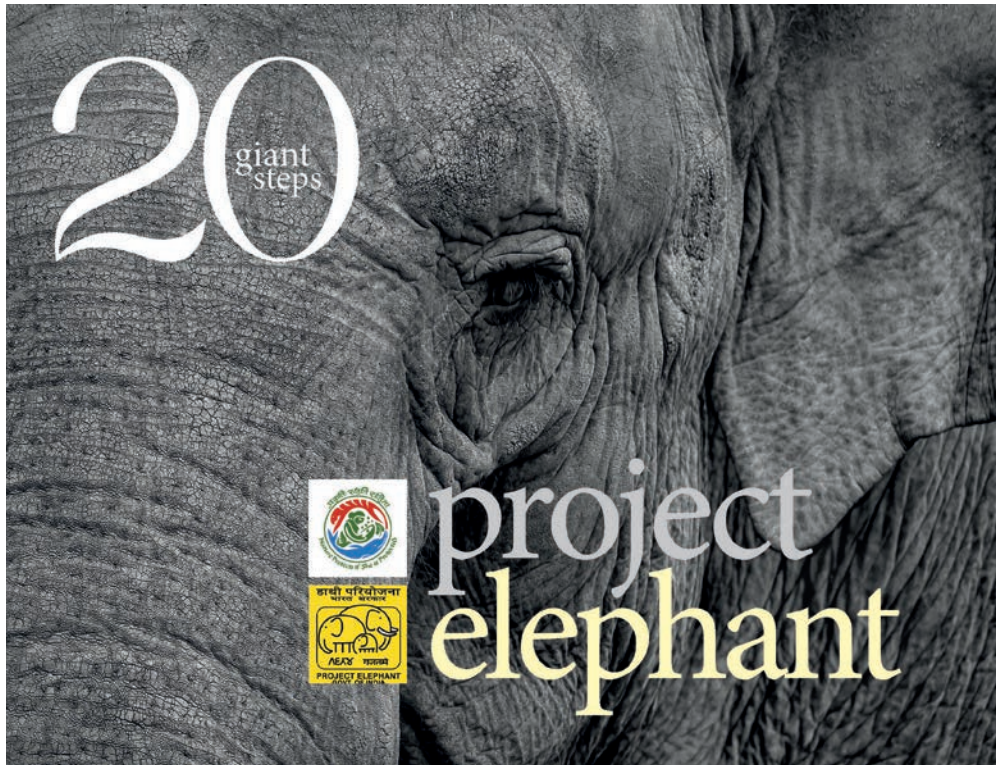


30
giant
steps



project
elephant



30 Giant Steps serves as the updated continuation of 20 Giant Steps of Project Elephant published in February 2024.

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Conceptualised & Created by: **Ramesh Kumar Pandey** (ADG, Wildlife, MoEF) and **Ananda Banerjee**

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Cover Photo: **Adil Arif** / Back Cover: **N C Dhingra**



project 2020-2025 elephant 30 giant steps

“If we save elephants, the forests will prosper as elephants are actual rangers of forests and serve to protect them”

-Shri Bhupender Yadav,

Hon'ble Union Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change



सत्यमेव जयते

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

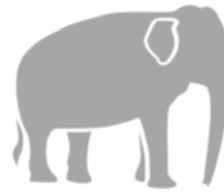


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The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is a keystone species affecting habitats and ecosystems in significant ways. Like ensuring ecological balance and resulting ecosystem services for human wellbeing.

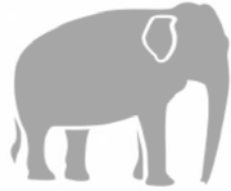
The Asian elephant is India's National Heritage Animal and has protection under Schedule I species of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Elephants, the largest land animals, have been called majestic, charismatic, gardeners of the forest and climate champions. Elephants play a key gardening role by dispersing seeds from the large volume of daily food intake, as much as 200 kilograms, and are recognised as ecosystem engineers. They do modify habitats by their feeding habits, in a way that is beneficial to a host of smaller animals, insects and several other organisms. As bulk feeders they help in effective nutrient cycling in the forest, breaking redundancy and promoting growth of vegetation. Their appetites influence not just how trees survive but how much carbon the forest stores in leaves and trunks. Since elephants require large and diverse forest habitats, holistically 'biodiversity' can be effectively conserved under the umbrella of elephants. Elephants elicit a lot of empathy in humans through the reflection of their complex matriarchal social lives where family bonds are extremely strong.

The social behaviour of elephants - like strong motherly care, deep affection between family

members towards younger individuals, and respect towards elders are considered as virtues in Indian societies. Consequently, there is always a strong public opinion in favour of elephants due to which they act as a flagship species in biodiversity conservation in India. There are three species of elephants that occur in the world. Africa has two of them and Asia has one. Within Asia, although elephants occur in 13 countries, India holds more than 60 per cent of the global wild elephant population.

In India, Asian elephants are distributed majorly in southern and north-eastern India, east central and northern regions. 'Project Elephant' was launched by the Government of India during 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the objectives to protect elephants, their habitat and corridors, to address issues of Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) and to ensure the welfare of captive elephants in India. Project Elephant has successfully completed 30 years in 2022. Through the collective efforts of the Central Government, State Forest Departments, scientific institutions, and civil society organisations, the population of elephants in India has shown a notable increase. Sustained conservation and protection initiatives undertaken by the Government of India in partnership with State Forest Departments have played a key role in the conservation of elephants. This booklet highlights and celebrates some of the major milestones and achievements of Project Elephant since 2020.





Elephant Reserves are designated to protect the natural habitats of elephants. These reserves help ensure that elephants have access to sufficient food, water, and suitable living conditions. Preserving their habitats is crucial for the long-term survival of elephant populations. Human–elephant conflict has emerged as one of the most challenging problems for elephant management and conservation in recent times. It creates considerable economic hardship for affected farmers.

The assistance provided by this Ministry contributes to the improvement of elephant habitats through augmentation of water sources, plantation of fodder trees, and regeneration of bamboo. Important elephant habitats are notified as ‘Elephant Reserves’ to ensure focused efforts and synergy in elephant conservation and to reduce conflict. Elephant Reserves can play a significant role in reducing human–elephant conflict.

Creating dedicated areas for elephants can minimise their interaction with human settlements, thereby reducing the chances of conflicts that often result in property damage, injuries, and sometimes even loss of life. Elephant Reserves typically encompass diverse ecosystems that support a wide range of wildlife species. By conserving elephant habitats, these reserves indirectly protect other flora and fauna, contributing to overall biodiversity conservation.

