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Report on the Ninth Elephant Conservation Group Workshop

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Introduction

The Elephant Conservation Group (ECG) is an informal network of researchers from Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) range countries that meets every two years – often adjacent to the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group's meeting. On 15th and 16th September 2025, a short ECG meeting was held in Bien Hoa in Vietnam. It brought together 11 researchers from five range countries. The meeting focused on discussing actionable conservation strategies to balance the needs of elephants and those of human communities. It highlighted the importance of cross-country and interdisciplinary exchange amidst growing challenges. Most participants gave presentations of their work, each being followed by spirited discussion among the members. ECG intends to continue having bi-annual meetings, aiming for networking among members to discuss their research, issues and lessons learnt, and discussions on cross cutting themes, in order to promote Asian elephant conservation in the range countries.

Presentations and discussions

Wishnu Sukmantoro from the **Indonesia** Elephant Conservation Forum presented human-elephant conflict (HEC) management through participatory spatial planning, focusing on threats to Sumatran elephants like land conversion. The MP2CE initiative aims to develop effective spatial strategies to reduce conflicts caused by habitat encroachment, lack of awareness, and retaliatory actions. The study proposes an integrated approach with five components: monitoring elephant movements, planning corridors, conflict control, stakeholder education, and habitat restoration. Results showed a 50% reduction in conflict across 20,000 hectares. The process involved collaborative mapping of elephant routes and habitats, with the "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)" legal framework enhancing community involvement. The goal is to improve spatial planning and conflict mitigation for better human-elephant coexistence, despite ongoing conservation challenges. Future plans include data collection and stakeholder engagement. Insights from India and Sri Lanka highlighted the importance of understanding elephant movements to avoid misplacing of corridors.

Nishant Srinivasiah from the Indian Institute of Science, **India**, studied male elephant mortality rates and their impact on social hierarchy in the Hosur-Ramnagara region of the Eastern Ghats, bordering Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Poaching of targeted males was a major issue in the fragmented northern part of the study area, while the southern, less fragmented area saw increased male presence and conflicts with farmers as farmers shifted to multi-crop farming from pumping. In Ramnagara, near Bannerghatta National Park, about 30 elephants near the Bangalore-Mysuru highway were impacted by urb-

anisation, with 43% of elephants aged 10–12 years involved in crop damage. Young males joined up into groups in urban areas, highlighting hierarchical dynamics. The study showed that crop-protection fencing improved farmer incomes, indicating that shifting the management focus from capturing elephants to promoting community-based fences was more relevant and developing elephant movement models was important to understanding underlying issues.

Ananda Kumar of the Nature Conservation Foundation studied elephant-human interactions in two regions in southern **India**: Valparai, where no barriers obstruct elephant movement across the landscape, and Hassan, where solar fences around coffee estates have displaced elephants into villages, increasing crop damage and deaths. The expansion of highway NH75 further restricted elephant habitat, raising conflicts in 140 villages. Valparai saw fewer fatalities thanks to conservation efforts, early warnings, and community involvement, while Hassan's fatalities dropped from five yearly (2010–2018) to two (2018–2025) due to monitoring and alerts. Nonetheless, new fatalities occur where fencing has displaced elephants. The study urges redesigning fences, building overpasses or underpasses on NH75, and expanding early warning systems in these areas.

Based on their work in **Sri Lanka**, where 70% of elephant range is outside protected areas, Prithviraj Fernando and Jennifer Pastorini from the Centre for Conservation and Research discussed habitats used by elephants, elephant range and what is considered as habitats/range that elephants should and should not be allowed to use by managers. They discussed the carrying capacities of different habitats used by elephants, ranging from primary forest to grasslands and the increasing gradient in elephant densities. They also discussed the relationship between elephant numbers, HEC and conservation and which types of elephants raided crops and why. The analysis provided a foundation for elephant management and HEC mitigation.

