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A Gathering of Experts for Asian Elephants

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On July 10th and 11th an unprecedented event took place in the Jiuhua Resort & Convention Center in Beijing China. For the first time in the annals of Asian elephant conservation an impressive group of Asian elephant experts convened to discuss, deliberate and assess the methods that have been applied to mitigate human elephant conflicts for the long term conservation of the Asian elephant and how successful these methods have been. Human elephant conflict is perhaps one of the most pressing issues impacting Asian elephant conservation in the new millennium. Never had there been before a similar international forum solely organized to assess the mitigation methods and their effectiveness to resolve human elephant conflicts in Asia.

The Human Elephant Conflict Workshop was an idea that evolved and was developed by the Human-elephant Conflict Task Force of the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. It took two years to plan and the main objective of the workshop was to conduct a review of the causes of human–elephant conflicts and the methods that had been used to mitigate such conflicts in Asia and how effective these methods have been in resolving human elephant conflicts.

The workshop was funded by the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and organized by the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society on behalf of the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) in coordination with the Institute of Zoology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ecology of the Beijing Normal University. All the participants who were finally selected to participate in the workshop were provided with a travel grant that covered their airfare, ground transportation, incidental expenses, hotel accommodations, and meals.

Fifty participants representing 12 of the 13 Asian elephant range countries participated in the workshop. The participants included field researchers, university faculty members and students, government officials from range countries, wildlife managers, and officers of national and international non-governmental organizations. Due to the incredible interest shown by a large number of individuals who wanted to participate and due to the financial and logistical constraints a selection process had to be conducted. All potential participants were invited to submit a report on their current and past HEC mitigation efforts. A rigorous review of the reports was conducted by the organizing committee based on a set of 12 pre-agreed criteria and a scoring system so that selection was unbiased.

By holding the workshop the IUCN/SSC AsESG Human–elephant Conflict Task Force's main goal was to bring together a group of people (including but not restricted to the Task Force members) with practical experience of human elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation work in Asia to:

- Review the causes for HEC.
- Identify processes and actions that could stop or minimize the creation of new HEC situations.
- Identify and review processes and actions



that can stop the escalation of existing HEC situations and possibly reverse some of the factors that contribute to HEC.

- Review and list the types of HEC situations (i.e. dispersal, pocketed populations, etc.) and mitigation measures in place.

- Compile a list of mitigation methods used across Asia.
- Review and compile a summary of what has worked and what has not, where, and why (if known), thus facilitating an evidence-based approach to HEC mitigation.

- Develop a document listing best management practices and keep that current on the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group's website as 'a living document.'

The workshop was a great success and it achieved its goal by producing a document that encompasses practically almost all the information pertaining to human elephant con icts in the Asian elephant range countries and an assessment of mitigation methods, their suitability and effectiveness to resolve HEC.

This document will be circulated to all the workshop participants, members of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group as well as other non-members who are involved in HEC mitigation in Asia for reviewing and editing. Once the document has been extensively reviewed and edited the information would be disseminated via a dedicated online elephant Geo-Portal that will be linked with the IUCN/SSC AsESG website and other websites dedicated to elephant conservation and research. The document will be maintained as a "living document" to ensure that it will continue to be updated with the most current efforts to mitigate human elephant con icts in the Asian elephant range countries.

For those who would like to know more about these efforts of the IUCN/SSC AsESG Human-elephant Con ict Task Force please go to the following link <www.AsianElephant.info> and register yourselves to receive current updates.

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