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Asian Elephant

Improving Patrolling & Enforcement

Conservation of flagship species at Nam Pouy National Protected Area

The Asian elephant has been worshipped for centuries and is still used today for ceremonial and religious purposes. Not only is it revered for its role within Asian culture and religion, it is also a key biological species in the tropical forests of Asia.

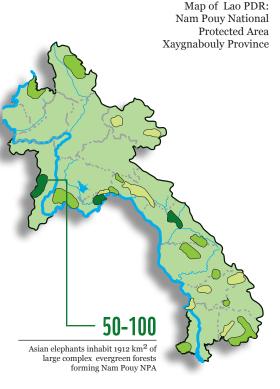
Whilst there are many thousands domesticated Asian elephants found in Southeast Asia, this magnificent animal is being pushed to extinction in the wild, only 25,600-32,750 are thought to roam naturally throughout Asia, less than a tenth of the number of wild African elephant.

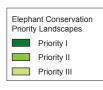
Lao PDR is considered to have the most important national elephant population in Indochina. Historically, the country has been known as 'Lane Xang' or Land of a Million Elephants, today Laos' wild elephant population is estimated at between 500-1000 individuals, a third of the numbers estimated two decades ago.

Threats to the Asian elephant include loss of habitat, with continuous increases in human population resulting in constant deforestation for both settlement and agricultural purposes. Elephants need a lot of space and a lot of food, as competition for habitat and natural resources magnifies, cases of human-elephant conflict become increasingly common. A single elephant in its quest for food can devastate a small farmers' crop in one raid. Losses to human property and, sometimes, human lives lead to retaliation by villagers, the biggest threat to the survival of the wild Asian elephant.

Habitat loss also creates the danger that elephants are unable to follow ancient migratory routes. Small, fragmented populations become isolated, unable to mingle with other herds and so may become inbred, this leading eventually to high juvenile mortality and overall low breeding success.

Poaching too remains a serious problem, with promise of high rewards for ivory and hides. In 1989, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned the international trade in ivory. However, there is still a thriving, yet unmonitored domestic ivory market in a number of Asian, and other countries which fuel an illegal international trade.





THE NAM POUY PROJECT IS FUNDED BY DONORS U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE



KEY SPECIES CONSERVATION

With this situation comes the added concern relating to the genetic effects on elephant populations as large male tuskers are targeted by poachers. The danger arises when these bull elephants are eliminated and poachers focus their efforts on killing immature males for their small tusks. When tuskers are killed, the number of males in a population decreased, resulting in unbalanced gender ratios, which again may lead to inbreeding.

Generally solitary animals, the large tuskers cover great distances, their removal reduces the probability of mating and exchanging genes with females of different sub-populations.



Kingdom: Animalia Class: Mammalia Order: Proboscidea Family: Elephantidae Species: Elephas maxius

The Asian elephant is the largest terrestrial mammal in Asia. It is smaller than the African elephant with relatively smaller ears. The skin colour of Asian elephants is dark grey to brown, with patches of pink on the forehead, the ears, the base of the trunk and chest. Only some male Asian elephants carry tusks; females have small tushes, which seldom show. But a significant number of adult males are tuskless, and the percentage of males carrying ivory varies by region. Asian elephants keep their ears in constant motion in order to radiate the heat they generate and therefore cool themselves. The species are reported to have well developed hearing, vision, and olfaction, and are also fine swimmers.

> Height: up to 300cm Length: 550 to 640cm Weight: up to 5000kg

Nam Pouy National Protected Area (NPA) is found in Xaygnabouly Province in Northern Laos. The protected area was identified as a top priority for Elephant Conservation by the Government of Lao PDR at a National Elephant Conservation Meeting held in 2008. WWF have been working on elephant issues in Laos since 2005, primarily focused in Southern Laos which is a WWF priority landscape. However, given the Governments prioritisation and the relevance of the Nam Pouy elephant population in the region, WWF with the support of WWFs AREAS (Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy) worked with the Government to develop and endorse a project on Nam Pouy NPA.

In February 2010 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed the MoU for the project, 'Improving the Patrolling and Law Enforcement for Nam Pouy NPA Management Project'. This overarching project is working to integrate elephant issues into provincial planning processes and strengthened capacity to address elephant conservation and human-elephant conflict in Nam Pouy NPA and across the country.

The Lao Governments partnership with WWF focuses to restore, maintain and increase populations of the Asian elephant within well managed protected sanctuaries through the implementation of project activities such as; increased monitoring and data collection on wild elephant population conducted by Nam Pouy NPA staff, military and villagers. Improvement of forest conservation, protection and other land use management practices. Reduction of illegal human activity and human conflict, through the development of guidelines for actions to prevent human-elephant conflicts, and to react as instances occur, whilst also training personnel in law enforcement and patrolling procedures to mitigate the threat of elephant poaching in elephant priority sites.

In addition, technical support provided by WWF is currently assisting the development of the National Elephant Management Action Plan.



DID YOU KNOW?

Elephants need to eat an average of 150kg of vegetation per day to survive.

The trunk of an elephant consists of approximately 100,000 different muscles.

The average lifespan for an Asian elephant is up to 60 years in the wild.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

For more information:

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