

Sumatra Mahout Workshop Leads to New Communication Forum

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Due to problems faced by the Pusat Konservasi Gajah (PKG) or Elephant Conservation Centers (ECC) and other elephant facilities in Sumatra, an idea was developed to conduct a mahout workshop and find solutions to these problems. The first Sumatra Mahout Workshop was held November 29-30, 2006 in the Elephant Conservation Center of Bengkulu, and was facilitated by Balai Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam (BKSDA) Bengkulu (Nature Conservation Agency), the International Elephant Foundation, and Fauna & Flora International.

The intent of this workshop was to bring together Sumatran mahouts from all the different elephant conservation centres, elephant management units and conservation organizations to discuss the various issues in these facilities, as well as conditions, technical and management problems faced by mahouts and PKG in their work with elephants and habitat conservation efforts.

The main result of this workshop was the creation of a Communication Forum among mahouts in Sumatra. This Forum establishes a means to address the mahouts' ambition of increasing their part in the development and management of elephant conservation centres, as well as achieving an agreement and understanding about the role of mahouts in the Nature Conservation and Forest Protection's (PHKA) scope to support elephant conservation efforts in Sumatra.

The workshop participants came from all over Sumatra: Tahura Bukit Barisan Tongkoh Berastagi (2), PKG Seblat, PKG Minas (3), PKG Sumsel (2), PKG Way Kambas (4), UPG Aras Napal (2), PKG Saree (4), CRU Tangkahan (2), PKG Holiday Resort Sumut (4), and Flying Squad Team (3).

The workshop was officially opened by the Director of Indonesian Biodiversity Conservation, Pak Adi Susmianto. Each PKG made a presentation about their situation (i.e. number of elephants, number of staff, specific use of the elephants, etc.) and any problems. This was followed by discussions on techniques and demonstrations of elephant care and management, and a general discussion session.

An important outcome of this meeting was the creation of the Sumatra Mahout Communication Forum (Forum Komunikasi Mahout Sumatera) whose initial membership consists of all participants attending the workshop.

The forum's vision is to achieve mahout professionalism in Sumatran elephant work and habitat conservation efforts; whereas the mission is to increase the capacity and competency of mahouts in Sumatran elephant work and habitat conservation efforts, to create an information and communication system between mahouts in Sumatra, and to increase the welfare of mahouts and Sumatran elephants.

To achieve the forum's goals, ongoing activities are planned:

- Increasing capacity and competency of mahouts in Sumatran elephant work and habitat conservation efforts through training and comparative studies, by creating mahout competency standards and certification, and by finding solutions to conflicts in PKG areas
- Creating an information and communication system among mahouts in Sumatra through a mahout-elephant database; issuing a twice-yearly updated information sheet; creating a website and a secretariat, and conducting an annual mahout meeting

- Increasing mahout and Sumatran elephant welfare through studies and recommendations to the government and other concerned institutions; incentive standardization in the PKG; professional allowance, insurance, staff status, on-time monthly administration management; camp facility renovations; recommendation and development of an ethics code; recommendations of elephant welfare efforts and fund raising by the Forum.

The Chairman of the Forum, elected by the members, is Nazaruddin one of the most senior mahouts in Indonesia from PKG Way Kambas, the elected Secretary is Khairil from PKG

Holiday Resort (Sumatera Utara). The meeting also defined and elected other positions in the Forum organization such as Treasurer, Partnership Coordinator, Capacity Building Coordinator, Data and Information Coordinator, Mahout and Elephant Welfare Coordinator. Regional Coordinators, from each PKG province, were also elected. Adi Susmianto (Director of Biodiversity Conservation Ditjen PHKA) and Widodo S. Ramono are nominated to sit on the Forum Advisory Board.

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Participants of the Sumatra Mahout Workshop.
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