

# IMPACT REPORT

2022-2024



## Center for Asian Elephant Conservation



## Background

The wild Asian elephant population is threatened by habitat loss, fragmentation, human-elephant conflict and poaching for its ivory, skin and meat. This species is considered Endangered; less than 55,000 Asian elephants remain in Asia, scattered across fragmented habitats in 13 range countries. If the wild Asian elephant populations continue to decline, wild elephants could become extinct in the next century.

The Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Institute Center for Asian Elephant Conservation shares a common vision with other elephant conservation organizations — a vision that includes Asian elephants in the world's future forever. Asian elephant conservation is a high priority for the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG), the IUCN Task Force on Human-Wildlife Conflict, the AZA Elephant TAG, the AZA Asian Elephant SSP and the AZA Asian Elephant SAFE Program. Working with our partners to focus on Asian elephant management and recovery, conservation science, and education, our ultimate goal is to save the endangered Asian elephant from extinction.

During the last three years of operation (2022-2024), the Center's conservation activities were achieved in partnership with four major conservation partners - the International Elephant Foundation, the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Wildlife Trust of India, and the SAFE Asian Elephant program.

## Center Impact

### International Elephant Foundation

Over the last 18 years, the Elephant Conservation Program and Center for Asian Elephant Conservation has chosen to support elephant conservation through a third-party partner, the International Elephant Foundation (IEF), by providing conservation support to an established and effective organization that is aligned with our goals. IEF serves as a partnership liaison by reviewing and evaluating elephant conservation and research projects both in the field and under human care, linking zoos with field conservationists and researchers, and fostering collaborative zoo/field partnerships to provide long-term support to wildlife programs around the world.

The Center for Asian Elephant Conservation in partnership with IEF, has achieved the following over the last three years:



» Continuation of the long-term support of Elephant Response Units (ERUs) surrounding Way Kambas National Park, which is home to the largest connected breeding herds of critically endangered Sumatran elephants. ERU teams help protect farms and communities, serve as conservation education ambassadors, and stop wildlife crime. ERU team members also work with affected communities to facilitate community watch programs, encouraging the community to take an active role in conservation and

the protection of their own crop fields. The number of ERUs and patrols continues to increase each year.

- » Providing annual, unrestricted, core funding for IEF. This support was vital in supporting conservation projects, such as addressing human-elephant conflict (HEC) in Nepal. Nepal has a small but growing population of elephants existing in human dominated landscapes creating serious human-elephant conflict. Habitat fragmentation, retaliatory killings, and inadequate coordination among agencies has created a low level of conservation awareness and increased HEC. To address this issue in the western region of Bardia-Suklaphanta, four Elephant Response Teams (ERT) were created to help address conflict and reduce fatalities. The ERTs respond to HEC incidents, conduct village-level outreach and education to change attitudes towards elephants, and strengthen cooperation between local agencies and stakeholders.
- » Providing “In-kind” support for IEF. Tim Thier has served on the IEF Board of Directors since 2020, offering the organization reliable leadership, services and expertise.
- » Providing advocacy and promotion. During this partnership, the Zoo has promoted IEF and advocated on behalf of its programs to a very broad audience through keeper chats, graphics, events and social media.

## Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute

Approximately 30-50% of Asia's elephants live in human care. Elephants that previously served as draft animals in the forestry sector are increasingly becoming unemployed because of changing logging management and deforestation. Releasing unemployed elephants into the wild to establish self-sustaining populations is a conservation strategy with the potential to bolster this flagship species and restore ecological functioning to natural habitats. However, due to their complex ecology, cognitively-advanced behavior, and reliance on social structure, elephants may be one of the most challenging species to release into the wild successfully.

With increasing threats to sustainable elephant populations, the need to develop the science of elephant release has never been greater.

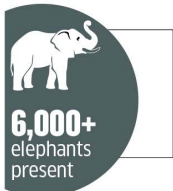


The Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) has been working to collect preliminary data to advance this effort. The Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Center for Asian Elephant Conservation is partnering with SCBI to provide support for groundbreaking science, capacity building, elephant rewilding and post-release monitoring. If successful, the result will be a blueprint for environmental managers to use when designing future elephant release programs across Asian elephant range countries.

The elephant rewilding project originally focused in Myanmar, but the military coup in early 2021 and continued civil unrest have greatly impacted travel to Myanmar and the ability to complete any significant field work. Thus, we have moved the focus of our work to the Elephant Conservation Center (ECC) in Laos. The Saint Louis and SCBI teams have had regular meetings with the ECC staff to determine key priorities for the rewilding project and developed a memorandum of understanding to identify objectives over the next three years.

Animal Care keeper Joshua “Syd” Sydney-Smith traveled to the Elephant Conservation Center in 2023 to meet our onsite partners and begin building relationships with our colleagues committed to rewilding Asian elephants in Laos.

## Brahmagiri-Nilgiri Eastern Ghats



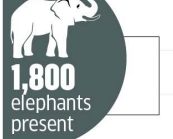
- 20 Elephant corridors
- 3,300 sq km out of 12,600 sq km is in protected area