India is a signatory to international agreements and conventions such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Declaring Elephant Reserves demonstrates India’s commitment to protecting its wildlife and fulfilling its obligations under these agreements. Forests within Elephant Reserves also act as carbon sinks, helping to mitigate climate change by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide from the

1 notification of three new elephant reserves



Agasthiyarmalai Elephant Reserve, Tamil Nadu

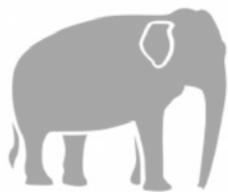


atmosphere. This contributes to India's efforts to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

During the last three years, the following three elephant reserves have been notified in the country, taking the total to 33 Elephant Reserves across 14 elephant-range States, covering an area of 80,776.7 sq. km:

- **Lemru Elephant Reserve in Chhattisgarh**, with an area of 1,995.48 sq. km, declared as the 31st Elephant Reserve
- **Agasthiyarmalai Elephant Reserve in Tamil Nadu**, with an area of 1,197.48 sq. km, declared as the 32nd Elephant Reserve
- **Terai Elephant Reserve in Uttar Pradesh**, with an area of 3,049 sq. km, declared as the 33rd Elephant Reserve

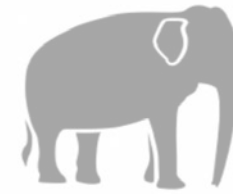
The declaration of Elephant Reserves in India is a vital conservation measure aimed at protecting not only elephants but also the ecosystems they inhabit and the well-being of local communities. These reserves are essential for ensuring the long-term survival and well-being of elephants while promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the regions they encompass.



SANJAY KUMAR



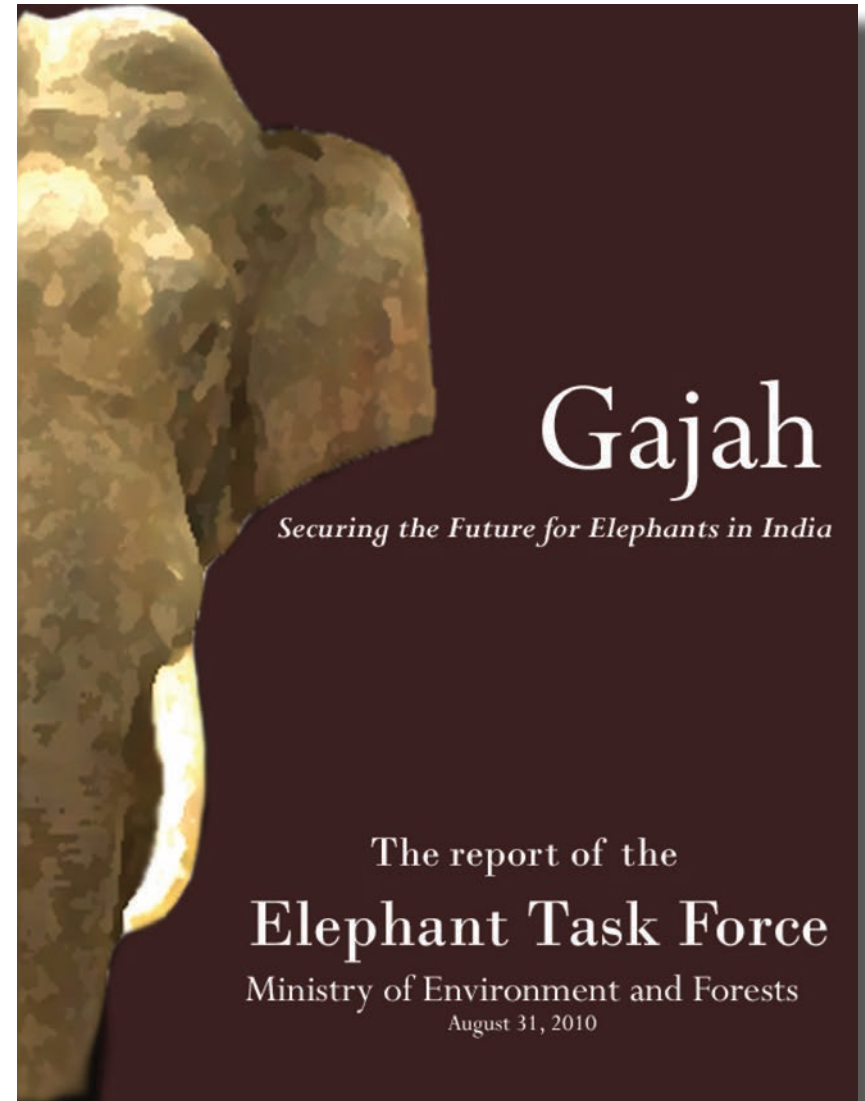
2 securing elephant corridors (2023)



Elephants are long-ranging animals and travel long distances from one habitat to another in search of food and water. Therefore, it becomes important to protect their movement paths, known as elephant corridors. During the last five years, the Government of India has been working to safeguard elephant corridors. One of the major initiatives undertaken in this regard is the ground validation of elephant corridors across the country. **Elephant corridors can be envisioned as strips of habitat or movement pathways that connect otherwise disconnected habitat patches for elephants. These corridors facilitate movement between habitat patches and, in the process, help maintain the long-term demographic and genetic viability of elephant populations.** Considering this, securing elephant corridors remains a central strategy for elephant conservation in the country.

The Ministry's Elephant Task Force Report, "Gajah", had enlisted 88 elephant corridors almost a decade ago. During the 16th Steering Committee meeting of Project Elephant, held in 2022 under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Minister, EF&CC, Government of India, it was informed that the task of ground validation of elephant corridors listed in the Gajah report had been initiated in collaboration with the State Forest Departments of elephant-range States. Ground validation of the corridors listed in the Gajah report was considered pertinent, as the report is over ten years old and documenting changes in corridor status was timely. In addition, elephant-range States were requested to provide lists of elephant corridors identified within their respective States so that these could also be ground validated for inclusion in the report.

The task of ground validation of elephant corridors has been completed, and a comprehensive report was released by the Hon'ble



MEFCC on the occasion of World Elephant Day, on 12th August 2023, at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. A total of 150 elephant corridors from 15 elephant-range States were ground validated and included in the report. The elephant corridors presented in the report should be considered as the minimum number occurring in the country and are subject to modification based on field data and inputs from State Governments.

The report defines an elephant corridor as a route or routes utilized by elephants to traverse between habitat patches to meet essential life-history requirements, such as within home-range movement, seasonal migration, and dispersal. Instances where elephants occasionally enter new areas that do not support sustainable populations are not classified as corridors. The dimensions of elephant corridors presented in the report are approximate, as only a limited number of States have officially established corridor boundaries. The current utilization status of these corridors by elephants was determined using data supplied by State Forest Departments during ground validation surveys conducted by teams designated by Project Elephant. To facilitate this assessment, Forest Department field officers were provided with a structured questionnaire.