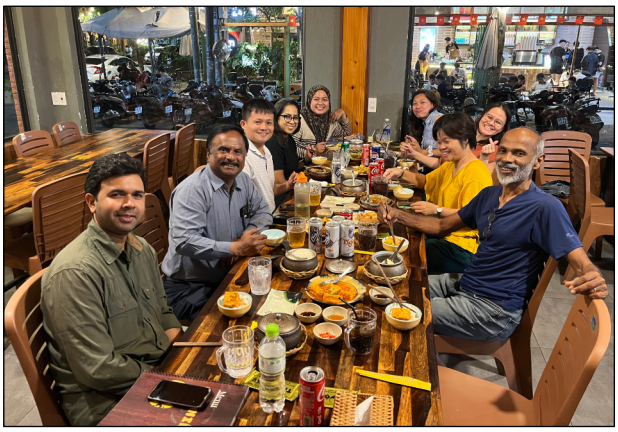
Mai Nguyen from Humane World for Animals discussed research on elephants in Dong Nai, **Vietnam** and national level initiatives. Vietnam's elephants are critically endangered, with about 100–150 individuals in small populations in five provinces. Three initiatives were conducted: camera traps to assess demographics and body condition, grid-based distribution surveys and HEC monitoring. The camera trap work was based on identifying individual elephants. Results from the three initiatives identified the pitfalls of management, such as constructing linear electric fences and shifting of conflict areas as a result of range loss. The success of the Dong Nai work led to methodology being incorporated into the National Action Plan for Vietnam (VECAP 2022) to be implemented across the five provinces in Vietnam with elephants, over the next few years.

Thien Le Quoc shared WWF Vietnam's elephant conservation efforts in Dak Lak, **Vietnam** including the Regional Asian Elephant Action Strategy of WWF and WWF-VN plans. Over 13 years, illegal poaching has been low, but snares still threaten wildlife in Dak Lak. Faecal DNA estimates Dak Lak's elephant population at about 28, with plans for more dung collection in 2026. It is hoped to develop a GPS-collaring programme shortly. So far no elephants have been collared, but a recent workshop discussed piloting GPS-collaring of an injured elephant in

a semi-wild situation. WWF is developing a conservation plan focusing from 2025–2030 based on DNA analysis, GPS collaring, and photo collection.

Malaysian forests host stable elephant populations, but understanding their habitat use and conflicts is essential for effective conservation strategies. The study from Ee Phin Wong (University of Nottingham Malaysia) in **Peninsular Malaysia** examined habitat selection and HEC involving elephants in Johor, focusing on rainforest and agricultural environments. Using the Resource Selection Function and Generalised Linear Mixed Models (GLMM), the study considered individual elephants as random effects within areas impacted by human activity. Over seven years, conflict hotspots were identified, with oil palm plantations suffering the most damage. The research measured elephant home ranges, averaging 245 km² and analysed movements in relation to habitat variables during day and night. A questionnaire survey across four locations examined factors like age, gender, and education to assess moral responsibility in conservation. Stakeholder mapping included 16 participants in a workshop, identifying key agencies involved in elephant conservation.

Cheryl Cheah from WWF Malaysia's **Sabah** Landscapes Programme stated that the Pan Borneo Highway project now involves wildlife experts to ensure better protection for wildlife. Critical areas have been identified, leading to



recommendations for wildlife overpasses and underpasses to facilitate the movement of Bornean elephants. WWF proposed a realignment based on preliminary findings, noting that further analysis could yield different results. A workshop focused on creating wildlife-friendly structures and assessing costs and benefits was held. A Tabin Landscape case study, home to 250–300 elephants, provided information for land use planning in the area.

Nurzhafarina Othman from Seratu Aatai, studying Bornean elephants for over a decade, found that the **Sabah** population has dropped to about 1,000 due to poaching, habitat loss from oil palm and highway construction, also threatening other species like orangutans. Since 2011, elephants have increasingly appeared in oil palm plantations. Research includes GPS collaring of males and analysing heavy metals in post-mortem samples. Research is ongoing to assess elephant genetics via microsatellites.