

## New Asian Elephant Foundations

### elephant family

*Elephant family* is a UK based charity formed just last year which believes that societies should treat elephants with the respect, care and admiration we would wish to extend to any family member. *elephant family* has been created to contribute to the stable future of Asian elephants in the wild and to ensure the welfare of captive elephants. It is a broadly based, life-affirming charity that is dedicated to both people and elephants. *elephant family* is honoured by two distinguished Patrons, the Rajmata of Jaipur and Sir Evelyn de Rothschild who share lifelong interests in wildlife and are dedicated to Asian elephant conservation. Its trustees are:

-- **Mark Shand:** An award winning travel writer, documentary film presenter and conservationist is a Life Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and a Member of the Explorers Club. Mark has lectured widely at many prestigious venues, such as The Royal Geographical Society and the Hay-on-Wye & Edinburgh Book Festivals. He is a frequent guest on radio and television talk shows.

-- **Nicholas Claxton:** Director of Programmes for ORTV, a London based television company producing major factual programming to broadcasters around the world. Formerly Managing Director of two UK based independent production companies specialising in high quality and high rating factual programming. He has an award-winning track-record in programme making around the world, including such Documentaries as the Emmy-award winning film 'Cry Ethiopia Cry', 'The Rhythm of Life' with Sir George Martin, 'Winnie Mandela & The Missing Witness', 'Apartheid's Assassins', and 'Inside Polygamy', among many others.

-- **Dugal Muller:** He spent the last 10yrs working as an advisor on conservation in Asia. He co-founded Fountain MCM (environmental/sustainability consultancy) and co-founded Oxford Index (environmental auditing consultancy).

-- **Caroline Cassey:** Undertook a 1000km trek across southern India to become only the country's third female mahout. She is founder of the Aisling Project (geared to changing opinions about disability), on the Board of FAS and has been named one of the RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) UK's People of the Year 2001.

-- **Lord Robin Russell** – Director of Woburn Safari Park. In 1996, together with a team from Woburn, Robin led an expedition to India to source three Asian elephants to start a new European breeding line. He is also a trustee of The Woburn Centre for Conservation and Education.

*elephant family* is unique in that it is the only charitable organisation dedicated to the conservation of all Asian elephants, both wild and captive. They recognise that building a world where humans and elephants can live in harmony is fraught with difficulties and conflicts, but believe that most people desire such a world and that if we act

together in a spirit of innovation and transparency, we can make that difference for elephants and for people.

***elephant family* was launched last year along with the publication of the first ever independent audit of elephant conservation, which claimed that the conservation movement and specific Asian governments were failing to arrest the sharp decline of the Asian elephant population, now a tenth of the size of its African relatives.**

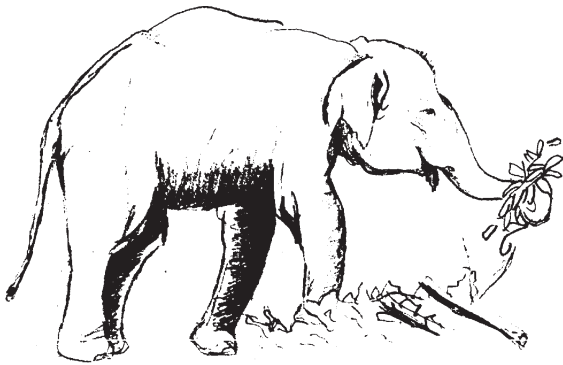
'The State of Wild Asian Elephant Conservation in 2003: An Independent Report to *elephant family*', the report was conducted by Drs Paul Jepson and Susan Canney from the Oxford based environment group, Conservation Direct, and commissioned by *elephant family*, a new charity dedicated to elephant conservation. *elephant family* was set up by Mark Shand, Lord Robin Russell, Caroline Casey, Nicholas Claxton and Dugal Muller, and has Sir Evelyn de Rothschild and the Rajmata of Jaipur as its Patrons.

Mark Shand, *elephant family* trustee, says: "We conducted the audit because we believe every person concerned with conservation from the man on the street to government leaders should have the right to know whether attempts to save wildlife are succeeding and be able to make informed choices about donations, awarding funds based on performance; it is our aim at *elephant family* to drive this reform, increase funding into elephant conservation and ensure that those funds are well-spent and delivering results."