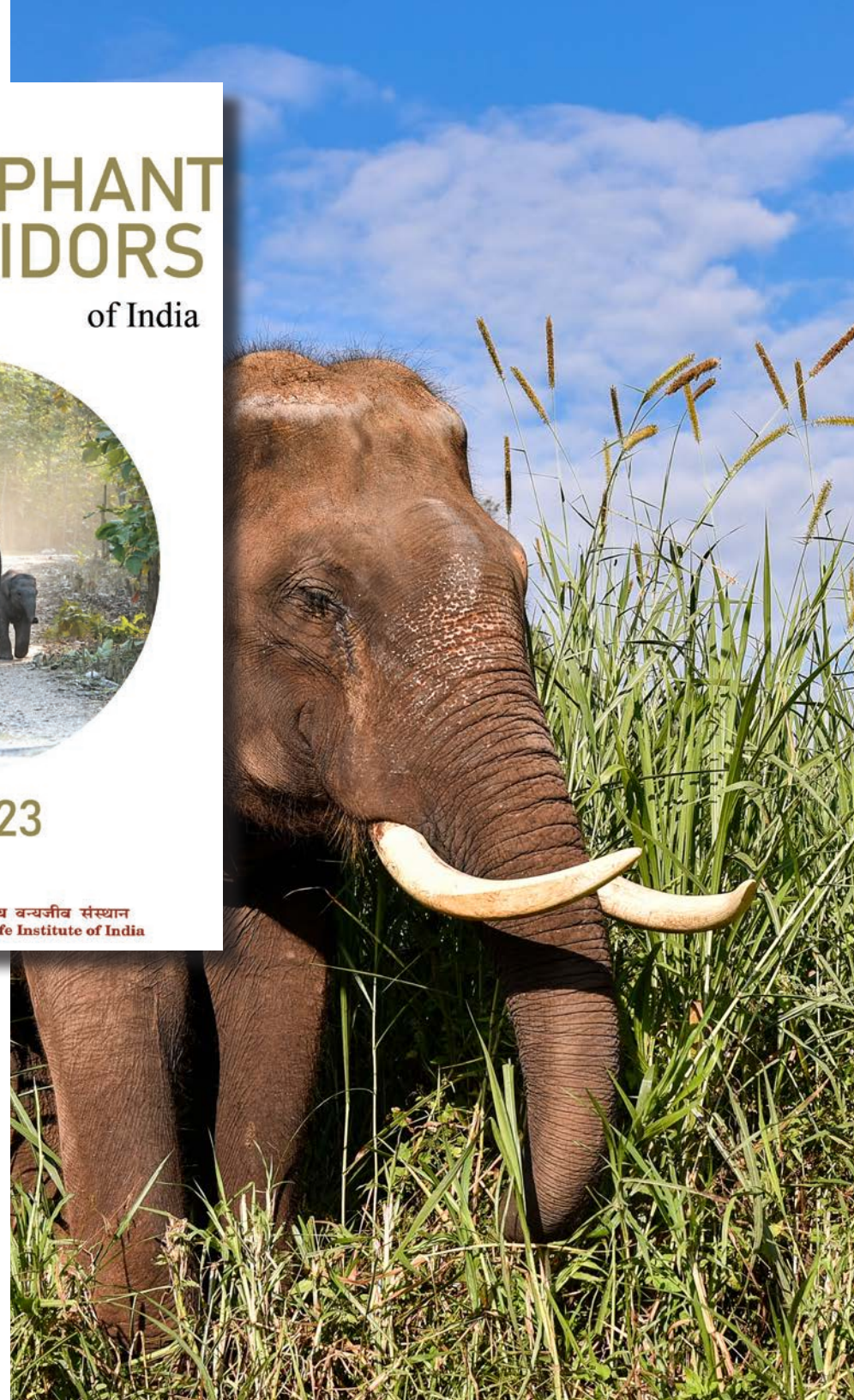
ELEPHANT CORRIDORS of India



2023



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India



3 regional workshops for coordination & regional action plans

At the 17th meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant, convened on August 12, 2022 in Kerala under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Minister, MoEF&CC, it was resolved to develop region-specific plans, adopting a landscape-based approach, rather than state-specific strategies. This strategic direction was further reviewed during the 18th and 19th meetings of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant, chaired by Shri Bhupender Yadav, Hon'ble Minister, MoEF&CC.

In line with this decision, a coordination meeting for the Elephant Range States within the East Central Landscape was held on January 19, 2023, in Kolkata, West Bengal, jointly organized by Project Elephant, MoEF&CC, and the State Forest Department, Government of West Bengal. The session was honored by the presence of Shri Jyoti Priya Mallick, Hon'ble Minister In-Charge of Forests, Government of West Bengal, and Ms. Birbaha Hansda, Hon'ble Minister of State for Forest, Government of West Bengal. Key topics discussed included elephant conservation efforts, mitigation of human-elephant conflict, identification and validation of elephant corridors, habitat management, and best practices for conflict resolution.

Subsequently, the second regional meeting for East Central Landscape States, facilitated by the Project Elephant Division, MoEF&CC, took place on August 30, 2023, at MoEF&CC under the Chairmanship of ADG (PT&E) & Director, PE, MoEF&CC.

Furthermore, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu

Forest Department, convened a regional meeting on 5th to 6th September 2024 incorporating Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, with the objective of refining the components of the Regional Action Plan for Comprehensive Understanding and Management of Human-Elephant Conflict in Southern India. Following this meeting, a capacity-building workshop for stakeholders involved with captive elephants was also organized in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

The Regional Coordination Workshop for the North-eastern Region was held on 21 January 2025 in Guwahati, Assam. Following this event, a Capacity Building Workshop titled "Enhancing Elephant Welfare in Captivity" was organised for elephant custodians and handlers.

At the 16th Steering Committee meeting of Project Elephant on 29/04/2022 in Dehradun, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department raised concerns about rising human-elephant conflicts in the state and stressed the need for a comprehensive action plan. Given that elephant habitats cross state borders in southern India, members proposed creating a regional action plan with participation from all southern states. Tamil Nadu later submitted a concept note outlining collaborative strategies through a structured "Regional Action Plan" to standardize conflict management across the region. The issue was revisited at the 20th Steering Committee meeting on 12th August 2024 and following this sub-committee to draft RAP for Southern and North-eastern elephant range states was constituted.





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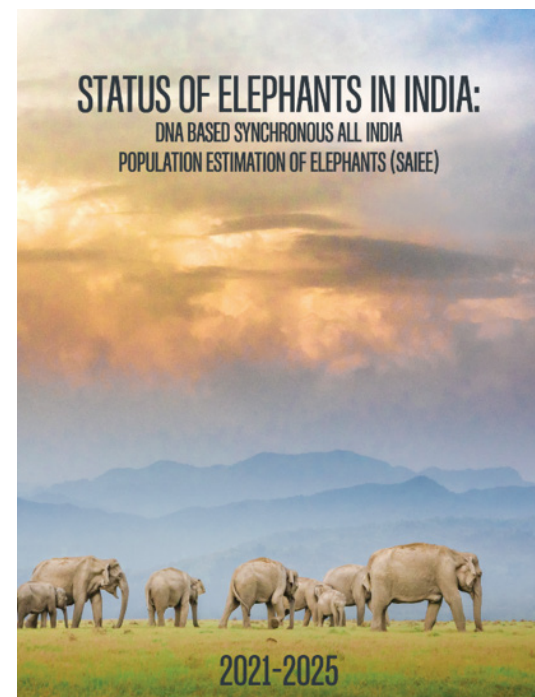
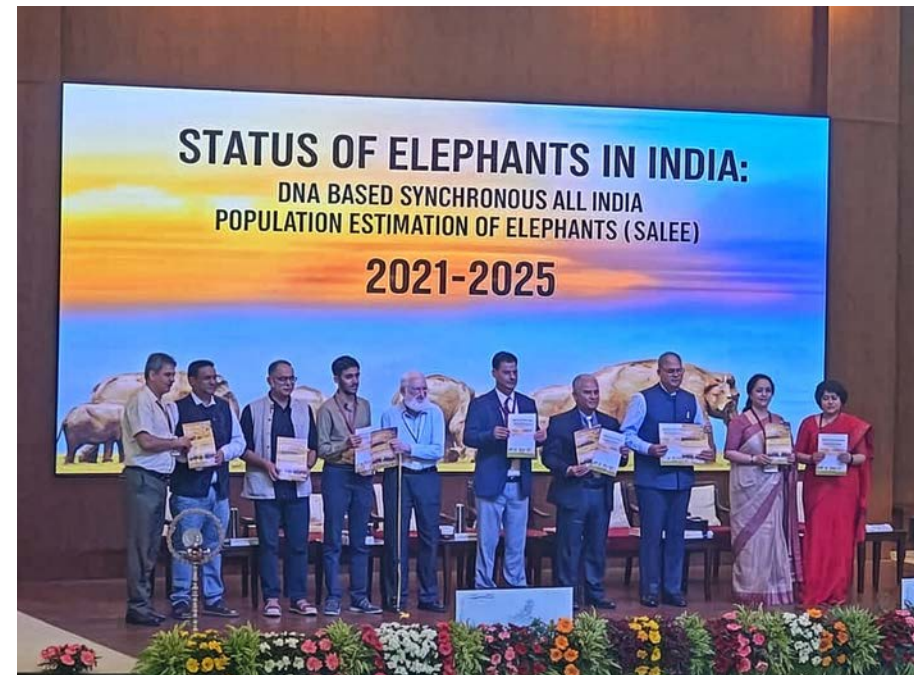
4 synchronised all-india elephant estimation (2021-2025)

