at a country and range level and ways to address them and also to devise best practices for the conservation of elephants in the wild and in captivity. The AsESG meeting is an opportunity to foster a closer relationship among range countries and members of the AsESG to deliberate and plan a way ahead as a specialist group to promote the long-term conservation of Asian elephants in 13 range countries.

The AsESG hosts the meeting of its members and range country officials every 18 months to deliberate on various issues related to conservation of elephants in Asia. The previous three AsESG meetings i.e. the 9th AsESG Meeting was held at Bangkok, Thailand in April 2018; the 10th AsESG meeting at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia in December 2019 and the 11th AsESG meeting at New Delhi and Corbett National Park in India in March 2023.

Aiming to bring together Asian elephant conservationists from across the range, the 12th meeting of the AsESG was held in Bien Hoa, Vietnam. The meeting was organised from 17th to 19th September 2025 at the Mira Central Park Hotel and was jointly organised in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Government of Viet Nam and Humane World for Animals.

The meeting had participation of over 100 individuals, including 70 AsESG members, representatives from all 13 Asian elephant range countries, six conservation partner organisations, special invitees, and organisers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Government of Viet Nam, and the Wildlife Trust of India. A total of 45 plenary presentations were delivered, with AsESG members actively engaged as presenters, session chairs, and co-chairs.

The event was inaugurated by Mr. Doan Hoai Nam, Deputy Director General, Viet Nam Administration of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment; Ms. Nguyen Thi Hoang, Vice Chair; and Mr. Vivek Menon, Chair of the AsESG, along with Ms. Tham Hong Phuong,



Country Director, Humane World for Animals International/Viet Nam and other distinguished guests. During the inaugural session, the second edition of “Action Elephant” – including National Elephant Action Plans from ten Asian elephant range countries – was launched. The “Impact Report”, highlighting the AsESG’s outputs and outcomes over the past decade, was also released, alongside the first volume of the compendium of AsESG working report titled, “Gajah Guidelines”.

Chair’s summary on AsESG’s achievements

Mr. Vivek Menon thanked the Government of Viet Nam, Humane World for Animals (HWA) and all the Conservation Partners for facilitating the organisation of the meeting and presented the report of AsESG activities since the last meeting held at India. The updates on the 14 Working Groups working to assess, plan and act in this quadrennium (2021–2025) were discussed.

Assess

In terms of assessment, the team finalised elephant distribution maps for 10 Asian elephant range countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. A Working Group led by Dr. Christy Williams revised the IUCN Red List assessment of the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), which was published in 2020. In addition, the Specialist Group led by Dr. Adrian Lister completed the national Red List assessment of the Borneo elephant (*Elephas maximus borneensis*) in 2023.

Plan

The AsESG provided technical and coordination support to the development, review, and adoption of National Elephant Conservation Action Plans (NECAPs) across Asian elephant range states. NECAPs serve as nationally endorsed strategic frameworks guiding elephant conservation, management, and human-elephant coexistence at the country level, while contributing to regional and global conservation objectives. As of 2025, ten Asian elephant range states have formally adopted NECAPs, represent-



ing a significant step toward harmonised conservation planning across the species’ range. The countries with adopted NECAPs are:

- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- Cambodia
- Indonesia
- Lao PDR
- Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah)
- Nepal
- Sri Lanka
- Thailand
- Viet Nam

Two editions of Action Elephant were produced as part of ongoing efforts to document progress, share experiences among range states, and disseminate information related to Asian elephant conservation planning and implementation. The first edition was released during the 11th AsESG meeting in India including six NECAPs. At the 12th AsESG meeting in Vietnam, the second edition of Action Elephant was released with inclusion of five additional or updated NECAPs, namely:

- Peninsular Malaysia (2023)
- Indonesia (updated, 2023)
- Viet Nam (2024)
- Nepal (2025)
- Thailand (2025)

Between 2021 and 2024, working groups developed and published seven technical guidelines and reports addressing priority conservation, management, and welfare issues for Asian elephants:

- Guidelines for Creating Artificial Water Holes in Elephant Habitats (2021)
- Protecting Asian Elephants from Linear Infrastructure (2021)

- Guidelines on Management and Care of Captive Elephants in Musth (2022)
- Guidelines for the Welfare and Use of Elephants in Tourism (2022)
- Guidelines on Emerging Diseases Affecting Asian Elephants (2023)
- Guidelines for the Reintroduction of Captive Elephants into the Wild as a Possible Restocking Option (2024)
- Handbook to Mitigate Impacts of Roads and Railways on Asian Elephants (2024)

These documents provide technical guidance to range states and contribute to the establishment of standardised best practices.

Linear infrastructure, policy uptake and capacity building: In line with commitments under the Siem Reap Declaration (2025), national-level workshops were undertaken in Bhutan and Sabah Malaysia to support the integration of best practices on linear infrastructure into national frameworks. These workshops aimed to facilitate policy uptake and practical application of regional recommendations. To enhance accessibility and national use, the guidelines on linear infrastructure were translated into national languages of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. A regional online webinar on linear infrastructure and Asian elephants was conducted in September 2024, with participation from all Asian elephant range states. The working group convenor presented updates on these activities at the Third Asian Elephant Range States Meeting in February 2025. Further national consultation workshops are planned for 2026 in Indonesia and Cambodia to support continued guideline adaptation and implementation.



Act

Technical Support for Elephant Habitat Management in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh: In 2019, technical support was provided to address conservation and management challenges affecting Asian elephant habitats in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, resulting from the rapid establishment of settlements for displaced Rohingya communities. The scale humanitarian response and associated infrastructure development resulted in significant pressure on elephant movement corridors, habitat connectivity, and traditional ranging areas.

