

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund

In the United States, Asian elephants are best known as familiar circus attractions. Yet throughout their homeland, captive elephants are primarily beasts of burden. An estimated 16,000 Asian elephants are presently tamed and used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Ironically, it is the destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture, and the encroachment of human civilization that pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia's wild elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests

and savannas of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild—about half of which are found in India.

With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day. And, each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles.

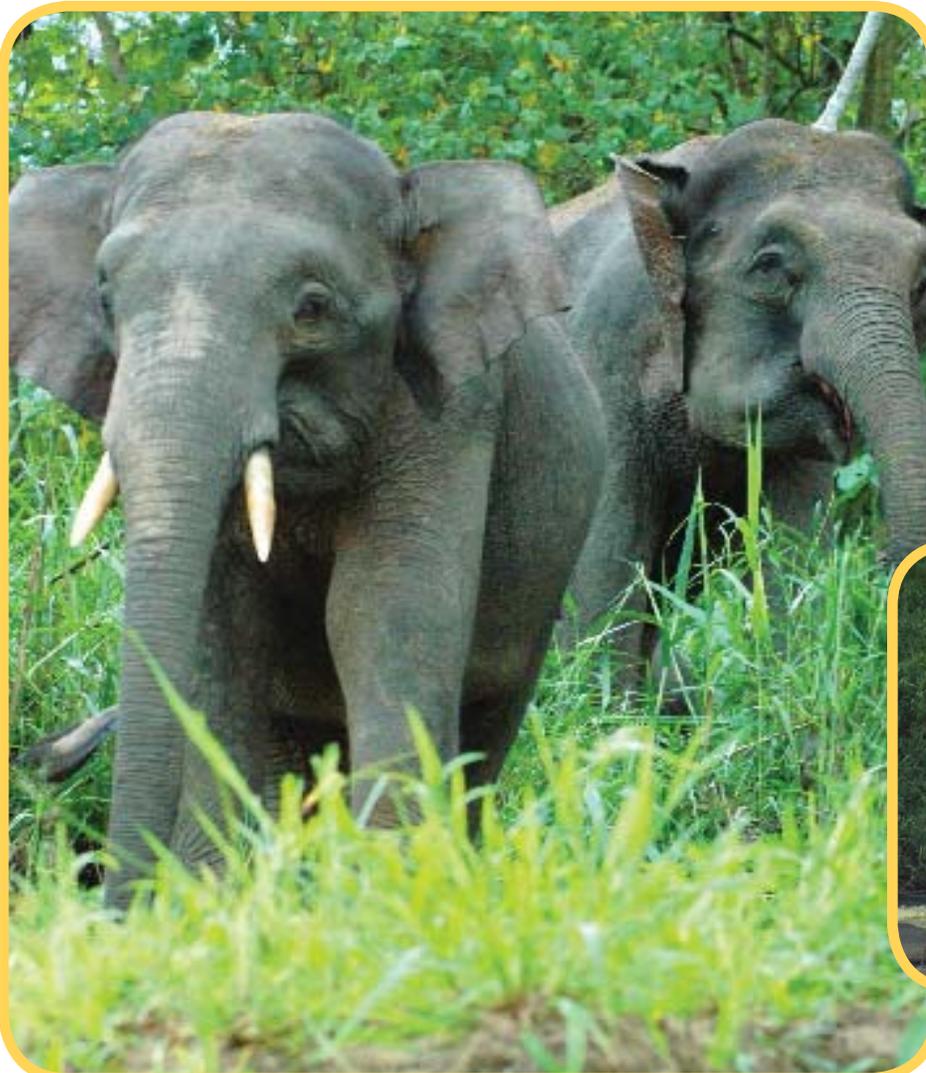
When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassava,

bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are killed each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants in connection with crop raids.

Poaching, the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones, poses a serious threat as well.

Among Asian elephants, only males have tusks. Asian elephant ivory is highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants has left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tuskier.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskers is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tusk-less males known as “mukhnas.”

To combat these threats, the United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for protection of the Asian elephant and the conservation of its habitat.



Raymond Alfred



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The 2007 Congressional appropriation of \$1.4 Million to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund allowed the Service to support 27 crucial elephant conservation projects in Asia, including:

- Estimating elephant numbers and sex ratio in Southwest Cambodia using fecal-DNA, georeferencing elephant locations in a GIS database, exploring regional capacity for cost-saving analytical methods such as DNA multiplexing, providing data for long-term monitoring, and developing capacity for the Asia-Pacific region to carry out analyses of fecal-DNA studies.
- Developing a strategic action plan taking into consideration what is already known nationwide about human-elephant conflict and mitigation measures in India, and identifying areas of future studies that will keep the Action Plan updated.
- Support to minimize human-elephant conflict and death of humans and elephants, provide a positive image of elephants while promoting practical methods people can adopt to mitigate conflict, train educators in techniques and provide accurate and effective educational tools that promote attitudinal and behavioral changes to avoid conflict and produce measurable results, and create a momentum that will continue long after the 12 training workshops in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.
- Doubling the patrolling staff in Ripu-Chirang Elephant Reserve, creating a network of community protection groups across Manas Biosphere Reserve, India, which is very important for elephants, tigers, rhinos and numerous other species, preventing illegal logging and hunting in the reserve, and helping strengthen the Assam Forest Department.
- Support for a Sumatra-wide survey to identify key elephant populations and human-elephant conflict hotspots, reduce and mitigate human-elephant conflict, reduce poaching, protect elephant populations, and train rangers and other wildlife staff on elephant survey and conflict reduction methodologies.
- Investigation of elephant dietary ecology in various habitats, elephant movement, and home range behavior and habitat use within the Seblat Elephant Conservation Center (SECC) area and the corridor to Kerinci Seblat National Park, Indonesia, and build a predictive model of crop raiding around SECC, Indonesia.
- Support to raise awareness and address issues faced by local people, monitor elephant movements and behavior, actively control human-elephant conflict, identify bottlenecks, erect electric fences where necessary, reinforce capacity of Elephant Conservation Units, conduct outreach education and awareness events, contribute to the “International Workshop on Bornean Elephants in Sabah,” and share data with partners.

Asian Elephant Conservation Funding History from 1999 through 2007

Total Number of Grant Proposals Received	348
Total Number of Grants Awarded	198
Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants	61%
Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress	\$9,657,353
Total Funds Distributed through Grants	\$9,123,809
Total Funds to Administration of Grants	\$533,545
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$12,517,791



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