

## Asian Elephant Symposium at the Society for Conservation Biology - Asia Meeting

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### Background

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Conference of the Society for Conservation Biology - Asia Section was held from 19 to 22 August 2014 in the city of Melaka in Malaysia. The conference participants hailed from a wide range of Asian and other countries. One of the highlights of the conference was the session on Asian elephants titled “Moving towards effective mitigation of human-elephant conflict – are we really progressing at all?”, organized by Prithiviraj Fernando and Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz.

Asian elephants – the largest terrestrial animals in Asia – are of global concern due to their ecological and cultural significance and the rapid decline of their populations in the past few decades. The reasons for this decline is complex but, simply put, it can be attributed to the combination of widespread land-use changes and the subsequent increase in human-elephant conflict (HEC). HEC occurs in the form of crop raiding, damage on infrastructure, and attacks on people by elephants; and the retaliatory response by people by killing, translocating, or harassing elephants away from cultivated areas.

Most Asian elephants now live in human-dominated landscapes and – as tropical Asia's economies and population numbers steadily increase – the carrying capacity for the species increasingly depends on people's willingness to coexist with elephants rather than on ecological factors. We do have a fair understanding of the behavioural and ecological factors that cause HEC, however, we know much less about how to effectively mitigate the conflict and achieve the often-discussed human-elephant coexistence. The long-term conservation of Asian elephants

depends on our capacity to effectively mitigate HEC.

The symposium aimed to collate ongoing conservation work in the region in order to understand where we stand in our aim to mitigate HEC.

### Symposium

The symposium was well attended. It consisted of 17 presentations and was the longest symposium of the conference. Seven of the 13 range countries were represented in the talks with the following breakdown: Malaysia 5; India 3; Sri Lanka 3; Indonesia 3; China 2; Thailand 2; Laos 1 and there was one range-wide presentation.

The presentations in the symposium could be broadly considered in two categories. The first group focused on drivers of HEC such as economic pressures for land conversion, people's perception and tolerance, and the responsibility assumed by different stakeholders. The talks that dealt with these issues consisted of:

Prithiviraj Fernando & Jennifer Pastorini  
*Human-elephant conflict mitigation: can we have the cake and eat it?*

Varun R. Goswami, Divya Vasudevn & M.K. Oli  
*Human-elephant conflict devalues the conservation potential of areas where elephants and people co-occur*

Franziska K. Harich, Anna C. Treydte, Chution Savini, Tommaso Savini & Kriangsak Sribuarod  
*Human elephant conflicts in rubber dominated landscapes surrounding protected areas in Southern Thailand*

Krithi k. Karanth

*Human-wildlife interactions in Indian forest, scrub and grassland systems*

P. Leimgruber, A. Campos-Arceiz, P. Fernando, W. Jitvijak, T. Neang, J. Pastorini, V. Ponnusamy, N. M. B. Pradhan, S. Chen & B. Stewart-Cox  
*Factors influencing people's perception of human elephant conflict across Asia*

Datuk Sam Mannan, Frederick Kugan, Albert Radin, Eddie Bungkoris & Robert Ong  
*Elephants, conservation and development in Sabah, Malaysia*

Chution Savini & Mattana Srikrachang  
*Status of wild elephant populations and human-elephant conflict in Thailand's remaining forests*

Ange S.L. Tan, Jennifer Pastorini, Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz & Prithiviraj Fernando  
*Elephant distribution changes in Malaysia and Sri Lanka over the past 40 years*

Li Zhang, Changhuan He, Shaobo Zhe, Jungan Dai, Liu Lin  
*A case study on 30-year changes of Asian elephant habitat in China*

The second set of presentations mainly dealt with the effectiveness of common strategies for HEC mitigation: i.e. elephant drives, translocation, the use of electric fences, crop guarding, economic compensation, and working with communities. The presentations in this section consisted of the following:

A. Campos-Arceiz, N. bin Othman & S.Saaban  
*The response of elephants to translocation*

Shu Chen, Zhuang-Fang Yi, Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, Ming-Yong Chen & Edward L. Webb  
*Developing a spatially-explicit, sustainable and risk-based insurance scheme to mitigate human-wildlife conflict*

Simon Hedges, Martin Tyson, Alex McWilliam, Sugiyo, Melvin Gumal & Donny Gunaryadi  
*Community based approaches to reducing human-elephant conflict: theory and practice in Southeast Asia*

Jennifer Pastorini & Prithiviraj Fernando  
*Electric fences against elephant depredation: what does it take to make it work?*

Salman bin Saaban & Melvin Gumal  
*National elephant conservation action plan (NECAP): An introduction*

Wishnu Sukmantoro, Anggoro Sudibyo, Mulyo Hutomo & Samsuardi  
*Elephant habitat improvement through satellite image Landsat 7 ETM+ analysis in Balai Raja, Riau Province*

Sunarto  
*Human-elephant conflicts in Central Sumatra: characteristics and mitigation efforts*

Alexandra Zimmermann, S. Wilson, N. Hazarika  
*Solutions for human-elephant conflict: lessons from Assam*



The symposium was concluded with a 30-minute question and answer session with a panel composed of the presenters, which addressed questions from the audience. In addition, the panel discussed the research priorities to progress towards effective mitigation of HEC in Asia.