Support activities focused on identifying priority elephant habitats and movement pathways within and around settlement areas, and on advising relevant authorities and partner organisations on measures to reduce habitat degradation and human–elephant conflict. This included guidance on maintaining functional corridors, managing high-risk interface zones, and integrating elephant considerations into site planning and habitat restoration efforts.

These technical inputs strengthened coordination among conservation agencies, government authorities, and humanitarian actors, with the aim of balancing urgent human needs with the conservation requirements of Asian elephants and the mitigation of conflict risks in a complex emergency context.

Network

The Membership Advisory Committee is operating in accordance with its mandate and will continue its work until the end of the quadrennium. During the current quadrennium, five meetings have been organised, resulting in the addition of 40 new members. The Specialist Group now comprises 130 members, with representation from all 13 Asian elephant range countries.

Communicate

Since 2015, the editorial board of the journal *Gajah* has published 17 issues. Each issue has been printed and made available online through the AsESG's website, with *Gajah* 58 now ac-

cessible at www.asesg.org. One of the key challenges faced by the journal has been the limited number of manuscript submissions, and the editorial board has encouraged members to contribute their work for publication.

The Communications Advisory Group has been active, and AsESG activities are now being regularly shared through social media platforms, including X, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Activities of the AsESG representatives

The Chair reported that, of the 130 AsESG members, 56 are engaged in working groups established for the preparation of reports and guidelines, and 44 members are actively participating in the 12th AsESG meeting as chairs, co-chairs, moderators, or presenters.

The SSC Chair confirmed Ms. Heidi Riddle as Chair of the AsESG for the new quadrennium (2026–2029). During the previous term, the Chair participated in several major international meetings and events. These included attendance at CITES CoP19 in Panama in September 2022, where a side event on the Kathmandu Declaration was organised with the participation of range countries and conservation partners. The Chair also presented at the 78th WAZA Annual Conference in the United States in 2023, attended UNFCCC CoP28 in Dubai in 2023, and presented at the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) conference in the United States in 2023. In addition, the Chair attended the IUCN SSC Leadership Meeting in Abu Dhabi in 2024 and participated in the International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB) meetings held in Rwanda in 2023 and Brisbane in 2025.

Several AsESG members participated in the 19th International Elephant Foundation (IEF) Conference held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in

2023. Members also attended the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Cali, Colombia, in 2024. In addition, AsESG members from Malaysia participated in and delivered presentations at the Malaysia Biodiversity Forum in 2024.

Fourth Asian Elephant Range States Meeting

The Fourth Asian Elephant Range States Meeting was held from 24–26 February 2025 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, bringing together government representatives from all Asian elephant range states, along with regional experts, partner organizations, and observers. The meeting provided a platform to review progress in the implementation of National Elephant Conservation Action Plans (NECAPs), exchange experiences on priority conservation challenges, and strengthen regional cooperation for Asian elephant conservation.

Key thematic areas discussed included habitat connectivity, human-elephant coexistence, impacts of linear infrastructure, captive elephant management, and emerging threats such as climate change. AsESG members participating in the meeting included Mr. Salman Saaban, Dr. Donny Gunaryadi, Ms. Alexandra Zimmermann, Ms. Megan English, Dr. Rachel Crouthers, and Mr. Sereivathana Tuy.

The meeting culminated in the adoption of the “Siem Reap Declaration”, which was signed by all 13 Asian elephant range countries and reaffirmed collective commitments to coordinated action for the long-term conservation of Asian elephants. In addition, the final report of the Third Asian Elephant Range States Meeting, held in Kathmandu, was prepared and circulated.

Separately, the AsESG submitted a report on “Asian Elephants: Status, Threats, and Conservation Actions” to the 74th IUCN SSC Standing Committee in November 2021. The group has also published the document “Protecting Asian Elephants from Linear Transport Infrastructure”, in collaboration with the IUCN WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group.





AsESG Meeting

Day 1

Day 1 of the 12th AsESG Meeting focused on technical deliberations led by the AsESG Working Groups. The morning technical session featured presentations by working group convenors, who provided overviews of recently completed and ongoing reports and guidelines, highlighting key findings, recommendations, and their relevance to national conservation and management priorities. These presentations facilitated a shared understanding of available technical resources and their application across Asian elephant range states.

The afternoon was dedicated to working group breakout sessions, during which participants engaged in focused discussions organised around key thematic areas, including the Green Status of Asian elephants, elephant translocation, mapping the distribution of Asian elephants across range states, the range-wide Asian Elephant Action Plan, and guidelines on human-elephant conflict. The breakout sessions provided an opportunity for range state representatives, technical experts, and partners to discuss implementation challenges, share national experiences, and identify priority actions and knowledge gaps to guide future working group activities.

Ms. Heidi Riddle chaired a parallel session on the stocktaking of the Siem Reap Declaration. This focused on the follow up to be done on the Siem Reap Declaration 2025.

A partners roundtable meeting was organised with all the conservation partners to discuss on



the way forward to support the AsESG activities.

Day 2

The technical sessions focused on examining the threats and challenges affecting the conservation of Asian elephants, as well as the guidelines and action plans being developed by the AsESG and range countries to support the conservation and welfare of elephants in both the wild and in captivity.

Discussions on the first day centred on country presentations from all 13 Asian elephant range states, delivered by ex-officio representatives and AsESG members. Ex-officio members provided national overviews covering the status of wild and captive elephant populations, key conservation issues and threats, the presence of national action plans, and ongoing management and conservation interventions. This was followed by presentations by AsESG members on CSS centres and other issues of elephant conservation.

Day 3

On the last day of the AsESG meeting, AsESG members shared their work, experience and studies on various topic from across different Asian countries on elephant conservation.