The elephant estimation was conducted every 5 years by State Forest Departments. There were some disparities observed with the methodologies adopted by the States. Considering this, the Ministry had decided to conduct all India elephant estimation along with the Tiger estimation in a synchronized manner. For the first time ever synchronized elephant and tiger population has been carried out considering the high spatial overlap between the two species. This will save resources; logistics and the same time improve the efficiency of field surveys. Hon'ble Minister MoEF&CC had launched the methodology for conducting synchronized all India elephant estimation 2022 during World Elephant Day celebration.

For SAIEE-2021-25, India was divided into cells measuring 100 sq km, which were then further split into 25 sq km and 4 sq km cells. This system has been used for tiger estimation since 2006, collecting data on tigers as well as other species like elephants, mostly for tracking distribution and calculating relative abundance indexes (Jhala et al, 2008). Each grid has a unique code, allowing for consistent comparisons across time and locations.

Researchers sampled thirty-seven sites using the area search method, gathering 21,056 samples for genetic mark-recapture analysis. Based on DNA quality, amplification, and sequencing success, a portion of these samples was processed, resulting in identification of 4,065 unique individuals from all landscapes. The total estimated population of Asian elephants in India is 22,446, with a confidence interval ranging from 18,255 to 26,645.

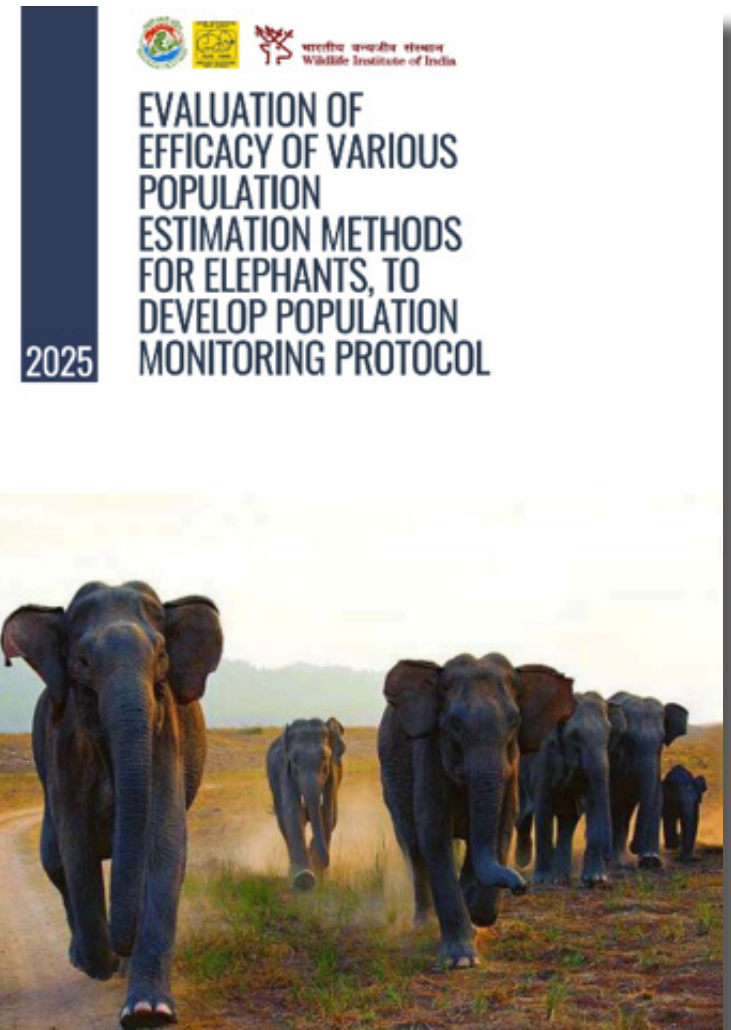
This nationwide estimate uses DNA-based mark-recapture for the first time in India; given the methodological changes, it is not comparable to past figures and may be treated as a new monitoring baseline for further research, monitoring and estimation.



5 efficacy of population estimation methods

Evaluation of Efficacy of various Population Estimation methods for elephants, to Develop population monitoring protocol (2025).

The study evaluated the effectiveness of multiple direct and indirect methods for estimating elephant populations to develop a scientifically robust population monitoring protocol. Conducted in the western part of Rajaji Tiger Reserve, the study applied camera trap-based approaches, dung-based methods, genetic and photographic capture-recapture, and line transect surveys under the same landscape conditions to allow direct comparison. The results showed substantial variation in population estimates across methods, with camera trap-based spatial models and capture-recapture approaches providing more reliable and precise estimates by effectively accounting for imperfect detection and the group-living nature of elephants. In contrast, dung density-based methods showed higher uncertainty due to strong sensitivity to dung decay rates and seasonal variation, while direct line transect surveys were limited in dense forest habitats. The study concludes that no single method is universally suitable and recommends a hybrid, landscape-specific monitoring framework that integrates camera trap-based spatial models with complementary genetic or photographic methods. To further this the Phase II of the study is already in progress which is testing the protocol in various elephant landscapes.



6 management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) of elephant reserves – guidelines (2023)

India is among the selected countries in the world that have institutionalized the Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) process and has taken a lead in evaluating its National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Tiger Reserves. Keeping the success of this process in improving the management of Protected Areas and Tiger Reserves, during the 16th project elephant steering committee meeting it was proposed to develop criteria and indicators for Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Elephant Reserves Elephant (MEE-ERs) of India. Accordingly, an eight-member drafting committee was constituted to develop guidelines, criteria and indicators for evaluation. The committee, in collaboration with the Elephant Cell at the Wildlife Institute of India prepared the framework for MEE-ER.

The MEE framework for Elephant Reserves comprises six elements—Context, Planning, Input, Process, Output, and Outcomes. To assess these elements, a total of 44 criteria (headline indicators) have been developed, with each element comprising 4 to 10 questions. Explanatory notes are provided wherever necessary to guide the assessment process. The scores, together with site-specific observations (remarks), help in developing a comprehensive understanding of the situation at each site. For every criterion, the evaluation team is required to indicate the relevant reference document(s) and provide appropriate remarks. Scores alone do not present a complete picture unless supported by well-considered observations that contextualize and qualify the scoring. A score of 2.5 represents the lowest management effectiveness, a score of 5 represents average management effectiveness, a score of 7.5 represents good but below optimal management effectiveness and a score of 10 represents optimal management effectiveness.