## Nilambur, Silent Valley and Coimbatore



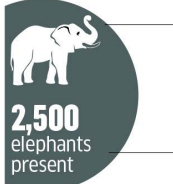
- 2 Elephant corridors
- 2,300 sq km

## Periyar - Agasthyamalai landscape

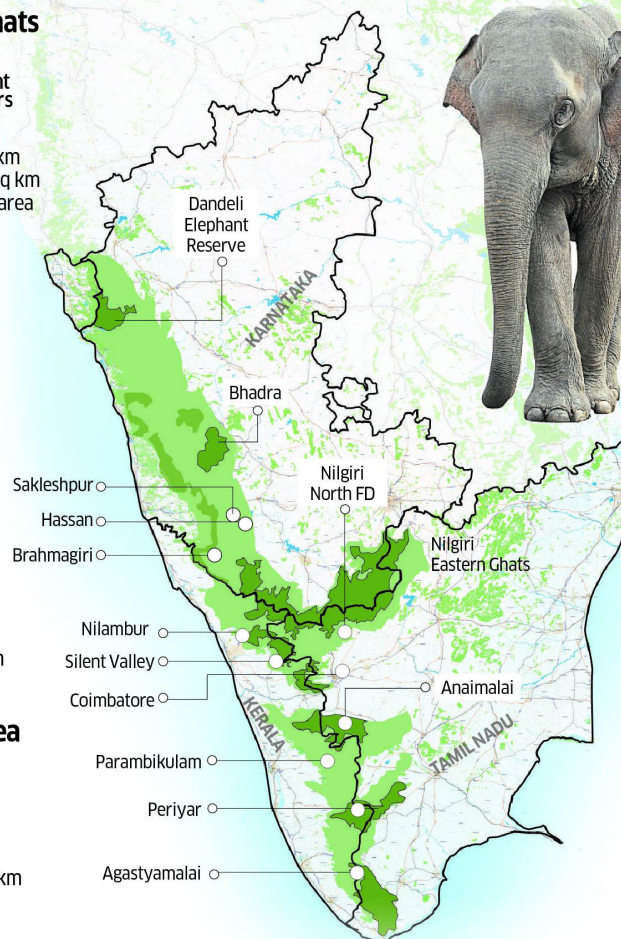


- 1 Elephant corridor
- 5,600 sq km

## Anaimalai-Parambikulam area



- 5 Elephant corridors
- 5,500 sq km



# 28 Elephant landscapes and corridors in South India

### Ecologically important elephant corridors

Chamarajanagara - Talamalai at Punjur; Chamarajanagara - Talamalai at Muddahalli; Madumalai - Nilambur via O'valley; Jaccanaire slope- Hulikal Durgam; Kaniyanpura - Moyar; Tirunelli - Kudrakote

### Threats to elephant corridors

Commercial plantations; Forest-based industries and Tourism activities

### Linear projects

Roads, Highways, Railways, Irrigation & mini hydro-electric projects

COMPILED BY: PRAJWAL SUVARNA, DH GRAPHICS: RAMU M

**NUMBER OF CORRIDORS** Karnataka: 10\* Kerala: 5 Tamil Nadu: 13

\*The corridors in Karnataka include five along the Tamil Nadu border and one along the Kerala border

## Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)

Human elephant conflict in India continues to escalate each year. To secure a future for elephants in India and reduce human elephant conflict, it is important to ensure the unhindered movement of elephants between key habitats.

In 2022 and 2023 the Center for Asian Elephant Conservation supported the mapping of elephant distribution and human-elephant conflict hotspots in 17 states of India. This aided in strategically planning out elephant corridor locations and human-elephant conflict mitigation strategies to foster human-elephant coexistence in the country.

In February 2024 IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) organized a side event "Room to Roam for Elephants: Conservation and Connectivity in Africa and

Asia at the Convention of the Parties 14 of Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Deforestation, linear infrastructure and poor connectivity across boundaries has resulted in elephants residing in small, fragmented pockets and elevating the risk of human-elephant conflict. Addressing this concern, AsESG organized the side event involving three elephant range countries, (India, South Africa and Malawi) to deliberate on promoting transboundary cooperation and protection for long – range movement of elephants. This was a step to address one of the nine targets outlined in the Kathmandu Declaration signed by all Asian elephant range countries in 2022 to "Develop bilateral transboundary agreements, protocols, or understandings in relevant countries to ease movement of Asian Elephants through appropriate corridors and transboundary protected areas". This research and event was supported by the Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Institute.



## SAFE Asian Elephant

SAFE Asian Elephant's goal is to enhance and assist Asian elephant conservation efforts within the 13 range countries by engaging communities with elephants in human care, supporting science of the treatment and management of EEHV in Asian elephant range states, and developing education materials, tools kits and social media materials to introduce to all AZA institutions. The Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Institute has been involved with the SAFE Asian Elephant program since its inception in 2015. The Center for Asian Elephant Conservation has committed \$2,500 annually from 2024-2026 to support the IUCN's Asian Elephant Specialist Group for outreach and addressing Human Elephant Conflict.

## Relevant Recognition

The WildCare Institute logo is found on the International Elephant Foundation (IEF) website as well as every official document distributed by IEF.

The WildCare Institute logo is found on the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) website and was displayed on the conservation partner slide at the 2024 Convention of the Parties 14 of Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) meeting.

## Plan for the Future

The Center will continue supporting the International Elephant Foundation (IEF). The support of long-term projects to mitigate human/elephant conflict have been very impactful and are still needed. Through IEF we will also continue to support smaller projects and work with new conservationists that may eventually grow into Center partners.

With our partners at SCBI, we will identify the locations and individual elephants that will make the re-wilding program a success. While this program was initially focused in Myanmar, we are now focused on elephants located at the Elephant Conservation Center in Laos. Animal movement and habitat usage are being analyzed and the focus over the next few years will be selecting animals most likely to succeed and truly re-wilding elephants.

Our support of the Wildlife Trust of India and the Asian Elephant Specialist Group will not continue as we grow our partnerships with SCBI and SAFE Asian Elephant.

In addition to the above goals, it is our sincere hope that the development of this Center will give the elephant care team strong direct-impact conservation and welfare messaging and real-life conservation stories about WildCare Institute's efforts related to their area's most iconic species, the Asian elephant.