

Gleanings from the Asian Elephant Specialist Group's Newsletter, Hasthi and Gajah

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In May 1986 the Inaugural Newsletter was sent out to the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) members. However, the second newsletter published in July 1987 was called Hasthi. The third, sent out in Spring 1989, was back again as the Newsletter. The Newsletter was sent out regularly till August 1992, when the 9th issue was called *Gajah*, which name has been retained to date.

Newsletter Number 1 - May 1986

Mr. Lyn de Alwis is the editor of the very first issue. The size of the Newsletter is A4. Mr. Lyn de Alwis, the Chairman of the AsESG, in his message in the inaugural Newsletter states: "At the meeting held at the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Karnataka, India from 5th- 9th November 1985, the members regretted the lack of communication, for there was so much more scientific material and technical know-how available since the Colombo and Jaldpara meetings, that could have been utilized in the implementation of other Action Plans. The members present were unanimous that the AESG should immediately commence publication of a Newsletter on a regular basis."

This Newsletter contains a note on the meeting held at Bandipur in November 1985. It also discusses, briefly, the proposal to hold the next meeting of the AsESG. A short note by Katherine Latinen gives details of captive elephant breeding activities of some North American Zoos. This Newsletter lists the name and address of 35 members, divided by country.

The Functions of the Group. Lyn de Alwis has listed out for the benefit of the new members, the following Terms of Reference of the AsESG:

- The distribution and numbers of all remaining Asian elephant populations should be known

as accurately as possible.

- The pressures on all known populations should be assessed and monitored as far as possible by regard to the following indicators:
 - Sufficiency of natural habitat. Is there enough? If so, at what rate, and in what way is it being reduced? How secure is this for elephants? Is there, and of what type, man-induced competition for elephant-important resources?
 - Poaching for ivory. The existence and seriousness of this is to be investigated. Efforts should be made to acquire annual records for legal / illegal imports / exports / confiscations / sales of ivory from the government agencies concerned.
 - Deaths and captures. Records should be acquired of exact numbers known to have been removed from the wild population annually through human agency and the reason given. Diseases and epidemics should be recorded.
 - Crop damage. This should be monitored and localities noted and its annual cost and seriousness assessed. Any deterrent activities (or lack of) by public or authorities should be recorded so that the Group can advise accordingly.

Hasthi Number 2 - July 1987

The editor Lyn de Alwis in his message says that "members may observe that our Newsletter now has a new name. 'Hasthi' in many Asian tongues means 'Elephant' or 'Tusker' and I thought it an appropriate title. I hope you will agree".

Lyn de Alwis continues: There is an increasing concern for Asian elephants by governments, scientists and conservationists, some of whom have only recently come to realize that elephants

(or, for that matter, wildlife) occur outside Africa. News reaching us tells of active protective measures being taken by Governments of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, which may result in the creation of a unique national park, the boundaries of which will cross national frontiers. This apparently is the only answer to saving the Indo-Chinese sub species of elephant, which migrate from country to country.

This issue also contains a comprehensive report by Peter Jackson on the AsESG meeting held at Bandipur. The chairmanship of the AsESG was transferred from Mr. J. C. Daniel to Mr. Lyn de Alwis. This report also contains summaries of reports for India, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. At this meeting the AESG made 22 recommendations on a variety of elephant conservation activities including fragmentation of habitat, ecological and management studies, Action Plans, census techniques, capture and removal of juveniles from the jungles, elephant tranquilization, maintenance of elephant corridors, trade in ivory and ivory poaching, translocation of pocketed herds, national parks, commercial capture from the wild and buffer zones. The recommendations also include the collection of information on elephants, nominees to represent Bhutan, China, Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam on the AsESG, a regular Newsletter and the setting up of a Task Force in the different states to monitor elephant conservation and the implementation of the recommendations.

This issue also features two papers, one on the '*Episiotomy, a new obstetrical approach in elephants (sic)*' by H. Merkt *et al.* and the other on '*Translocation of elephants in Lampung, Sumatra*' by Charles Santiapillai.