BHASKAR CHOUDHURY / WTI

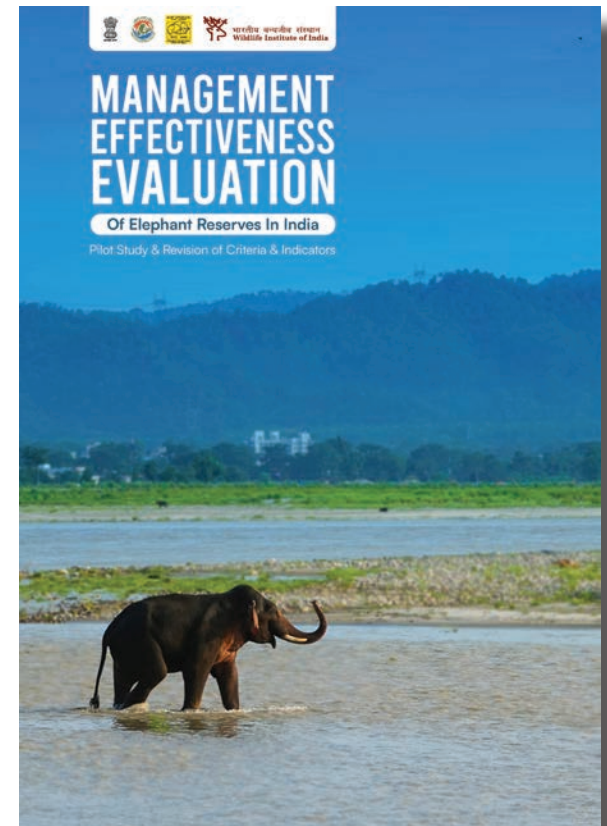


7 MEE of elephant reserves pilot study & revision (2024)

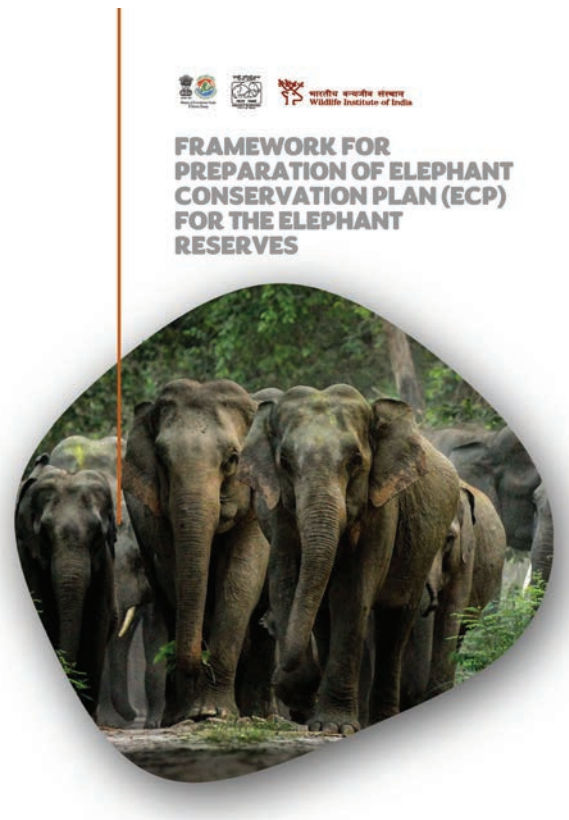
The Project Elephant initiated the task of evaluating management effectiveness of the ERs to institutionalize activities pertinent to landscape-level elephant management, mainstreaming ERs with the wildlife management and to standardize elephant specific management requirements for better management of elephant habitats and population. In this regard, the MEE-ER (Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Elephant Reserves in India) providing required guidelines, criteria and indicators was released during April 2023. The guidelines, criteria and indicators for MEE-ER were tested (on pilot basis) in four ERs from the four elephant-bearing regions of India. The ERs include the Shivalik ER in Uttarakhand (northwest region), Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong ER in Assam (north-east region), Mayurbhanj ER in Odisha (east-central region) and the Nilgiri ER (southern region) by involving a team of seasoned foresters and scientists. Based on the lessons learnt during the pilot MEE-ER, the guidelines were thoroughly reviewed, criteria and indicators were evaluated, and adequacy of the overall MEE process was validated.

Overall rating of pilot sites

S. No	Elephant Reserve	MEE Score (%)	MEE Rating
1	Kaziranga - Karbi Anglong	65.91	Good
2	Mayurbhanj	73.39	Good
3	Nilgiri	81.82	Very Good
4	Shivalik	78.40	Very Good

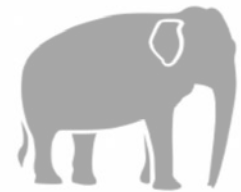


8 framework for preparation of elephant conservation plan (ECP)



The Framework for Preparation of Elephant Conservation Plan (ECP) aims to provide a structured approach to elephant management, incorporating elephant ecology, socio-economic factors, and the latest scientific practices. Developed collaboratively by wildlife managers, conservationists, researchers, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and local communities, the framework emphasizes a holistic perspective on the interconnectedness of elephants with their habitats and human communities. It seeks to create sustainable landscapes where elephants can thrive and move freely with minimal human conflict, ensuring the long-term conservation of elephant populations and their ecosystems. This collaborative effort is hoped to pave the way for better management and preservation of elephant landscapes and habitats.

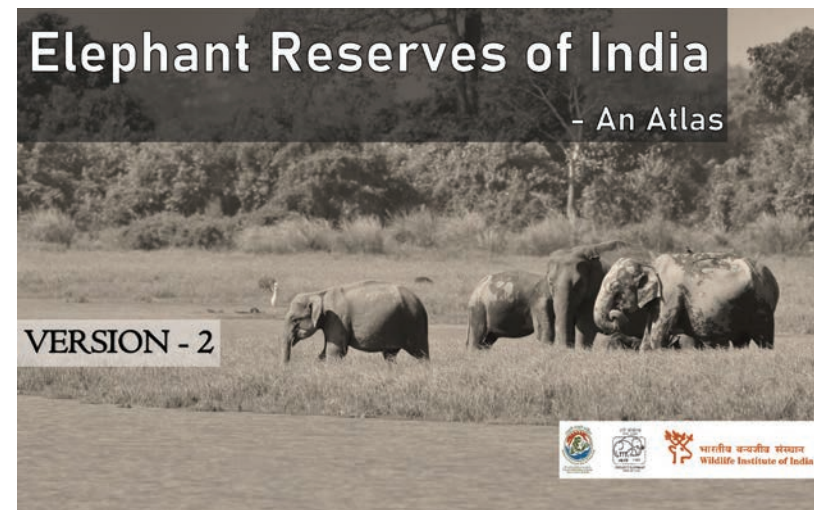
Elephant Conservation Plan (ECP): Pilot study in Nilgiri is being conducted by Elephant Cell, Wildlife institute of India in coordination with Project Elephant, MoEF&CC.





