



## A Gathering of Experts for Asian Elephants

Ravi Corea\*

On July 10th and 11th an unprecedented event took place in the Jiuhua Resort & Convention Center in Beijing, China. For the first time in the annals of Asian elephant conservation an impressive group of Asian elephant experts convened to discuss, deliberate and assess the methods that have been applied to mitigate human elephant conflicts for the long term conservation of the Asian elephant and how successful these methods have been. Human elephant PLAN conflict is perhaps one of the most pressing issues impacting Asian elephant conservation in the new millennium. Never had there been before a similar international forum solely organized to assess the mitigation methods and their effectiveness to resolve human elephant conflicts in Asia.

The Human Elephant Conflict Workshop was an idea that evolved and was developed by the Human-elephant Conflict Task Force of the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. It took two years to plan and the main objective of the workshop was to conduct a review of the causes of human-elephant conflicts and the methods that had been used to mitigate such conflicts in Asia and how effective these methods have been in resolving human elephant conflicts.

The workshop was funded by the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and organized by the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society on behalf of the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) in coordination with the Institute of Zoology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ecology of the Beijing Normal University. All the participants who were finally selected to participate in the workshop were provided with a travel grant that covered their airfare, ground transportation, incidental expenses, hotel accommodation and meals.

Fifty participants representing 12 of the 13 Asian elephant range countries participated in the workshop. The participants included field researchers, university faculty members and students, government officials from range countries, wildlife managers, and officers of national and international non-governmental organizations. Due to the incredible interest shown by a large number of individuals who wanted to participate and due to the financial and logistical constraints a selection process had to be

conducted. All potential participants were invited to submit a report on their current and past HEC mitigation efforts. A rigorous review of the reports was conducted by the organizing committee based on a set of 12 pre-agreed criteria and a scoring system so that selection was unbiased.

By holding the workshop the IUCN/SSC AsESG Human-elephant Conflict Task Force's main goal was to bring together a group of people (including but not restricted to the Task Force members) with practical experience of human elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation work in Asia to:

- Review the causes for HEC
- Identify processes and actions that could stop or minimize the creation of new HEC situations
- Identify and review processes and actions that can stop the escalation of existing HEC situations and possibly reverse some of the factors that contribute to HEC
- Review and list the types of HEC situations (i.e. dispersal, pocketed populations, etc.) and mitigation measures in place
- Compile a list of mitigation methods used across Asia
- Review and compile a summary of what has worked and what has not, where, and why (if known), thus facilitating an evidence-based approach to HEC mitigation
- Develop a document listing best management practices and keep that current on the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group's website as 'a living document'.

The workshop was a great success and it achieved its goal by producing a document that encompasses practically almost all the information pertaining to human elephant conflicts in the Asian elephant range countries and an assessment of mitigation methods, their suitability and effectiveness to resolve HEC. This document will be

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\*Coordinator, IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group Human-elephant Conflict Task Force & President, Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society  
E-mail: ravi@slwcs.org

circulated to all the workshop participants, members of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group as well as other non-members who are involved in HEC mitigation in Asia for reviewing and editing. Once the document has been extensively reviewed and edited the information would be disseminated *via* a dedicated online elephant Geo-Portal that will be linked with the IUCN/SSC AsESG website and other websites dedicated to elephant conservation and research. The document will be maintained as a “living document” to ensure that it will continue to be updated with the most current efforts to mitigate human elephant conflicts in the Asian elephant range countries.

#### **Some sample recommendations from working group presentations at close of workshop**

- The AsESG recommends prioritizing conservation-based approaches for mitigation of Human-Elephant Conflict over animal rights based approaches.
- In each HEC situation the AsESG recommends use of the mitigation technique that is the least detrimental to the elephant population.
- Need to be deal with the causes of HEC rather than the symptoms.
- Recommend that HEC mitigation is always conducted using an evidence-based/adaptive management approach.

· Addressing HEC requires a landscape-level approach.

· HEC mitigation is not only responsibility of the States wildlife/conservation authorities (e.g. Forest or Wildlife Depts.) but also the private sector, donor agencies, banks, communities/individual farmer.

· There is no permanent solution to HEC, instead human-elephant coexistence requires long-term commitment to managing elephant populations, human landuse, and human behaviour/attitudes. There is no single mitigation technique that will be applicable in all HEC situations.

#### **Workshop organizing committee**

Ravi Corea – Coordinator and President, Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society

Ajay Desai – Co-chair, IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

Simon Hedges – Co-chair, IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

Meenakshi (Mini) Nagendran - Program Officer, Asian Elephant Conservation Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Chandeep Corea – Operations Director and GIS Specialist, Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society



**Group Photograph : A Gathering of Experts for Asian Elephants  
Human Elephant Conflict Task Force Workshop, Beijing, China, July 10-11, 2009**