Newsletter Number 3 - Spring 1989

The name has gone back to Newsletter. The two editors, Lyn de Alwis and Charles Santiapillai state: "This issue of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group Newsletter differs from earlier issues in format, style and content. It is intended to provide a forum to discuss the group's activities, facilitate the exchange of information among the members and publish news and articles concerning the

Asian elephant and its habitat. The underlying theme of this newsletter is forest destruction and its consequences."

The AsESG held its third meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand on 19-21 January 1988. The draft Action Plan for Elephant Conservation was reviewed. The current status of the elephant throughout its range in Asia was also assessed. It was agreed by those present that the main threat to the elephant in Asia is the rapid conversion of its habitat to other uses by man and called for more discretionary policies to replace the current indiscriminate exploitation of forests. The survival of the elephant in Asia would depend not only on the availability of viable reserves but also on how scientifically these reserves and their elephant populations are managed in order to ensure their long term survival and to minimize conflicts with human interests.

Workshops on the following themes were held at the Chiang Mai meeting: 1. Management of domestic and captive Asian elephants. Chairman: Dr. Mike Schmidt, 2. Human-elephant conflict policies for their resolution. Chairman: Dr. R. Sukumar, 3. Conservation and development: a new approach to habitat conservation. Chairman: Prof. D.K. Lahiri-Choudhury, 4. Appropriate conservation policies for Asian elephant populations. Chairman: Mr. J.C. Daniel, 5. Regulating the trade and use of ivory. Chairman: Mr. Peter F. Jackson.

The feature of this issue are the excerpts of a paper by D.K. Lahiri-Choudhury titled '*The Indian elephant in a changing world*'.

The regional news section contains news from Indonesia: '*Plan to kill rampaging elephants criticised*', '*Lampung Forests face extensive destruction*' and '*Nation warned of damage of forest destruction*'. The news from Thailand is on '*Elephants benefit from the governments ban on logging*'.

The research news section contains notes on, '*Male-female differences in foraging on crops by Asian elephants*' based on research carried out by Dr. R. Sukumar and published in Animal

Behaviour. It also has a note on '*Talking elephants*' based on the discovery by Katherine Payne on the means of elephant communicating.

This issue lists 37 AsESG members.

Newsletter Number 4 - Summer 1989

In the '*Editorial comment*' in this issue the two editors, Lyn de Alwis and Charles Santiapillai, discuss the recent total ban on logging in Thailand. This decision was taken by the Thai government in the light of the severe floods and landslides that took many lives and destroyed property. Though this ban was hailed at the initial stages, it now seems to have created different problems. There are demands by Thai entrepreneurs to be allowed to go to Burma and Laos and log the vast extents of forests there.

The principal activity of the AsESG has been to set up an Asian Elephant Conservation Centre in Bangalore, India. The first Asian Elephant Secretariat was established in Sri Lanka in the late 1970s under then Co-Chairman Dr. R.C.D. Olivier. Over time this secretariat fell in to abeyance. However now given the substantial research carried out in Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia and Indonesia much reliable data has been collected on elephant distribution and numbers. Furthermore, given the human population growth and the development programmes in many of the Asian countries where the elephant occurs, the conversion of forests to agricultural holdings and human settlements has led to a substantial escalation in human-elephant conflicts that need resolving. Hence it was felt that the Asian Elephant Secretariat should be revived.

The members expected the secretariat to focus on (1) the preparation of a brochure on the aims of the secretariat and basic information to be sent to all Director-Generals, Park Superintendents, Rangers etc who manage or work in parks that have elephants, (2) maintenance of a centralized data base on elephant distribution, abundance and conservation needs and the provision of up to date information, (3) encourage governments to census their elephant populations on a regular basis in order to draw up appropriate management

policies, and (4) advising governments and conservation organisations of the conservation priorities of the Asian Elephant Action Plan.

The feature articles are '*Conservation of Asian elephants in Thailand*' by Choompol Ngampongsai and a very comprehensive paper on '*Management of elephants in camps*' by Dr. V. Krishnamurti.

The research section contains notes on (1) '*Growth in Asian elephants*' by R. Sukumar, (2) '*Sounds of silence revealed*' by Ian Redmond, (3) '*Characteristics of three populations of elephants of the Western Ghats*' by A. Vijayakumaran and (4) '*Protected areas and elephant conservation in India*' by A.J.T. Johnsingh.

