

Notes from the Co-chairs IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

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Following on from the ‘Note from the Co-chairs’ in the last issue of Gajah, in which we wrote that a likely group project would be the creation of an Asian Elephant Database (AsED) similar to the African Elephant Database (AED), I am pleased to tell you that – after a lengthy process – the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) and the African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) have been awarded a grant by the USFWS to develop a Asian Elephant Database as part of a Global Elephant Database. This database concept received range state government support at the ‘Asian Elephant Range States’ Meeting and such a database is long overdue for Asian elephants. The AsESG’s Database Working Group (DWG) has started a review of data coding systems for the Asian Elephant Database. Once the DWG has reached some preliminary conclusions, we will seek inputs from the wider AsESG. The next step will be to hold a meeting of the Data Working Groups of the AsESG and AfESG in the second half of this year to discuss development of the new databases.

The other AsESG Task Forces have also been active. For example, the Wild Elephant and Elephant Habitat Management Task Force is discussing if/how Asian elephants can be incorporated into the “endangered species value” measure in “High Conservation Value Forest” assessments; and the Captive Elephant Management Task Force has been drafting possible AsESG position statements on registration of captive Asian elephants and the rational and sustainable use of captive Asian elephants. Once these within-task force discussions are further advanced, the task forces will share their drafts with the wider AsESG for comments and further inputs.

The Human–Elephant Conflict Task Force (HECTF) has begun organizing an HEC ‘retreat’. This retreat will serve to gather together those Asian elephant conservationists who are currently working on HEC mitigation projects and allow

them to produce a report reviewing all the HEC mitigation techniques that have been developed and applied over the years in the Asian elephant range countries. The HECTF has submitted a proposal to the USFWS, and we hope that this retreat will be held in Sumatra late this year or early next year.

We thank all those AsESG members who have volunteered their time and efforts for these endeavours.

Ajay and I have begun the process of organizing a Strategic Conservation Planning Workshop for Asian Elephants, which will be held in Cambodia in October 2008 with support from the USFWS, WCS, and WWF. This strategic planning workshop was requested by range state delegates at the range states’ meeting in Malaysia and will be similar – but not identical – to the Regional Strategic Planning Workshops for Central African Elephants and West African Elephants (which lead to regional strategies and national action plans for elephants in those parts of Africa). More details about this workshop will follow soon.

Finally, earlier this year, Ajay and I attended the first-ever IUCN/SSC Specialist Group Chairs’ Meeting in the UAE. The meeting was a great success and provided an opportunity for presentations and discussions on the work of the IUCN/SSC’s Species Conservation Planning Task Force, which aims to improve the effectiveness of the action planning process. Please note that the executive summary and meeting report of the Specialist Group Chair’s meeting in UAE is available on the meeting website at: http://cms.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/about_ssc/ssc_chairs_meeting/index.cfm.

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