The report's findings took 12 months work from September 2002, and assessed 10 Asian countries and 21 NGO projects, investigating whether they had the necessary capacity to meet their aim of saving the Asian elephant, and solving the conflict raging between them and an expanding human population. Increasingly, over the last five years Asian elephants are being driven out of their natural forest habitat because of agricultural encroachment and illegal logging, leading to deforestation. Organised poaching syndicates in search of ivory and bush meat are wiping out tuskers and herds in regions of India and Indochina.

The report found that only 2 countries were performing strongly. India and Sri Lanka demonstrated the best capacity for conservation, strong cultural regard for elephants and long established wildlife and forestry agencies. Indonesia is said to have performed the worst, largely because the government has allowed implementation agencies to collapse.

Only half of the NGO projects assessed met the 'fair to strong' criteria as set by Conservation Direct. No NGO project was considered to be 'very strong'. The report concluded that without a co-ordinated countrywide strategy these projects could only make a relatively small scale impact, compared to the size of the Asian elephant problem. Those performing highest include in-country NGOs such as the Wildlife Preservation Society of India, the Friends of Doon, the Nature Conservation Foundation in India and Hutan in Malaysia. Together they demonstrated a



long term vision and strategy, employ a good organisational structure and experienced staff, and are delivering an impact against their given objectives. The worst performing NGO projects include FFI's Indochina elephant programmes and WWF activities in India's North Bank, and Thailand. They have performed poorly in the audit because they lack a clear strategy and are under resourced with inexperienced staff and little institutional support.

High-budget projects did not rate better overall. A case in-point is FFI's Conservation of Elephant Landscapes in Aceh Province (CELA project), which despite a budget in excess of \$200,000 per year failed to make an impact. In part this is because of the difficult political situation but the authors of the audit point to over bureaucratisation which has resulted in "procedure before action".

The report questions whether relatively too much effort is going into scientific population surveys and grand planning visions linking reserves with elephant corridors; and too little effort is been given to generating the public and political will needed to support real action on the ground.

Overall the report concluded the need for the following to help solve the Asian elephant war and halt pending extinction:

1. **Admission & mutual engagement:** Governments and NGOs need to admit to the scale of the problem and mutually work together. Governments though must accept the ultimate responsibility because of the scales of space and time over which elephants live.
2. **Long-term strategy:** Governments and NGOs need to develop long term strategies and implementation plans to ensure effective use of the limited funds currently available. Good but *ad hoc* projects will continue to make little impact if long term, country wide strategies aren't put in place.
3. **Transparency:** NGOs need to be more accountable and transparent e.g. *via* independent auditing which will drive credibility, legitimacy and performance, thereby attracting greater investment of funds and time in the cause.
4. **Socialisation:** Elephant conservation needs to be treated as a social problem not just a technical one. Conservation agencies need to lead a considered and informed public debate on the future of the Asian elephant.

They need to reinforce the sense of respect and responsibility that people intuitively feel for elephants and mobilise this to bring about the reforms in government and NGOs need to protect wild elephant populations and reduce human-elephant conflict.

"The conservation of elephants requires that society as a whole urgently faces up to three crucial questions," says Mark Shand. "Firstly, do we want Asian elephants in the world, or not? Secondly, how much land are we willing to grant them? And finally, what should be done with the surplus animals?"

"The scale and complexity of issues surrounding elephant conservation and management far exceed the capacity and mandate of any single government department. As a result, a range of institutions must take some responsibility for their conservation and co-operate with each other to establish a social infrastructure to manage the delicate human-elephant relationship. Furthermore any conservation project should be independently audited to report as to whether best practice is being followed. Currently, this is not the case" reported the audit.

Turning the audit into a mechanism for change, *elephant family* is currently developing an online donation system – *elephantbank*. This is a new initiative allowing anyone to invest in the fund, or directly into its specific projects, identified as examples of "best practice" by the audit. The *elephantbank* seeks to overcome donor cynicism regarding the destination of their money by submitting all recommended projects to an annual audit and bringing project managers in touch with their donors, through the *elephant family* web site. 100% of all donor monies invested in the *elephantbank* fund will go directly to support projects in the field. All core running costs for *elephant family* are covered by the generosity of *elephant family* 'parents'.

*elephant family* is currently seeking partners to help implement this innovative investment scheme.

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