This issue lists 43 AsESG members.

Newsletter Number 5 - 1990 (Special Issue)

The whole of this 'Special Issue' Newsletter is devoted to a paper on '*Sumatran elephant database*' by Charles Santiapillai of WWF and Widodo Sukohadi Ramono of the Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation in Indonesia. The paper is an attempt to establish a Sumatran elephant database. The editorial states that "It is hoped that this initial attempt to establish a database would provide the necessary stimulus to other elephant specialists in Asia to start compiling information that would ultimately result in the preparation of a Global Resource Information Database (GRID) for the Asian elephant."

The paper contains different sections on: an overview of Sumatra, climate and rainfall, elephant distribution, elephant density, protected areas, human population, transmigration, summary of the status of elephants in each province, and current elephant-human conflicts. Each of these sections has a map of Sumatra with the relevant details.

Interestingly the last paragraph of the '*Editorial comment*' states "The opinions expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of

the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) or the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).”

This issue lists 42 AsESG members.

Newsletter Number 6 - Spring 1991

Mr. Lyn de Alwis and Dr. Charles Santiapillai are the editors. The ‘*Editorial*’ by Lyn de Alwis is ‘*A plea to help save the Asian elephant*’. Mr. de Alwis traces the background to elephant conservation in Asia and Africa. He mentions that the push for the conservation of the African elephant by conservationists has been so successful that it has almost forgotten the Asian species. He says that “it is doubtful if, the wild population in all thirteen countries of the species range would add upto 50,000 animals”. Though there seems to be a vast range for wild elephants in the ranges ‘in actual fact there are only some 500,000 km² of wild habitat left and this is declining at an average rate of 4000 km² per annum’. ‘In comparison, Africa still has 7,000,000 km² of forest for its estimated 600,000 elephants. In 1978 the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of IUCN responded to the repeated calls for a long-term plan to save the Asian elephant. It formed the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AESG) to pool expert knowledge and experience available in the region and elsewhere to formulate and implement such a plan’. Mr. J.C. Daniel was the first Chairman of the AESG, which has grown into a strong hardworking body of 46 members.

Mr. de Alwis says that he feels that the setting up the AsESG Secretariat, governed by a steering committee, is a logical step in the progress of the AsESG. The Secretariat has the following aims and objectives:

- Identify the target elephant populations in Asia, which offer the best hopes for long-term survival and concentrate on safe-guarding these key populations through government and field actions.
- Carry out in-depth ecological studies in these selected populations and their habitats in order to obtain the best, most reliable and quantifiable data as a basis for sound management of elephant populations and

their habitats.

- Design a mechanism for sharing practical knowledge especially in solving problems concerning herds migrating within or across national borders. This will also involve strengthening capabilities of staff through training programmes, workshops etc.
- Compilation of records of all the publications to date on the elephant and its habitat. This is particularly relevant today when research on elephants has become widespread and the publication of books has gathered momentum.

There is a report titled ‘*Singapore’s brush with wild elephants*’ based on the three young tuskers that swam across the sea from Malaysia to an island off Singapore. The report describes the efforts that were made to get these three back to mainland Malaysia. A special team from Malaysia, headed by expert Mohamed Shariff Daim came with two tame koonkie elephants and two large elephant transport trucks. The whole lot was transported to the island in the sea by the Singapore Army. The elephants were then tranquilized, captured and taken back to mainland Malaysia.

This issue contains a note on the progress of the Asian Elephant Conservation Centre (AESG Secretariat). Charles Santiapillai reports on a ‘*Preliminary workshop on censusing elephants in forests*’.

The regional section contains reports on: ‘*Elephants slaughtered in civil war (Sri Lanka)*’, ‘*Saving elephants for posterity (India)*’, ‘*India plans rescue of elephants*’, ‘*Counterfeit ivory being sold as the real thing in Lampung Province (Indonesia)*’, ‘*Illegal trade threat to timber-camp elephants (Burma)*’, ‘*Resolving elephant-human conflicts in Xishuangbanna Nature Reserve (China)*’ and ‘*Enhancing the survival of elephants (Sri Lanka)*’.

