

## Assam Elephant Foundation – Prelude to a Solution

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### Introduction

Assam is home to one of the largest populations of Asian elephants, both wild and captive. The need for a practical and comprehensive approach to save the elephants of the region led to the formation of the Assam Elephant Foundation (AEF), a trust formalized in early 2007 for in-situ and ex-situ conservation of elephants in Assam, India.

AEF has organized health camps for elephants and their handlers, and conducted around a dozen rescue operations involving elephants both in the wild and in captivity.

The work of the AEF can be considered under two main sections:

### Human-elephant conflict

Last year WWF India requested the services of AEF in their North Bank Landscape Project which involved the deployment of koonkies, (domestic elephants trained in elephant capture) to drive out wild herds in high HEC areas. AEF helped plan and implement the programme, and provided trained elephants and logistics. Similar programmes were also carried out jointly with the State Forest Department in Goalpara and Hojai and. AEF has proposed their extension to Rani and Chakrado.

Currently AEF, in conjunction with the State Wildlife Department, is working towards setting up permanent Koonkie Camps in these areas. Eight koonkies that were used for illegal logging and rescued by AEF, will be used for this project. AEF is also working closely with local communities, conducting community development and capacity building as part of this programme. Depending on the success and achievements of the project, AEF plans to adapt it to other areas of Assam.

### Elephant Conservation Center

AEF is setting up an Elephant Conservation Center in Sonapur, Assam, which will house a state of the art veterinary facility for elephants.

*The Center will:*

- a) Provide a refuge and rehabilitation center for old, sick and neglected elephants.
- b) Provide an orphanage for abandoned or rescued elephant calves. A systematic approach for releasing calves into a semi-controlled environment will also be envisaged.
- c) Carry out scientific studies relating to conservation of Asian Elephants both in the wild and in captivity in Assam, including a Captive Breeding Programme.
- d) Develop programmes in the field of elephant management, care and health targeting elephant handlers, managers and owners.
- e) Set up an Interpretation and Resource Facility, which will act as an information bank and will:
  - Educate the public about elephants and create awareness on conservation issues.
  - Involve communities in conservation projects and carry out community development and capacity building programmes.
  - Work with individuals, local bodies, government agencies and institutions engaged in the conservation of elephants.
  - Formulate programmes on Mitigation of HEC keeping in view Assam's age-old traditional and cultural relationship with elephants – under the motto “Man Elephant Co-Existence”.

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