## Participants

Dr. Irfanullah Haseeb Md., Sr. Pgm. Off., IUCN Country Office, Bangladesh  
Mr. Islam Mozaharul Md., ACF, Forest Dept., MOEF, Bangladesh  
Mr. Mohsanin Samiul, R.A., Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, Dhaka  
Mr. Sereivathana Tuy, Pj. Mgr., FFI, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
Ms. Lingling, Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Science, Beijing  
Ms. Wang Li, Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Science, Beijing  
Ms. Yanfei Jin Jenny, Volunteer, Beijing  
Ms. Yu Han, Volunteer, Beijing Normal University, China  
Prof. Yue-Hua Sun, Prof. Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Science, Beijing  
Dr. Aster Li, China  
Anupam Sarmah, WWF, India  
Ashok Kumar, Consultant, BNHS, India  
Ramakrishnan B., WTI, India  
Mrs. Brahma Namita, Wildlife Biologist, Aaranyak, Guwahati  
Bora Chandan, DoEF, Government of Assam, India  
Dr. Chowdhury Sushant, Scientist, Wildlife Institute of India, Uttarakhand, India  
Mr. Desai Ajay Adrishappa, Consultant, WWF-India, Belgaum, India  
Dr. Dhakate Parag Madhukar, DFO, Forest Department, Uttarakhand, India  
Dr. Easa P.S., Asia Biodiversity Cons. Trust, India  
Ms. Hazarika Nandita, Ecosystems India, Guwahati  
Tewari Hem, WWF India, India  
Lenin Janaki, India  
Kulkarni Jayant, WRCS, India  
Chaudhuri Kisor, NGO, India  
Mr. L.N. Prasad, Pgm. Secty., Aaranyak, Guwahati  
Mr. Mavatur Anandakumar, Cons. Officer, NCF, Valparai, Tamil Nadu, India  
Dr. M.P. Kantilal, Scientist, Envirosearch, Pune  
Mr. Molur Sanjay R.V., Ex. Dir., Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, India  
Dr. Baskaran Nagarajan, Sr. Scientist, Asian Nature Cons. Found., Bangalore, India  
Dr. S.K. Sahoo, Chm. Cons. Himalayas, Chandigarh  
Sarma Ujjal Kumar, WTI, India  
Mr. Varma Surendra, Res. Scientist, Asian Elephant Research CC, NCF IIS, Bangalore  
Dr. Vijay D Anand, Bangalore, India  
Mr. Yadav Vinod Kumar, CF, Govt. of West Bengal, Kolkata  
Tewari Hem, Terai Arc Landscape, WWF India, Nainital Uttarakhand, India  
Dr. Kandpal K. D, Sr. Pgm Off. WWF India  
Murali Pai, India  
Dr. Sukumar Raman, India  
Arnold Sitompul, CSI, Indonesia  
Mr. Azmi Wahdi, Manager, FFI, Indonesia  
Bambang Suprayogi, SEF, Indonesia  
Mr. Bangun Aswin, CRU Coord.  
Fauna Flora International, Indonesia  
Sukatmok, Forest Dept, Indonesia  
Mr. Sumartono Donny Gunaryadi, ECC, WCS, Indonesia  
Mr. Khounboline Khamkhoun, WWF Greater Mekong Programme - Laos office  
Mr. McWilliam Alex, Senior Field Supervisor, Nakai Elephant Pgm.WCS, Lao PDR  
Aris Oziar, WCS, Malaysia  
Dr. LAI, Nathalie, Director, Hutu, Sabah, Malaysia  
Ms. Tay Jessica Jess, Field Res., WCS Selangor, Malaysia  
Dr. Raymond Alfred, Malaysia  
Dr. Jnawali Shant Raj, Dir. Terai Environment, NTNC, Nepal  
Dr. Shrestha Rinjan, Cons. Bio.WWF-Nepal  
Dr. Williams Christy Amirtharaj, WWF AREAS Programme, Nepal  
Mrs. Attanayake G.R.D.N.K, DD, Central Env. Authority, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Corea Chandeeep G.D., Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Corea Ravindra, President, Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society, Sri Lanka  
Dr. Jayantha Deepani, Country Rep, BFF, Sri Lanka  
Dr. Fernando Prithiviraj, Chairman, Centre for CR, Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Hiddelle Gunawardane, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Karunasinghe Upul Wilagoda Gedara RA, Sri Lanka WCS \ Sri Lanka  
Ms. Kudavidanage Enoke, Researcher, Sri Lanka Gunawardene Manori, CCR/Dilmah Foundation, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Wilson Meepage Edmund, (Ret. DD) DWC, Sri Lanka  
Dharmasiri Nishantha, SLWCS, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Pebotuwa Dhammike Gamage Jagath, Dept of WL Conservation, Sri Lanka  
Prof. Oswin Perera, Professor, U. of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Sandanayake Ajith Nawanadana, Chm, United Society Solar Power, Sri Lanka  
Ms. Walker Sally R., Dir. Zoo Outreach Org., India  
Dr. Weerakoon Abeyasinghe, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka  
Mr. Jitvijak Supol, Unit Head, WWF Thailand  
Dr. Pattanavibool Anak, Director, WCS, Thailand  
Dr. Srikrachang Mattana, Sr. Biol., Dept of National Park, Wildlife, Thailand  
Ms. Ritthirat Jittin, Project Director, Elephant Conservation Network, Thailand  
Dr. Hedges Simon, Co-chair, IUCN/SSC AsESG, IUCN/SSC AsESG & WCS UK  
Dr. Leimgruber Peter, Head, Conservation GIS, Smithsonian Institution, Front Royal, VA, USA  
Dr. Nagendran Meenakshi, Wildlife Biologist, U S Fish and Wildlife Service, Arlington, VA, USA  
Ms. Riddle Heidi, IEF, Greenbrier, AR, USA  
Mr. Richard Stone, Asia editor, Science  
Prof. Dang Nguyen Xuan, Ass.Prof., Institute of Ecology and Biological Res., Vietnam