9 atlas of elephant reserves

The “Elephant Reserves of India – An Atlas-Version-2” is the updated version of the Atlas of Elephant Reserves of India which was released in 2022. The version 2 includes: (i) biogeographic region in which the Elephant Reserve falls, (ii) the mean annual rainfall, (iii) the number of revenue villages occurring within the Elephant Reserve, (iv) extent of different types of main roads passing through the Elephant Reserve (v) the extent of irrigation canals and the power lines passing through the Elephant Reserve (vi) the extent of mining area, (vii) forest administrative details like the Forest Ranges encompassing the Elephant Reserve and the Protected Areas and Tiger Reserves falling with the Elephant Reserve, and (viii) the elephant population estimated in the Elephant Reserve. The elephant corridors falling within the Elephant Reserve have also been indicated in the maps. Further, two new Elephant Reserves namely Agasthiyarmalai Elephant Reserve in Tamil Nadu & Terai Elephant Reserve in Uttar Pradesh have been added in this updated version, reflecting the Government’s continued commitment to strengthening elephant conservation and expanding the landscape-based management approach under Project Elephant.



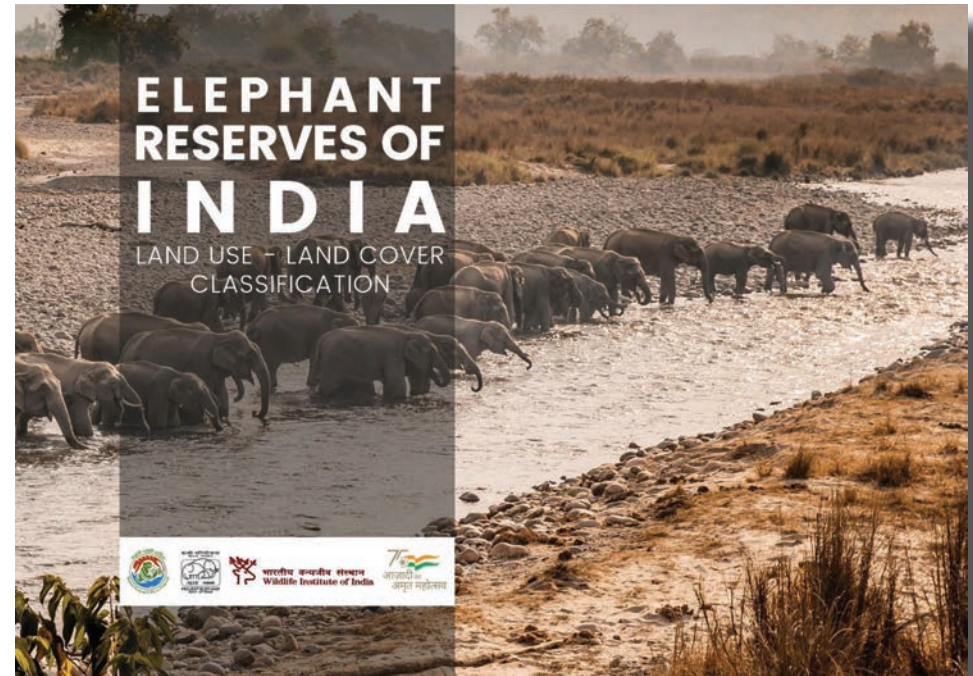
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report of elephant reserves land use-land cover (LULC)

Elephant ranges in India are not confined to Protected Areas. Their range also includes multiple-use forest areas and even non-forest areas. In this report, the land-use and land-cover classification of the Elephant Reserves across India has been mapped and tabulated. Further, broad-scale trend comparison of land-use land-cover has been made for all the elephant reserves using remotely sensed geospatial layers.

Elephant Reserves of India – Land use and Land Cover Version – 2

During the last few years, Project Elephant (PE) has placed emphasis on strengthening management of the Elephant Reserves (ERs) to harmonize elephant-centric prescriptions with long term conservation. As part of developing a management information system (MIS), PE collated basic information on all Indian ERs and developed a land use land cover (LULC) classification of the ERs during 2022 using high resolution geospatial layers. This version pictorially presents LULC for 33 ERs, with emphasis on terrain, gradient, elevation, and water courses pictorially presented for all 33 ERs. The document can serve as a ready reference to understand the land cover of the ERs.



11 elephant-human conflict in assam, chhattisgarh & jharkhand (2000-2023): trends & insights

Human-elephant conflict (HEC) in Assam, Chhattisgarh & Jharkhand has been a persistent and growing challenge, resulting in significant losses for both humans and elephants. The pressure on elephant habitats has escalated as landscape has shown an increase in agriculture, settlements, and development projects, leading to more frequent interaction between human and elephant. This report examines the trends in Human-elephant conflict over the last 23 years (2000–2023), analysing the underlying factors driving conflicts and attempt has been given to formulate mitigation strategies to foster coexistence between local communities and elephants. To analyse conflict patterns, a comprehensive approach was used, combining spatial analysis and field observations. Information was gathered from forest department records and on-site surveys to identify conflict-prone areas. Changes in land use land cover were examined to understand their impact, while relationships between landscape characteristics, conflict severity, and various causes of elephant mortality were evaluated. The report was released by Hon'ble Minister, MoEF&CC during the 21st Steering Committee Meeting of Project Elephant at IGNFA, Dehradun.



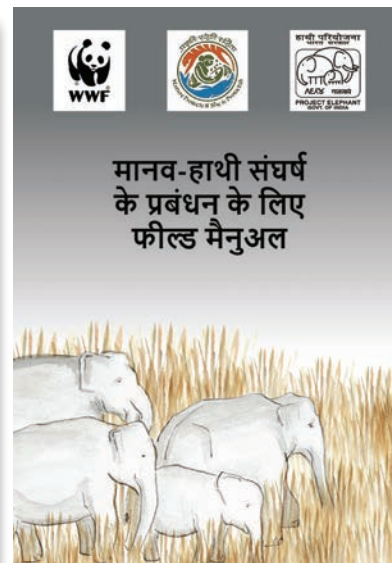
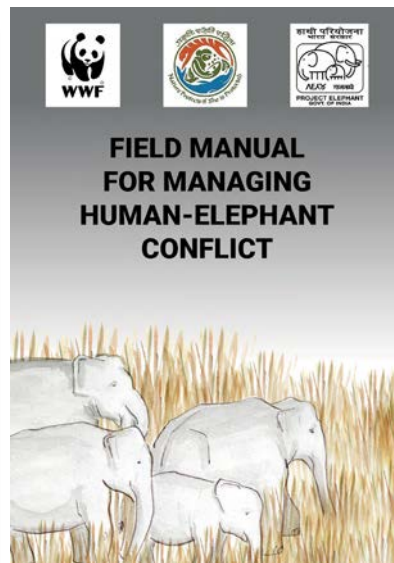
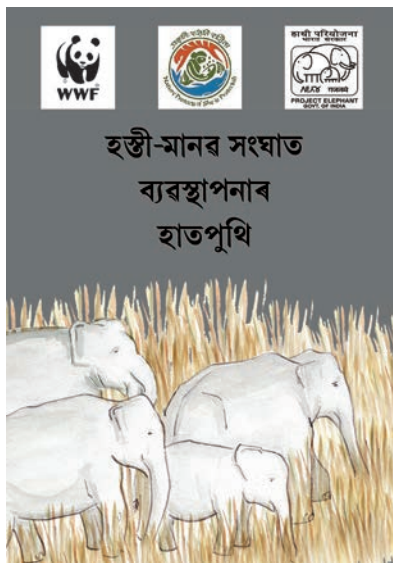
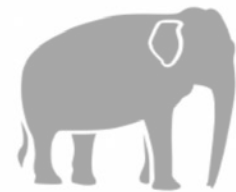

