

Notes from the Chair IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

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Dear Members

I am happy that this year has started with the successful organisation of the 11th Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) meeting from 14th to 17th March 2023 in India. I would like to convey my sincere thanks to all the 128 people who participated and particularly to those who helped in its organisation. Today, the AsESG is a team of 115 members from 21 countries – including all the 13 range states – with the inclusion of 4 new members as approved by the Chair on advice of the Membership Advisory Committee earlier this year.

The meeting included 67 AsESG members, representatives from 11 Asian elephant range countries, 11 conservation partners, and special invitees from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India, the Forest Department of the State of Uttarakhand and the Wildlife Trust of India. I would like to specially thank the Government of India and the Uttarakhand Forest Department for collaborating with IUCN SSC AsESG and extending all support in organising the meeting. It was wonderful that Shri. Subodh Uniyal,

Hon'ble Minister of Forest & Environment, Uttarakhand took keen interest and joined us at the closing ceremony at Corbett. I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to our donors; majorly International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the principal sponsor and Mr. Kaushik Barua for hosting the icebreaker dinner, Mandai Nature, WWF (US), Kölner Zoo, Colossal Biosciences, Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund, White Oak Conservation, Albuquerque Bio Park, American Zoo Association and AZA SAFE, Denver Zoo, African Lion Safari and Asian Elephant Trust.

In this meeting, there were 57 plenary presentations in total with participation from 51 AsESG members actively involved in presenting, chairing and co-chairing the sessions. My special thanks to Dr. Jon Paul Rodriguez, Chair IUCN SSC, Ms. Kira Mileham, Director, IUCN SSC Strategic Partnerships and Ms. Heidi Riddle, Vice Chair, IUCN SSC AsESG in linking the conservation partners into the strategic priorities and activities of the AsESG. I also like to thank Ms. Heidi Riddle for chairing the session on the stocktaking of the Kathmandu Declaration and Dr. Ee Phin Wong, Deputy Chair,



Participants at the 11th AsESG meeting in Delhi, India.

IUCN SSC AsESG for leading the speed talks and Southeast Asian range state networking.

What was interesting to note is the energy in the group, especially amongst the younger members, to work towards several new and emerging issues. We have noted two or three different areas of work that can be developed into new Working Groups in this year. Currently we have nine Working Groups to complete their outcome documents and I request all the members of the groups, especially the convenors, to please work with your group members on getting it completed as soon as possible, preferably by December 2023. While I am happy that we have come out with first volume of the “Action Elephant” including six National Elephant Action Plans, I urge the members of Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India particularly to work with their governments to get their action plans completed.

Earlier last year, the AsESG assisted the Nepal Government in organising the Third Asian Elephant Range States Meeting that concluded with the drafting of the “Kathmandu Declaration for Asian elephant conservation” charting out nine key priority actions underlined and agreed upon by all range states to attempt to fulfil by 2025. Taking the way forward, IUCN SSC AsESG organised a side event at the CoP 19 of CITES on “Kathmandu Declaration and its implication for conservation of Asian elephants” on 16th November 2022 at Panama Convention Centre, Panama City. About 100 people participated at the side event. The resource persons besides me at the event were Dr. Jon Paul



Release of the first volume of the “Action Elephant” at the AsESG meeting.

Rodriguez, Chair IUCN SSC; Mr. Azzedine Downes, President IFAW; Dr. Maheshwar Dhakal, DG, Govt. of Nepal; Dr. S. P. Yadav, ADG, Govt. of India; Ms. Rahmah Illias, Principal Assistant Director, Govt. of Malaysia; Ms. Tanya McGregor, MIKE Coordinator, CITES; Dr. Benson Okita-Ouma, Chair AfESG and Ms. Rose Mayienda, AfESG. This event brought together the Asian range countries as well as other stakeholders to an agreement to establish transboundary collaboration, create pan India Asian elephant database, complete national elephant conservation plans and establish an Asian Elephant Conservation Fund.

The important thing moving forward is to see how we lead in the six areas of work that the Kathmandu Declaration has wanted of our group, some such as the range wide mapping and priority setting for the elephant, for the establishment of an Asian Elephant Fund and also the publication of guidelines on human-elephant conflict as well as linear infrastructure amelioration, which we have been tasked to do as well as others where our participation with national governments are vital. I look forward to leading on these and exhort the entire membership to come forward and participate in various parts of these large exercises.

I would like to end this message to *Gajah* by also giving a shout out to our member and the Chair of the IUCN Human Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Specialist Group. Dr. Alexandra Zimmermann successfully organised a mammoth international conference on Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence from 30th March to 1st April 2023 at Oxford, UK with representatives from conservation organisations, academia, governments, businesses and indigenous and local communities from six continents and 70 countries. They also launched the publication of the IUCN SSC guidelines on human-wildlife conflict and coexistence. Although I am sorry to have missed it myself, I am happy that many of our AsESG members also attended and actively participated at the event.

Vivek Menon
Chair IUCN SSC AsESG