The book ‘The Asian Elephant’ written by R. Sukumar is reviewed separately by N. Leader Williams and Charles Santiapillai. This issue contains the revised list of the names and countries of 46 members.

Newsletter Number 7 - Autumn 1991

With 48 pages this is the largest issue of the Newsletter so far. The 'Comment' by the two editors Mr. Lyn de Alwis and Dr. Charles Santiapillai states: "The lesson from these arguments is that wildlife conservation must be integrated in such a way as to confer direct benefit to the surrounding communities. Elephant conservation is no exception. In the final analysis, both economic and ecological considerations will determine the survival of much of the wildlife including the elephant. Although in theory, large conservation areas are better than smaller areas to enhance the long term survival of elephants and thus reduce the risks of early or untimely local extinctions, yet in practice, most countries in the world where elephants occur have neither the money nor the trained manpower needed to adequately protect such areas. If elephant conservation is to succeed in the coming decades, then the ball is in the international conservation organization's court. They have to adopt a long-term perspective and assist the Government organizations in the economically poor developing countries in Asia in tackling such broader issues as land-use planning and the reduction in human population growth rate. The factors adverse to elephant survival stem not only from the aspirations of a burgeoning human population in Asia but also from more demand by the industrialized countries in the west for goods of the kinds which lead to pressures on the elephants' life-support system.

An article titled '*The status of elephants in Vietnam*' by Do Tuoc and Charles Santiapillai gives details of the forest cover, protected areas, status of elephants, habitat utilization and conservation in that country. A map with the distribution of elephants in Vietnam is included.

Another interesting and detailed paper is titled '*An indirect method for counting Asian elephants in forests*' by A.J. Dekker, Shanthini Dawson and Ajay Desai. This is a synopsis of lectures and field exercises given at the Workshop on Censusing Elephants in Forests. The methodology is detailed in this paper. Another lengthy paper is by Jay Haight on the '*Captive*

management of breeding Asian elephants'. This paper details the work done at the Washington Park Zoo. There is a fairly long and interesting paper titled '*Elephant catching*' by D.H. Wise, which recalls vividly elephant capture in the past. '*Immobilization of free ranging Asian elephant in Sri Lanka using etorphine hydrochloride and acepromazine maleate*' by leading Asian elephant capture specialist Mohamed Sharif-Daim, is another useful paper. The '*Importance of sex-ratio and age structure in the management of elephant populations*' by Widodo Ramono, is another paper. This issue contains the names and addresses of 43 members.

Newsletter Number 8 - Spring 1992

With this issue a contents page has been included. The 'Comment' by the editors Mr. Lyn de Alwis and Dr. Charles Santiapillai states: "Many Asian countries with elephant populations face a dilemma: on the one hand, as custodians of biodiversity and charismatic mega fauna they are forced to assume responsibility for their protection. Yet at the same time, most of these countries faced with expanding human populations, collapsing economies and crippling foreign debt are in desperate need of new resources to bolster their ailing economies and thereby keep the body and soul of their human population in communication. Therefore conservation of elephants per-se may rank rather low in their scheme of things. One of the surest ways of creating public awareness of the importance of conserving the Asian elephant and its habitat is to encourage and promote the study of elephants across their range in Asia. The emphasis of such studies should be on resolving human-elephant conflicts in order to create a climate of public opinion conducive to the long-term survival of the elephant as an integral part of its ecosystem. Conservation of elephants and their habitat, perceived by the local populace to be of direct economic importance, its far more likely to be successful in the long term than by conservation for its own sake."

One of the feature articles is '*Population structure, activity and density of elephants in the Ruhuna National Park, Sri Lanka*' by Sarath Dissanayake *et al.*. This study was carried out

from 1987-1989. A follow up survey was carried out in 1991. Three maps showing the distribution of elephants in the park, the park itself and the vegetation of the study area, are provided.

