

Book Review

Alexander Mossbrucker's *Island Elephants: The Giants of Sumatra*

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Island Elephants: The Giants of Sumatra by Dr. Alexander Mossbrucker offers a rare insight into the critically endangered Sumatran elephant and the steps required to secure the future of the species in the wild. Written by an expert in the field, *Island Elephants* presents an in-depth, highly researched approach to the protection of the Sumatran elephant (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) in its natural habitat. Despite the scientific rigour, this is not an impenetrable technical book, as it has been written for a wide audience that includes laypeople, scientists and conservationists in Indonesia, with a free version translated into Indonesian.

For those wondering about the title, Mossbrucker explains in the Preface that 'island elephants' has a double meaning. It refers, on the surface, to the fact that Sumatran elephants live exclusively on the island of Sumatra. It also refers to the ways in which deforestation has isolated the species into separate 'islands' of forest. Sumatran elephants are separated from each other by vast seas of human habitation, roads and cities. This highly sentient species, whose memories of lost forests remain, have become islands, unable to reach each other.

Separated into four sections, this detailed book is easy to navigate and read, with text generously supported by photos such as elephant feet and footprints, babies suckling, and aerial shots of herds in their habitats. The text provides insights into the science, conservation and habits of elephants, starting with a fascinating excursion into the world of elephants accompanied by rich (and sometimes unexpected) details and insights into elephants, such as the family structures of elephant 'clans', the importance of

'aunties', and the roles of bulls. This first section is a thorough introduction to Asian elephants, covering all the basics about their biology and behaviour in a compact and easy-to-understand way.

The second section focuses specifically on the elephants of Sumatra and how they're unique in the world of elephants. It provides details about their specific origin, distribution, threats, conservation status, and conservation needs. Some of the captive Sumatran elephants who are in the care of elephant conservation centres are briefly mentioned, although the book mainly focuses on wild elephants and their conservation.

The third section presents a selection of research and monitoring approaches and methods, with a focus on those that are directly related to elephant conservation. This includes attempts being made to understand, predict and address what is known as 'human-elephant conflict'. Mossbrucker says, "For many, human-elephant conflict is the ultimate manifestation of all the difficulties we have to deal with in elephant conservation, a constant headache for site managers and conservationists across the elephant range. To really 'solve' human-elephant conflict permanently is a complex and challenging task."

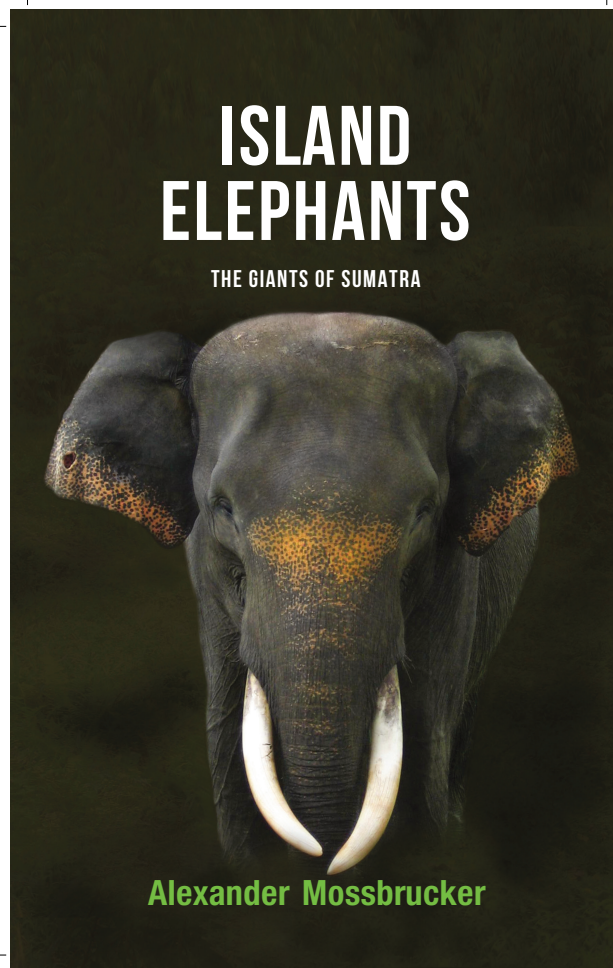
Section four then focuses on some of the best practice conservation methodologies being used by Mossbrucker and the Indonesian teams he works with to 'solve' this complex issue. In this final chapter, the author goes into detail about all aspects of management and conservation of elephants in the unique Sumatran context, covering topics including habitat management,

meta-population management, efforts to turn conflict into coexistence, and the importance of working with local communities.

Dr. Alexander Mossbrucker is a trained biologist and forester who has spent more than a decade on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, researching the native elephants and working with international and local organisations to close knowledge gaps and support various elephant conservation programs. Not surprisingly, this beautifully illustrated book contains plenty of first-hand information and authentic insights.

According to Mossbrucker, the publication is primarily aimed at future elephant conservationists and students who are looking for a compact and reliable source of information. Regardless of this intent, the text will be of interest to a wider audience, especially those who are fascinated by elephants and concerned about their future survival. Importantly, the book is also relevant for seasoned practitioners and scientists, who will enjoy and appreciate the careful attention to detail in this book.

Island Elephants is the most comprehensive book on the Sumatran elephant available today, and the clear writing style makes it an enjoyable read, with the many subheadings making the information simple to navigate. It's great to hear that the Indonesian version of the book is available for free under <<https://www.elephant.org.au/islandelephants/>>, which reduces barriers for those working at the coalface of this challenge. For readers with even a passing interest in Sumatran elephants, *Island Elephants* is a clear, accessible and detailed deep dive that will fascinate and inform, hopefully leaving you with a desire to help save this iconic and critically endangered species.



Citation

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