Editorial

Heidi S. Riddle (Member Editorial Board)

Communication. It is one word representing a simple concept: the exchange of thoughts, messages, opinions or information by speech, writing or behavior. Yet the value of communication is often overlooked, especially in species conservation.

As members of the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) we are all aware of the many challenges facing Asian elephant conservation. The AsESG membership has varied expertise and experiences – from science to academia, administrators to laypersons. Through communication and open debate, the AsESG assists and supports Asian elephant conservation by providing advice and a consensus of professional opinions. These views can help governmental entities responsible for conservation to better plan and implement effective actions. However, to achieve the goals of the AsESG, the membership needs to be proactive and understand the importance of, and the need for, effective and timely communication. With no communication the AsESG would simply cease to exist.

As a step towards improving communication the AsESG has created several Task Forces, each one addressing specific conservation issues. These Task Forces allow smaller groups of members to focus communication on a specific topic, therefore providing the building blocks for broader group discussions. As AsESG members, each one of us has taken on the responsibility to actively communicate our views and experiences when questions arise – either during a Task Force discussion or with the entire AsESG. This communication frequently extends beyond the AsESG, further serving as a valuable means of networking, one of the important facets of responsible conservation.

If the AsESG is to be considered a leader in the field of Asian elephant management and conservation, then we should lead by example and actively communicate successes, even failures, to inspire ourselves and others to do what is best for Asian elephants. There are limitations to any elephant conservation work, so it is important to draw on each other's experiences to improve our



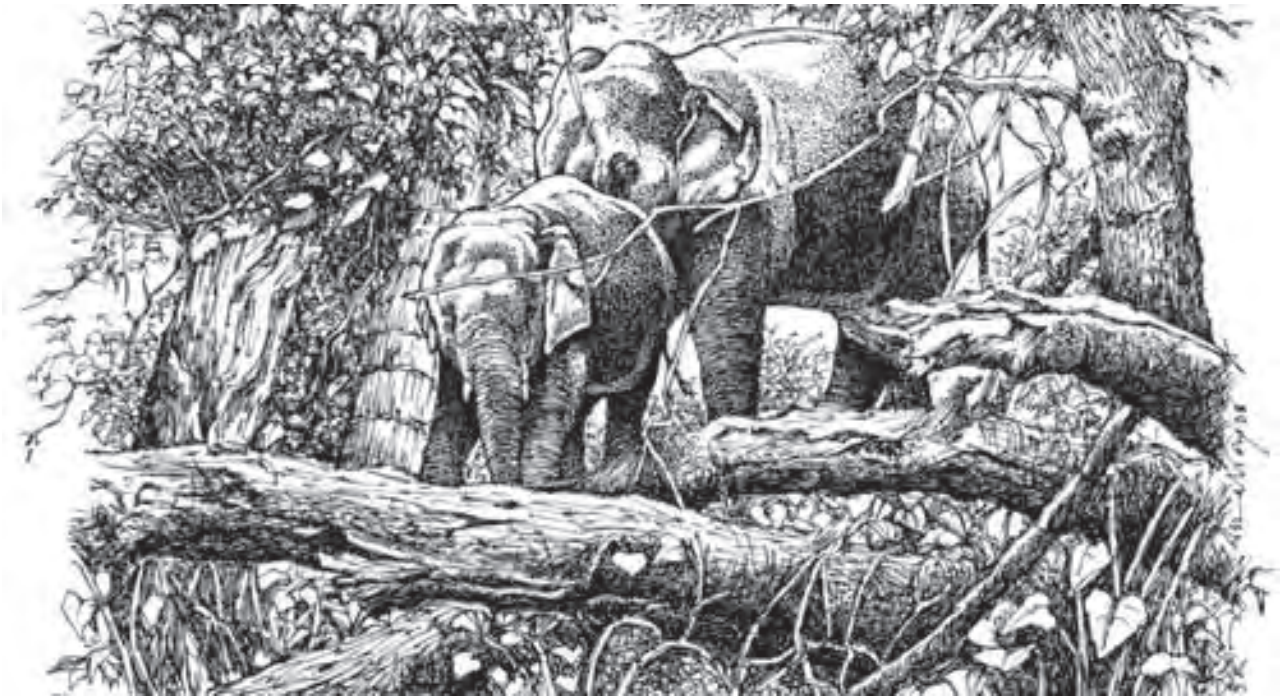
At the Seblat river near the Seblat elephant camp in Bengkulu province, Sumatra
Photo by Heidi Riddle

own efforts. We can achieve this through communication. The best way to be a responsible communicator is by offering a clear point of view and providing accountability. Successful communication at all levels is a priority when managing projects and staff; this is also true of communication between professional colleagues in other projects or groups. Often it is simply incomplete information or a lack of communication that cause conservation issues to stagnate.

Communication takes many forms: there are structured opportunities such as formal meetings, workshops, and action planning, and the AsESG membership should actively participate in these types of discussions. Additionally there are other communication mediums: the AsESG hosts a website and publishes this professional journal, Gajah. Gajah is a communication forum offering an open exchange of ideas and discussion about issues confronting elephant conservationists today. The journal presents a wide diversity of regional experiences and an array of topics. Gajah is not merely a compilation of news and articles about Asian elephants; it is also an important tool to communicate within the AsESG, and to help identify resources for projects and staff outside of the AsESG. However, the AsESG membership's active participation is always needed to better communicate timely information about upcoming meetings or workshops, summaries of discussions, or project activity reports.

Communication provides an opportunity for every one of us to participate in a meaningful way in Asian elephant conservation, even far beyond our specific project(s) or study area(s). With open communication, any project from any region can make a difference on a broad scale.

The goal of the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group is to facilitate the sharing of ideas, experiences, and challenges regarding the many elephant conservation issues across the world. Gajah is an important communication tool provided by the AsESG. On behalf of the Editorial Board of Gajah I invite each and every one of you to actively participate by communicating your thoughts and achievements, as there is much knowledge to be gained from one another. If we can be effective communicators – within and outside of the AsESG - it will motivate us all to be better elephant conservationists.



Drawing by Arnab Roy