

Sixth Indonesian Mahout Workshop

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The 6th Indonesian Mahout Workshop hosted by the Indonesian Mahout Communication Forum (FOKMAS) was held from November 26-29, 2013, at the Tangkahan Conservation Response Unit elephant camp, located in the province of North Sumatra on the border of the Gunung Leuser National Park. The Indonesian Mahout Workshops were initiated in 2006 at the government Elephant Conservation Center Seblat in Bengkulu province (Sumatra) to provide a better opportunity for mahouts to share information, strengthen their professionalism, and influence elephant conservation in Indonesia more effectively. FOKMAS and the Mahout Workshops are supported by the Indonesian government conservation agencies.

The 6th workshop was attended by 62 participants (Fig. 1). All of the Sumatran Elephant Conservation Centers, Conservation Response Units (CRU), and other elephant patrol units in Sumatra were represented, as well as several zoos and safari parks from Sumatra, Java, and Bali. The majority of participants were mahouts, but some camp managers from Elephant Conservation Centers and private facilities also attended. The workshop was officially opened by the head of the Gunung Leuser National Park, Pak Andi Basrul. The Director of Biodiversity for the Indonesian central government conservation agency, Pak Bambang Novi, visited the workshop to talk to the mahouts about Indonesian government elephant issues. Several NGOs also provided workshop



Figure 1. Participants of the mahout workshop (photo by Bruce Levick).



Figure 2. Practical demonstration (photo by Bruce Levick).

support, instruction, and teaching materials to assist this professional training opportunity for mahouts. General issues discussed during the workshop included problems mahouts encounter in their work and habitat conservation efforts, finding solutions to improve the care and management of wild and captive elephants, and means to create an information network with colleagues throughout Asia.

On the first day of the workshop presentations were given by representatives of the International Elephant Foundation and Asian Elephant Support about captive elephant care and management. A presentation about the Elephant Conservation Center in Lao PDR, established by the NGO ElefantAsia, was given by the manager, Sounthone Phitsamone. In the afternoon, training in field navigation using maps and GPS units was conducted by the CRU Tangkahan team leader Edy Sunardi. This training was divided into two parts: theoretical background and hands-on practice in locations within the Tangkahan area. All mahouts were instructed about various skills to deal with wildlife monitoring and illegal activities, data collection and recording, human-wildlife conflict mitigation techniques, and community relations. Building the capacity of mahouts for improved forest protection and wildlife conservation also creates improved job performance of these individuals.

The second day of the workshop included presentations from some of the elephant patrol

units in Sumatra. Additionally, presentations and practical demonstrations about the needs and techniques to train elephants for medical procedures were conducted by the Veterinary Society for Sumatran Wildlife Conservation (Fig. 2). These practical demonstrations included weighing elephants (using body measurements and confirming with a portable scale), foot care, and using ultrasound to check internal organs. All of the 8 Tangkahan CRU elephants (1 bull and 7 females, including an 18 month old calf) were used for practical demonstrations. For the mahouts these sessions underscore the importance of health, welfare, and medical care for their animal partners as they are an integral component of the patrol units. This information is also applicable in the mahouts' monitoring of wild elephants and rescue of injured wild elephants.

The third day started with a discussion led by Ajay Desai, co-chair of the IUCN-SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group, about the importance of information gathered by mahouts involved in conservation activities, and the need to standardize data collection by all elephant patrol units in Sumatra (supported by either government or NGOs). Establishing common data collection forms for each topic these patrol units address (i.e. wildlife monitoring, HEC mitigation, ecotourism) will provide more comprehensive data to inform the Indonesian government conservation agencies. The final part of the workshop included a presentation and discussion among the participants about improving elephant facilities and management in Indonesia, and a wrap up of the field navigation and GPS sessions.

These Mahout Workshops are very important for the mahout staff across Indonesia. There is a need to continue professional exchanges and training as this has resulted in positive outcomes such as requests for input from the Indonesian government to FOKMAS about mitigating elephant conflict. FOKMAS is currently planning the next mahout workshop and will continue hosting mahout training modules so this level of staff can be more effective participants in elephant conservation initiatives in Indonesia.