

EDITORIAL COMMENT

This issue of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group features what appears to be the first attempt in Indonesia to establish a Sumatran Elephant Database. The main objective of this exercise is to provide all current information on elephant distribution, numbers, density and trends. The picture that emerges from this exercise is necessarily static but the elephant populations in the wild provide a dynamic situation that is changing all the time. Therefore any attempt to characterise the population is only a "snapshot" of that particular period and thus such an exercise needs regular updating if it is to be of any use. In Sumatra, development programmes are going on at such a rapid rate that any management plan will become outdated soon. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this initial attempt to establish a database would provide the necessary stimulus to other elephant specialists in Asia to start compiling information that would ultimately result in the preparation of a Global Resource Information Database (GRID) for the Asian Elephant along the lines of the most successful case studies of the African Elephant by Ms Anne Burrill and Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton (Burrill, A. & Douglas-Hamilton, I (1987) African Elephant Database Project: Final Report. GRID Case Study Series No. 2, Global Environment Monitoring System, Nairobi).

The dense tropical rainforest habitats provide some of the most difficult areas to study animals even as large as the elephant. Many of the estimates given for elephant populations are at best educated guesses and extrapolations from one area to another. The results are therefore very crude approximation though founded on the experience of many responsible observers. Nevertheless in such a situation making an estimate itself can be a great achievement!

We would like to have the comments and criticisms from the AESG Members to this first, essentially preliminary attempt to establish the Sumatran Elephant Database. Your comments would help improve the quality and precision of the Sumatran Elephant Database.

The opinions expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of either the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) or the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Mr. Lyn de Alwis
Dr. Charles Santiapillai