**ELEPHANT - HUMAN CONFLICT
IN THE STATE OF CHHATTISGARH, INDIA
(2000-2023)**
TRENDS, CHALLENGES & INSIGHTS
March 2025





12 field manual for managing human-elephant conflict

Human-elephant conflict is a management challenge of high concern as it negatively affects elephant conservation and human welfare. There are several time-tested practical options available to address HEC. Often, the field personnel in the frontline are hampered by lack of information on tackling HEC. Recognizing this lacuna, the Project Elephant along with WWF-India and WII had come up with a pictorial, ready-to-use manual on HEC management. The content of the documents are illustrative and is designed for ready use in the field by all those who are in the forefront of managing elephants and their habitats. The English version of the manual was released by the Hon'ble Minister, EF&CC during the 16th Steering Committee held in Dehradun. Due to overwhelming demand for the manual, the manual has been released in Hindi, Assamese, Malayalam, Odiya, Kannada and Tamil. The manual would be translated into other regional languages too.



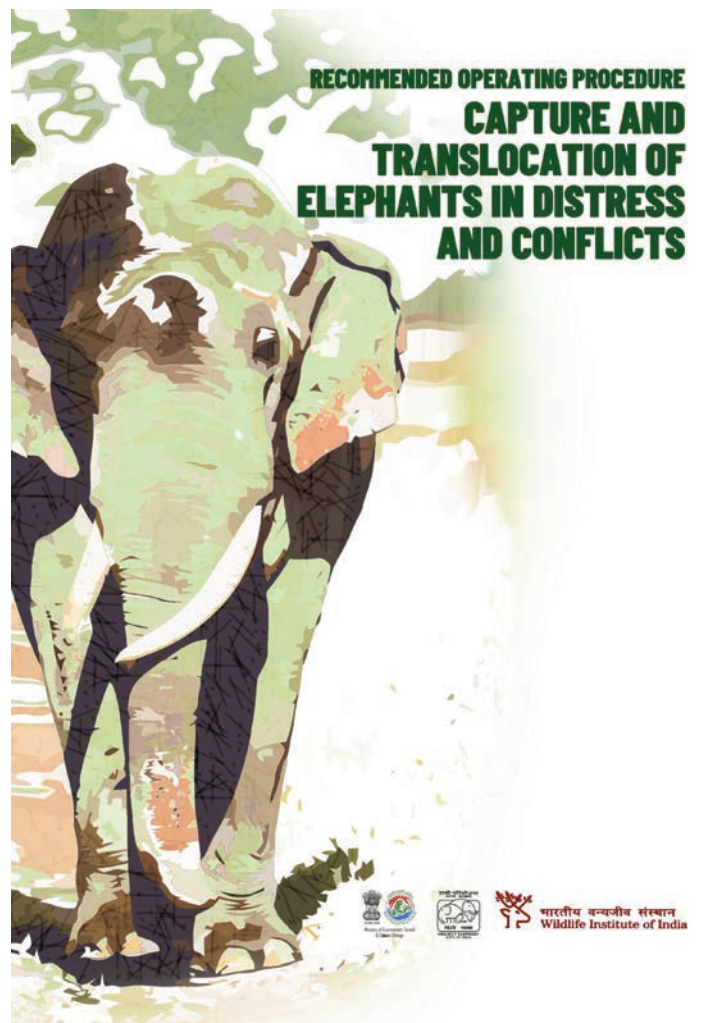
13 Guidelines for human-elephant conflict mitigation



To effectively and responsively address the issue of Human Elephant Conflict, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has facilitated the development of “Guidelines for Human-Elephant Conflict Mitigation in India” under the Indo-German cooperation project on “Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation in India (2017-2023), taking a participatory, integrated and inclusive approach. These guidelines aim to facilitate a common understanding among key stakeholders on what constitutes effective and efficient mitigation of the Human Elephant Conflict in India, leading to co-existence, to ensure standardisation in performing mitigation operations in the most effective and efficient manner, with minimum damage to humans and elephants.



14 recommended operating procedure for capture & translocation of elephants



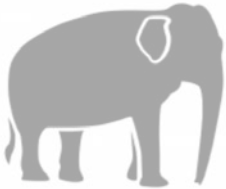
The need for capture (chemical and physical restraint) and translocation of elephants from the wild could arise from a variety of circumstances. The 'Project Elephant' took cognizance of the increasing need for a ready-reference manual to guide field personnel and constituted a technical committee comprising reputed veterinary professionals, experienced field managers, and biologists to draft the Recommended Operating Procedure (RoP). The draft document has been prepared which is a result of numerous structured deliberations by the committee. The committee members contributed to individual chapters, which have been collated and succinctly summarized as RoP. The overarching purpose of this RoP is to lay down the procedures that will guide the field teams to: i) Plan an elephant capture or translocation operation in the field and ii) Minimize the risks associated with the operations through careful planning and execution. The RoP would be relevant and useful in guiding decision-making and carrying out the operation. Since elephant capture operations are highly challenging and require careful consideration of many intricate technical aspects, it is important to have a ready reference document. Lately, increasing HEC in various landscapes has resulted in many elephant capture and translocation operations. The RoP is applicable to all field situations involving elephants, capture using chemical or physical restraint, and the translocation of wild elephants, regardless of the administrative jurisdiction of the land. The document was released during the World Elephant Day 2024.



15 recommended operating procedure for necropsy & carcass disposal



Elephants are long-lived and understanding the patterns of mortality would be crucial for informed management. Despite the importance, carrying out necropsy on elephants required high level of technical knowledge that is not readily available in all regions that elephants occur in India. The Project Elephant and the Elephant Cell at the Wildlife Institute of India have come up with this important “Recommended Operating Procedure” document on conducting elephant necropsy and safely disposing the carcasses targeting the field veterinarians and forest officials engaged in managing elephant populations. The aim of this manual is to improve the standards of conducting elephant necropsy and sample collection techniques so that critical scientific information related to elephant demography, emerging diseases of local and national importance, and habitat-specific variations in death rates can be obtained.



16

inter-ministerial coordination with railways: general guidelines (2023)

The roads and railway lines in the natural habitats/ forests bisect them, create edges, alters the hydrological dynamics, and create a barrier to the movement of elephants and other animals. The barrier effect of railways on wildlife is one of the most important factors associated with habitat fragmentation. The Ministry is constantly working to minimize the impacts of existing railway lines on elephant and other wildlife. Regular inter-ministerial meetings have been organised with Ministry of Railways (MoR) and State Forest Departments. Joint advisories by the MoEF&CC and MoR have been issued to State/UT Forest Departments emphasizing regular patrolling, clearing vegetation along the tracks to improve visibility for the loco pilots, placing signages at sensitive locations to caution the railway crew and improving waste disposal techniques to keep railway tracks free from food wastes etc.

