Elephant conservation in Asia will be ineffective without the support of the people, especially those who, live along the periphery of the elephant reserves bearing the brunt of elephant depredations. IUCN and WWF must change their emphasis from rhetoric to action in the field. We need to invest more on field-based conservation efforts which address the needs of the local communities if we are to achieve any long-term success in elephant conservation. Many conservation efforts need to be integrated with some form of human activity. Conservation is also very much an issue on education. Often policies are enacted without the benefit of sound, reliable data.

I very much hope that the Asian Elephant Specialist Group during the three days will devote much of its energies into identifying key projects throughout Asia that need to be implemented. Time is running out fast for many countries to set aside additional conservation areas. The day is rapidly approaching when much of the wild elephant populations in Asia will be confined in a patchwork of parks, reserves and sanctuaries. What are the prospects for the Asian elephant in such a situation where barriers exist for its natural dispersal and movement? I leave it to the better wisdom of you, the Asian elephant Specialists to reach a conclusion that is comforting to hear!

With the blessing of Allah the Great, I open the Asian Elephant Speciallist Group Meeting officially.

ASIAN ELEPHANT CONSERVATION CENTRE PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT

Project Number and Title : WWF Project 1777 – Asia,
Asian Elephant Conservation

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Consolidated Report : Ist April 1991 to 31st March 1992.

1. DATA BASE

Questionnaires were sent out to the Forest Departments of the fifteen states in India which have elephants. The purpose of the questionnaire was to compile existing information on the elephant numbers, age-sex composition, forest area, habitat type, etc. in each forest division. Not many responses have been received so far, and a second set of questionnaires is being sent.

Information that has been received so far has been computerised. The Program entry and retrieval of this information has been written in FOXBASE, and includes information such as political division, forest type, forest area, year of census operation, method of census operation, source of information and details on the elephant population in each forest division such as herd number, and age/sex composition of the population. The information on elephant populations can be accessed by forest type, forest division and population number.

This database is being extended to include data on the various Asian countries that support elephants. Information has been collected from available literature and maps for some of these. Maps of these areas are being digitized in AUTOCAD.

Surveys to check for elephant habitat contiguity and crucial corridors were carried out in many places in southern India. These include the Kodaikannal – Munnar area, Pettupparai Coffee Estates and the Nagarahole – Brahmagiri area.

Secondary data on the Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa elephant populations were collected from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun, and from the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi.

A detailed survey of the elephant habitat in the state of Kerala was initiated with the help of Dr. P.S. Easa (of the Kerala Forest Research Institute and an AESG member). The purpose of the survey is to collect information on usage of habitat by elephants, and identify crucial areas of elephant habitat and corridors in the state.

Work on computerizing a bibliography on Asian elephants continued. The data are currently being entered in PROCITE, a library software. This information can be provided on request and can be accessed by author, title, journal, year of publication or keywords. At present, over 1,500 records have been entered, and this information is continuosly being updated.

AECC also continued dialogue with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in U.K. about the collaborative development of a full-fledged Geographical Information System (GIS) on Asian elephants and biodiversity. R. Sukumar had discussions with Harry Miles, Ron Miller and Mark Collins at the WCMC in Cambridge, U.K. in September, 1991. They agreed in principle to pursue the setting up of a GIS facility in Bangalore. Both AECC and WCMC began explorations for funding for the GIS.

2. TRAINING/WORKSHOPS

Dr. V. Krishnamurthy spent a month (Sep. 1991) in the Way Kambas Reserve in Sumatra at the invitation of the Indonesian Dept. of Nature Conservation to help them organize their captive elephant management programme. The trip was arranged by Charles Santiapillai and sponsored by AECC.

Mr. Abdullah-al-Zabed, student from Jahangir Nagar University, Bangladesh, was trained in different field techniques relating to elephant management in Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and Bandipur National Park. He was later taught to use appropriate software for data analysis.

Shantini Dason and Uma Ramakrishnan attended a workshop on 'Elephant Management' conducted by the Royal Forest Department from 2nd to 11th October, 1991, at Erwan National Park and Salakapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand. The purpose of the workshop was to train administrators and researchers of the Royal Forest Department, Thailand, in management of elephants in the wild and in captivity. They gave lectures and conducted field exercises in techniques of censusing elephants in the wild.

Shantini Dason held a training programme in Sabah for staff of the wildlife department on indirect techniques of censusing elephants in forests. The visit was funded by WWF–International and planned with the assistance of John Sale.

3. MEETINGS

Chairman Lyn de Alwis and Executive Officer Charles Santiapillai began preparations for the Asian Elephant Specialist Group meeting to be held at Bogor in May 1992.

R. Sukumar gave a number of talks to the zoo community in the U.K. and the U.S.A. In September 1991 he addressed the U.K. Zoo Directors meeting in London, the British Elephant Keepers' Association meeting at Windsor and a gave a public lecture at Chester. He spoke on the demography of captive elephants in relation to their management and stressed the need for a partnership between western zoos and Asian countries managing elephants in forest camps. He also gave an inaugural address at the American Elephant Managers' Association annual meeting at Syracuse in October 1991.

4. PROJECT ELEPHANT

A meeting of the Task Force for Project Elephant was held on May 8th and 9th, 1991, in New Delhi. The Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests chaired the meeting. This meeting was attended by AESG members J.C. Daniel, D.K. Lahiri-Choudhury, R. Sukumar, V. Krishnamurthy and Jacob Cheeran. This meeting finalized the overall approach to Project Elephant. The project was scheduled to be launched in late 1991.

5. PUBLICATIONS

The second technical report "Censusing Elephants in Forests — Proceedings of an International Workshop Southern India, 2–10 January, 1991" was published. The report incorporates lectures given by the faculty members at the workshop and a summary of recommendations.

A copy of the elephant bibliography is available on file. AECC can make a photocopy available at cost. As the bibliography lists over 2000 references we decined not to print it for the present as costs would be prohibitive.

A technical report on Population Viability Analysis of Asian Elephants is also under preparation and would be printed in the near future.

6. FUND RAISING

During his visit to Princeton University, R. Sukumar worked with the IUCN/SSC Chairman's office in Chicago to develop a proposal on Asian biodiversity focused on Asian elephant conservation. This proposal will be presented to the MacArthur Foundation based in Chicago as soon as it is finalized.. In the meanwhile, we have had informal discussions with the foundation about the contents of the proposal.

Due to various reasons, R. Sukumar could not make use of his Princeton visit to organize the fund-raising events in the zoos. However, he had further discussions with Dale Tuttle (Jacksonville Zoo) and with other zoos about organizing these events. Tentatively, it was decided to hold these during May–June 1993.