

# Asian Elephant Conservation Fund



*Asian elephants, Minneriya National Park, Sri Lanka.* Credit: Cory Brown

Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) once roamed Eurasia from the southern coast of Iran east to the Yangtze River in China. Today, however, they exist in only thirteen countries and their numbers are on the decline. Wild population estimates range from 30,000 to 48,000 individuals, though reliable counts are not easy to attain due to detection difficulties and inconsistent sampling methods among range states. Population estimates of captive elephants range from 12,000-16,000, and often they work under poor conditions serving tourists, temples, circuses, and loggers, usually without adequate veterinary care or nutrition. In the United States, Asian elephants are popular zoo attractions and circus performers but historically captive elephants have been used as beasts of burden in the timber industry – this practice however is on the decline. The destruction and conversion of habitat and the encroachment of human development pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia’s wild elephants.

With diets that can include over 80 plant species, home ranges in excess of 200 square miles, and water requirements upwards of 50 gallons a day, elephants require ample natural resources and huge landscapes to survive. When adequate natural habitat and forage is not available, opportunistic elephants are drawn to commercial agricultural plantations and private fields of rice, cassava, banana, oil palm, rubber, tea, and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frantic attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. Hundreds of people and elephants are killed every year from these human-elephant conflict incidents across the species’ range.

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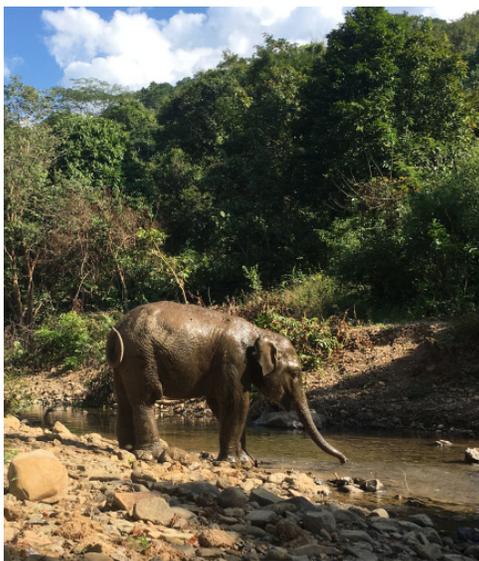
## 2017 Program Highlights

The Asian Elephant Conservation Fund is the single most important source of dedicated funding for activities addressing the major threats to wild Asian elephant populations within range states. Program-funded activities include law enforcement training and monitoring, public education campaigns via public television and radio programming, forest ranger and patrol training, research on population dynamics, community-based conservation and education programs, human-elephant conflict mitigation programs, developing national ivory action plans, wildlife veterinary capacity building programs, and conducting programs to educate journalists about accurate reporting on Asian elephants.

In 2017, the Fund supported 34 projects in nine countries, financing activities that will have local, national, and regional impacts.



*Asian elephant foraging in Nagarhole National Park, India.*  
Credit: Cory Brown / USFWS



*A young elephant cools itself in Rakhine Yoma Elephant Sanctuary, Myanmar*

Credit: Forrest Miller

### Threats to Asian Elephants

Threats to Asian elephants are anthropogenic in nature and driven by the growing populations and global economies of Asia - Asian elephant range states are home to more than 3.3 billion people and fewer than 40,000 elephants.

Habitat conversion, degradation, and fragmentation have compressed elephant habitat, reducing their foraging area and pushing them into human-dominated landscapes such as agricultural lands, plantations, villages, and roads. This interface of elephant habitat and human use leads to conflict, where both elephants and people are injured and killed.

In addition to habitat loss and the resultant human-elephant conflict, Asian elephants are exploited regularly for their ivory and other body parts. Poaching for ivory, bushmeat, skin, teeth, feet, and bone poses a serious and growing threat as the economies in Asia continue to develop.

Unlike African elephants, only some Asian elephant bulls develop tusks (and females lack tusks entirely). Those with tusks have been targeted over the centuries for capture and captivity or killed for their ivory. The removal of males from the wild population of Asian elephants has skewed sex ratios towards females, and the males that do survive are tuskless and known as “mukhnas.”

### Strategic Objectives

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through its Asian Elephant Conservation Program provides financial support to work aimed at conserving wild Asian elephants and their remaining habitats in the 13 range states. USFWS projects frequently focus on the mitigation of human-elephant conflict and prevention of poaching. The United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for the species’ protection and the conservation of its habitat.

### On-the-Ground Investments

#### USFWS Support to Asian Elephant Conservation Fund, 2015 - 2017

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Amount Awarded</i>	<i>Amount Leveraged</i>
2017	\$1,835,320	\$2,737,589
2016	\$1,746,121	\$2,188,629
2015	\$1,759,070	\$2,229,982
<i>3-year total</i>	<i>\$5,340,511</i>	<i>\$7,156,200</i>



*Elephant Protection Unit and their patrol elephant, Myanmar.* Credit: Forrest Miller

### Achievements

In India, USFWS is providing funding to build anti-poaching camps in Kaziranga National Park that will strengthen protection for elephants.

In Thailand, USFWS is supporting activities that will use SMART software to support law enforcement patrols and will expand elephant conservation education directed at villagers.

In Indonesia, USFWS is helping to secure the future for Sumatran elephants in the Harapan rainforest by introducing human-elephant conflict mitigation techniques to local communities.

In Cambodia, a USFWS partner is working with government officials to launch the activities specified in the government-endorsed National Ivory Action Plan in its first year of implementation, which will strengthen the control of ivory trafficking through Cambodia and reduce overall demand for ivory from both Asian and African elephants.

In Myanmar, USFWS is supporting a project that is working to equip local people with appropriate skills and knowledge about elephant behavior in order to reduce the danger to themselves, their crops, their homes, and wild elephants by creating innovative television programming and media spots for local and national radio and newspapers.

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