A short report on the status of the elephants in Burma (based on a visit to Burma in January 1992)

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About 5,000 domestic elephants are know to occur in Burma (= Myanmar) of which 2,955 animals are owned by the Myanma Timber Enetreprise (MTE), while the balance remain under private owenership. The composition of the animals owned by MTE is as follows:

Class	Males	Females	Total
(19–60 yr old)	582	967	1549
(5–18 yr old)	473	539	1012
Calves at heel (with mother)	177	217	394
Total	1232	1723	2955

During the last five years, a total of 180 animals were captured by MTE using chemical immobilization with a tranquilizer (Capchur) gun. This gives the capture rate of 36 animals per year in the 6 to 12 year age-class. Overall, the total number of animals captured using all the methods including the stocakade-method is estimated to be about 100 a year, Only the young animals are kept while the others are released back into the forest.

Elephants are used in timber camps until the age of 60 years at which time they are pensioned off. The elephants in captivity are also known to breed with wild animals (especially wild bulls mate with domestic cows) but no one has ever witnessed such a mating. Every year about 110 calves are born in captivity with a sex-ratio of 40 males to 60 females. The mortality as a result of diseases as well as accidents is about 100 animals per year.

The size of the wild population is not known with certainty, especially in areas that are politically volatile and therefore insecure. However, the total population must be well over 3,000 animals.

The captive population is not reduced by increased use of machines in timber extraction since elephant is still being used to extract timber selectively in many areas. This appears to be the most suitable method of logging in Burma.

The number of wild elephants captured appears to be sustainable, and so is not likely to affect the wild population. However, there might be some poaching activities which if not brought under control, could pose a threat in some areas. In the market in Rangoon, ivory artifacts are on sale and these are usually bought by unvary tourists (including the Dutch). But the export of ivory articles out of Burma is prohibited and so, if they are discovered on tourists, they are confiscated.

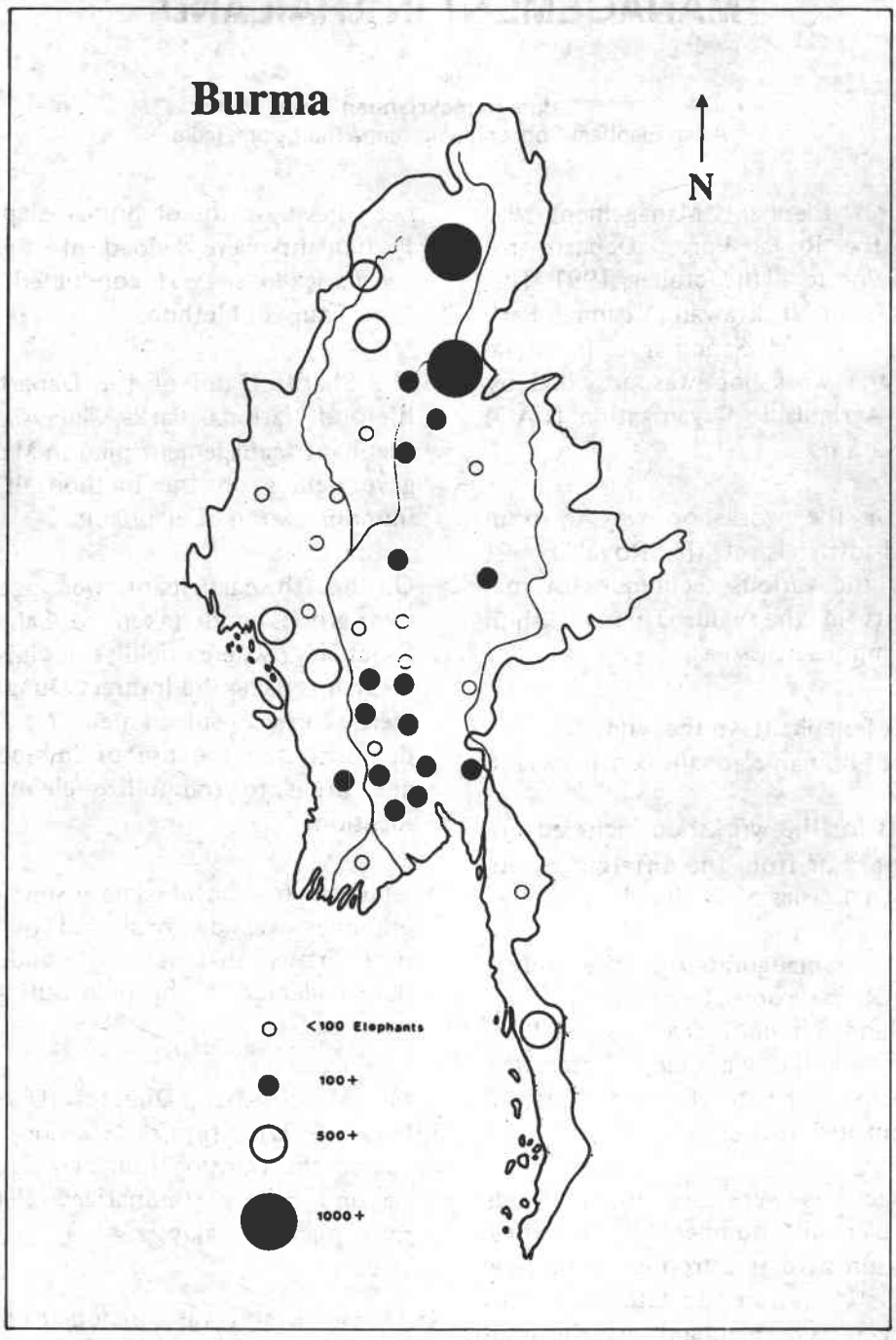


Fig. 1. Approximate distribution and relative abundance of wild elephants in Burma. Redrawn from UNDP/FAO (1983). The symbols represent maximum estimates and are based on the questionnaire survey carried out by the Divisional Forest Officers in 1960/61 and 1980/81.