# COMMENT

**by Lyn de Alwis & Charles Santiapillai**

The Asian Elephant Specialist Group held its fourth meeting at the BIOTROP Institute in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia on 20-22 May 1992 mainly to formulate field projects that would ensure the long-term survival of the elephant throughout its range in Asia. This is easier said than done. Conservation of elephants in Asia will require much more than mere formulation of projects and a lavish display of lip service. The causes for the decline in the species' range and number lie in the demography of the human populations that share the land with it. While the African elephant is undoubtedly being threatened by poaching for its ivory, the Asian elephant on the other hand, faces a much more serious and intractable threat of habitat loss than simple poaching. This is not to imply that poaching is not a serious issue in Asia. It is indeed a matter of extreme importance and significance in small, isolated elephant populations characterised by skewed sex-ratios and inhabiting patches of forest habitats that are surrounded by human settlements and or agricultural landscape. Despite the ban on ivory, elephants are still being killed for their tusks in Africa and Asia.

The Asian elephant is a wide ranging species and as such it is no respecter of national boundaries. Across the dotted lines on the map, the elephants may move from one country to another in search of food and mates and in the process, come into conflict with man. International agreement is often the best way to resolve problems concerning deforestation, conversion of habitat to agriculture, establishment and maintenance of trans-frontier reserves, elephant corridors etc. Some of these issues transcend national borders. Neighbouring countries may share part of the seasonal ranges of elephants and so without their mutual support, such crucial elephant habitats can never be protected. A classic example is the vast stretch of forest extending from Bhutan eastwards to Assam in India. Protection and maintenance of such a vast area of continuous forest would ensure the survival of a significant proportion of India's elephant population.

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 (% of Government spending in Sri Lanka is 0.03; in Indonesia, 0.04; in Malaysia; 0.05; compared to USA's 0.16% in 1988; while the corresponding % of GDP for Sri Lanka is 0.01; Indonesia 0.01; and Malaysia 0.01; while that in USA amounts to 0.04%).

Asian elephant conservation needs money badly. The species is a global rarity and therefore the responsibility for its long-term survival rests not only on the Governments and Conservation Organizations in the range states but more importantly from the wealthy nations in the west who have the power and the purse to provide tangible assistance to elephant conservation. African elephant continues to receive millions of dollars from the west. During the CITES Meeting held in February 1992 in Japan, the British Government pledged a million dollars to deal with ivory poaching. More recently, the Belgian chocolate company, Cote d'Or whose product features an African elephant provided another million US dollars to help protect the species in Africa. But such generosity has not reached the Asian elephant!

It is time therefore that the AESG 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 AESG 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.

Almost all the elephant populations occur in very poor countries in Asia. If such poor countries are to act as custodians of the elephant and thus protect its habitat and contribute financially to its conservation, then they have to make some economic gain from elephants. One way is through eco-tourism and the use of elephants in forestry operations. These will only bring in very limited revenues. Against this must be viewed the serious threat that would come from the human population itself in Asia. Asia will witness some of the fastest growth in human population in the decades to come. Although such growth will occur mainly in cities and urban areas in Asia, they will have an enormous impact on the wilderness areas through the increasing demand to feed such burgeoning human populations. The need to grow enough food to feed the masses will encourage the conversion of more and more forests for agriculture. Here in lies the danger to the conservation of biodiversity in general and that of the elephant in particular.

If African elephant is to survive in the future, the 33 countries in Africa need a budget of 480 million US dollars over the next five years. But in the case of the

*(continued on Page 4)*

Feature Articles

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT OF CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS IN WAY KAMBAS NATIONAL PARK LAMPUNG, SUMATRA, INDONESIA

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## INTRODUCTION:

The Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHPA) of Indonesia has achieved considerable success in their efforts to capture crop raiding elephants in various parts of Sumatra and train them.

For this purpose, they have established an 'Elephant Training Centre' at the Way Kambas National Park (Fig. 1) in Lampung Province, where with the assistance of the mahouts from Thailand, a number of young Indonesians have been trained in the art of domesticating and training of elephants in captivity (Santiapillai, 1990).

Dr. Charles Santiapillai, Senior Scientific officer of WWF Asia Programme, at Bogor, Indonesia, suggested that I should visit this Centre and make recommendations for improving the management of elephants. The WWF Indonesia Programme, proposed a project for this purpose and invited me to undertake a visit to the Elephant Training Centre, at Way Kambas National Park with the following objectives:

a) To critically assess the current management of elephants in captivity and recommend appropriate improvements;

b) To train PHPA staff in the management of elephants, with special emphasis on provision of a balanced diet and adequate veterinary care;

c) To initiate a programme to breed elephants in captivity; and

d) To train the PHPA staff to maintain proper records for each elephant and monitor its performance.

I visited Indonesia and stayed at the Way Kambas National Park from 18 September 1991 to 12 October 1991 (25 days) and observed the prevailing management practices, health of the elephants, the training procedures and general practices.

## ADMINISTRATIVE SET UP :

The Way Kambas National Park is under the Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHPA) of Indonesia. Pak Kurnia Rauf was the Administrative Head of the Park, Pak Tonni Ramadhani, the Officer In-charge of the Elephant establishment and Dr. (Mrs) Anjar Buddi Susilowati was the Veterinary Surgeon in-charge of veterinary care of the elephants. Four mahouts from Thailand were engaged for organising the capture and training of the elephants. Local Indonesians were employed as mahouts (Pawang).

Elephant capturing was undertaken from 1986 onwards, concentrating mainly on pocketed herds of elephants, which were crop raiding and causing serious problems. During my visit, fifteen elephants were captured in the sugarcane belt of Karang Mulya (a transmigrant settlement) in the Sungkai Selatan District of Lampung Utara, near Kotaboomi in Sumatra.

The elephants were captured by the drug immobilisation technique (using Xylazine as the drug for darting) within a period of five days from 27 September to 1 October. I was present during the transport of these animals from the site of capture to the Elephant Training Centre at Way Kambas National Park, - a distance of 165 kms.

The elephants were transported in two batches, by trucks. The first batch of 8 elephants were transported on 1 October and the remaining 7 elephants were transported on 4 October. During the transportation, involving

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*(from: page 3)*

Asian elephant, the 13 countries concerned do not have even half a million dollars provided by the West to implement conservation programmes! The WWF International plans to spend over 4 million US dollars in Africa this year alone on elephant-related projects. But sadly, WWF has not extended its philanthropy to the Asian elephant. If such concerned conservation organizations as WWF and IUCN are ineffective or impotent in raising sufficient funds to conserve the Asian elephant, we shudder to think what hope is there for other less charismatic animals in the wild?