Another feature article is '*Managing elephant depredation in plantations in Sabah*' by Mahedi Andau and Junaid Payne. This paper, presented at the 9th Malaysian Forestry Conference in Sarawak in 1986, mostly discusses electric fencing as a means of elephant control. It concludes that 'In most situations, the cost on installation and maintenance of electrified fencing will be less than the cost incurred by elephant damage, if total costs are averaged over several years'.

The third major feature article is '*Conservation of elephants in Laos*' by Bouaphanh Phanthavong and Charles Santiapillai. This is a detailed paper that looks at Laos' forest cover, its protected areas, the status of elephants in that country and their numbers in the wild. The authors also discuss the conservation problems faced and make recommendations for future action.

'*Elephant Catching in Assam*' by A.J.W. Milroy, the author of the book 'Management of Elephants in Captivity', published in 1927, is a long article under the 'From the Archives' section. This paper deals comprehensively with the capture of wild elephants by the *Keddah* or *Kraal* method.

Seventeen abstracts of papers on the Asian elephant, taken from various journals, are published in this issue. This issue contains the name and addresses of 43 members.

Newsletter Number 9 - Autumn 1992

Quoted from the two editors Mr. Lyn de Alwis and Dr. Charles Santiapillai: "However, protection and maintenance of such crucial elephant habitats will need much more than a prayer and a proposal. What is needed is not only the political will and courage to set aside such areas for elephant conservation but also the necessary financial and trained manpower resources to implement sensible, viable and long-lasting conservation programmes. Already many poor countries are spending substantial

sums of money on nature conservation in Asia. The proportion of government spending and national wealth devoted to conservation is indeed surprisingly high in some poorer countries like Sri Lanka. It is time therefore that the AsESG launches a massive global campaign to raise not only funds but more importantly the awareness of the ordinary man on the street to the plight of the elephants in Asia. Such a campaign needs the support of the international media such as the press, radio and TV to spread the message across the world. Here both the message and the media are important. The AsESG Newsletter alone cannot do the job on a scale that would really make the world take notice of the serious situation of the Asian elephant. We need the Advertising Giants and the power of the press to highlight the plight of the elephant."

One of the feature articles is '*Recommendations for improving the management of captive elephants in Way Kambas National Park, Lampung, Sumatra, Indonesia*' by expert veterinarian Dr. V. Krishnamurthy. This issue contains the name and addresses of 52 members.

Gajah Number 10 - Spring 1993

With this issue the name of the publication has been changed to Gajah. This issue is also in the A4 format.

Gajah Number 11 - 1993

The format of Gajah Number 11 has now been changed to an A5 format. The contents page, which in previous Gajahs was at the front, has been moved to the back cover. Interestingly there is a contents page at the front as well. Editorials have ceased from Number 11 onwards. A colour photograph is published on the front cover for the first time. The two editors remain Mr. Lyn de Alwis and Dr. Charles Santiapillai.

Gajah Numbers 12 - 34

Issue Numbers 18, 19, 20 and 21 are in a format slightly different to the A4 format. The format of Gajah returned to the A4 format with issue Number 22.

In issues Gajah Numbers 12, 13 and 14, Shantha Saravanamuttu and Charles Santiapillai have published 'A bibliography on elephants'. This is in three Parts.

All the authors of Gajah Number 13 are Sri Lankan.

In Gajah Number 15 Lyn de Alwis, who hitherto was co-editor is now listed as Associate Editor. Dr. Charles Santiapillai remains editor.

Gajah Number 22 contains a 'Guest editorial' by Chairman AsESG Raman Sukumar. For the first time 'Instructions to contributors' is published in this issue. The names and addresses of the 70 members (2001-2003), listed by country, are published in this issue. This is the first time the list was published after the 10th issue (1993) and it was also the last time.

Gajah Number 23 is a Special Issue in which the only article is 'A glossary of elephant terms' by Phillip Kahl and Charles Santiapillai.

In 2007 Jayantha Jayewardene took over as editor from Charles Santiapillai. The first Gajah with Jayantha Jayewardene as editor was Number 26. That issue includes, for the first time, colour pictures on the inside pages with the text.

Gajah on the Internet

In early 2008 Hank Hammat uploaded all issues of Gajah including the original issue and all Newsletters, and the lone issue of 'Hasthi' onto the Asian Elephant Specialist Group's website <<http://www.asesg.org/gajah.htm>>. Scanned copies of the past issues were given to him by Christy Williams and Jayantha Jayewardene. Technical assistance was given to Hank by Dr. Jennifer Pastorini and Mike Cordingley.

In November 2011, thanks to these efforts, Google Scholar for the first time also picked up papers listed in Gajah. Google Scholar is commonly used by scientists for literature searches and also sends out messages to its subscribers, when new papers are published.



Dear Members and Friends,

We, like the Elephants we are pledged to conserve, apply ourselves to any task with ponderous determination and esprit de corps, yet are somewhat modest and unobtrusive (isn't even crop damage seen only the next morning!) about our accomplishments. Again, like elephants we must have a "family bond".

This was the consensus at the meeting held at the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Karnataka, India from 5th - 9th November 1985, to review the work done on WWF Project 1777. In fact, so much had been done by both Task Forces and individuals that the far-reaching results presented came as a surprise to members as close as in neighbouring States, let alone countries.

The lack of communication was regretted, for there was so much more scientific material and technical know-how available since the Colombo and Jaldapara meetings that could have been utilized in the implementation of other Action Plans. For example, Dr. Sukumar's work on the Biology and Ecology of the Elephant in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and Dr. Mohamed Khan's fantastic success in the immobilization and translocation of 48 elephants in Malaysia, on specially constructed rafts, across water, have such built-in practical application that a day should not be lost in putting them to use in other countries.

And so members present were unanimous that the AESG should immediately commence publication of a Newsletter on a regular basis.

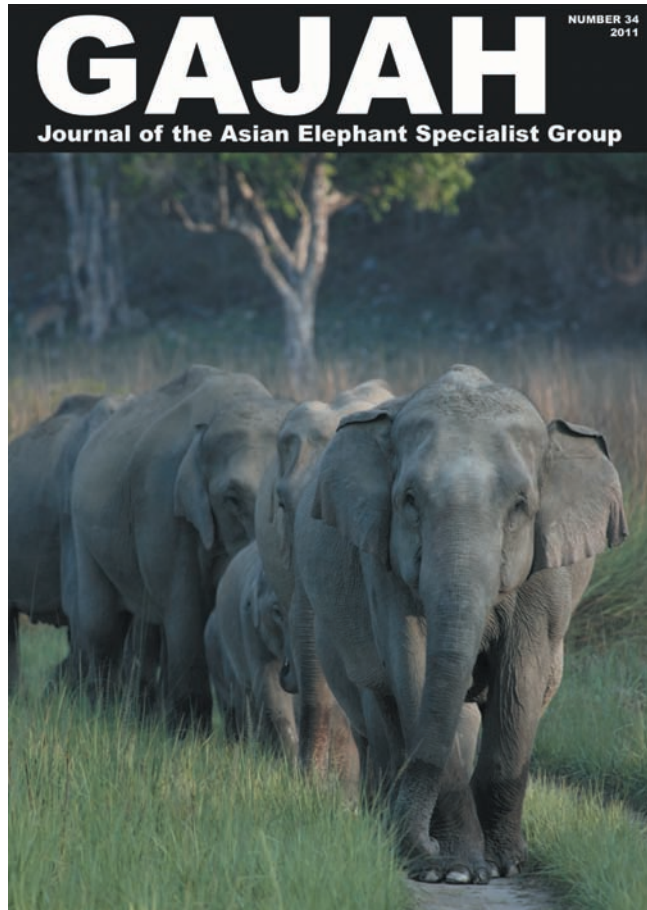
Accordingly, it is my privilege to inaugurate such a Newsletter, which I consider to be a life-line among members of any organization. Although members assigned the task to me, it is obvious I cannot do it alone. I appeal to all of you, therefore, to send me news about elephants in your respective area, progress reports on Projects, successes and failures of Action Plans, suggestions and recommendations, indeed, anything "newsy" about elephants or work being done for them.

The next Newsletter is scheduled for August, so please send me your contribution by 15 July.

Thanking you,

Yours in conservation


Lyn de Alwis
Chairman.



Gajah has come a long way from this...

... to this .