110 critical sites in a stretch of 1800 kilometres on existing railway lines across the country have been identified by the MoEF&CC in consultation with the State Forest Departments and submitted the same to the Ministry of Railways for undertaking mitigation strategies like underpasses, overpasses, imposing speed restrictions, creating level crossings and ramps to facilitate elephant movement and developing technological interventions to better detect elephants along the Railway tracks. Ministry of Railways is also actively cooperating and taking various steps in coordination with the MoEF&CC. For instance, the Southern Railway has initiated novel measures like creation of underpasses to reduce the death of elephants in the Coimbatore to Palakkad railway stretch connecting

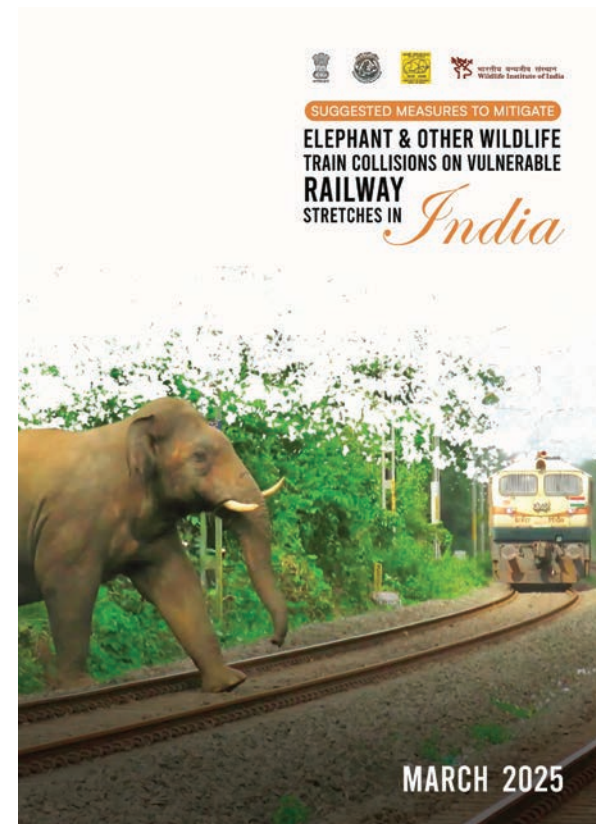
Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

A pilot project on “Intelligent elephant movement detection and alert system” to detect movement of elephants approaching railway tracks through seismic sensors has been initiated in Rajaji Tiger. Further, the Northeast Frontier railway has been constructing an elevated corridor in Deepor Bheel of Assam to prevent elephant deaths due to elephants. Technological intervention such as Intrusion Detection System (IDS) using Optical Fibre Cable Technology, detecting the animal movement using the seismic sensors and infrared thermal cameras have been piloted in West Bengal and Uttarakhand and these technologies will be soon implemented in other parts as well.

To prioritise the planning and monitor the implementation of mitigation measures a portal was launched by Hon’ble Minister, MoEF&CC and Hon’ble MoS, MoEF&CC on 19th May, 2023. It’s a multistakeholders initiative which involves the active cooperation from the Government of India, State Governments and the Indian Railways. The General Guidelines for Suggesting Mitigation Measures on Railway Tracks passing through Elephant Habitats in India have been prepared and circulated to all the States/UTs for implementation in May, 2023. These guidelines would be a guiding document for the Railway and Forest Officials in designing and choosing between different structural mitigation measures in the identified critical elephant zones intersected by railway lines. The choice of mitigation measures can be based on landscape, topography, railway track height, and other logistics.

17 suggested measures to mitigate elephant & wildlife train collisions (2025)

The Indian Railways serves as a vital transportation lifeline for the country, facilitating the movement of people and goods nationwide. However, its extensive network has also contributed to major threats to Asian elephants and other wildlife in certain regions. Additionally, railway infrastructure can act as a barrier, restricting wildlife movement and leading to habitat fragmentation. To address the issue of wildlife fatalities resulting from train collisions, the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Ministry of Railways, had initially identified 110 sensitive railway stretches across the elephant distribution range in India, with 17 additional sensitive stretches identified in two Indian tiger range states. Across these identified stretches, a comprehensive joint survey was executed by a team of Project Elephant officers, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) representatives, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) experts, Ministry of Railways officials, and State Forest Departments, focused on assessing critical railway stretches where elephant and wildlife-train collisions are prevalent. The team evaluated site-specific conditions and proposed targeted permanent mitigation measures tailored to the unique characteristics of each location. After an exhaustive survey of the 127 railway stretches (110 in elephant range and 17 in two tiger range states) spanning 3452.4 km, 77 railway stretches spanning 1965.2 km across 14 states were recommended for mitigation measures based on the intensity of use by elephants, tigers, and other wildlife in the region. The proposed mitigation measures for these 77 stretches include 503 ramps and level crossings, 72 bridge extensions and modifications, 39 fencing, barricading, or trenching structures, 4 exit ramps, 65 new underpasses, and 22 overpasses—totalling 705 structures. A detailed comprehensive report in this regard was released by Hon'ble Minister, MoEF&CC during the 21st Steering Committee Meeting of Project Elephant at IGNFA, Dehradun.



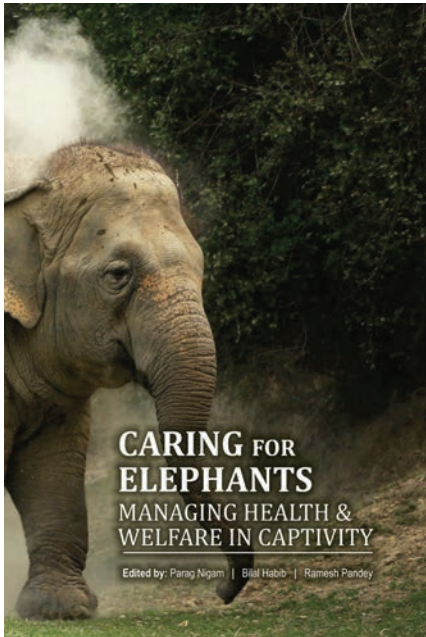
18 dna profiling of captive elephants & gaj soochna app

India has a long history of taming and keeping elephants in captivity for a diversity of purposes that included use in wars, temples & religious places, in zoological parks (for conservation education) and for various forest department activities such as wildlife tourism, patrolling, forestry operation and mitigation of conflict with wild elephants. With the decline in forest exploitation for timber the use of captive elephants for this purpose has declined dramatically in recent decades. Unfortunately, illegal trade in live elephants still continue despite continuous efforts by the Government of India. Accordingly, The Project Elephant Division, MoEF&CC decided to develop a comprehensive database (including DNA) for all the captive elephants regardless of their ownership in India to curb illegal wildlife practices and manage their population in a scientific manner. The objective is to account/ identify every single captive elephant in the country and bring it all in a central database which would have individual-level genetic data along with pictures of these captive elephants, making it extremely useful to stop any illegal activities involving these animals. The elephant specific forensic kits for field sampling were developed by following inputs from Project Elephant, Government of India. Subsequently, these kits were distributed to respective Forest Departments for field use. This was the first time any such effort has been made in India. Till now more than 2000 DNA samples from the captive elephants have been collected.



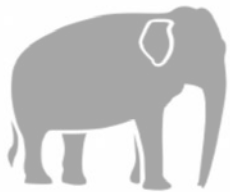
Advisory for DNA Profiling of Captive Elephants During Transit

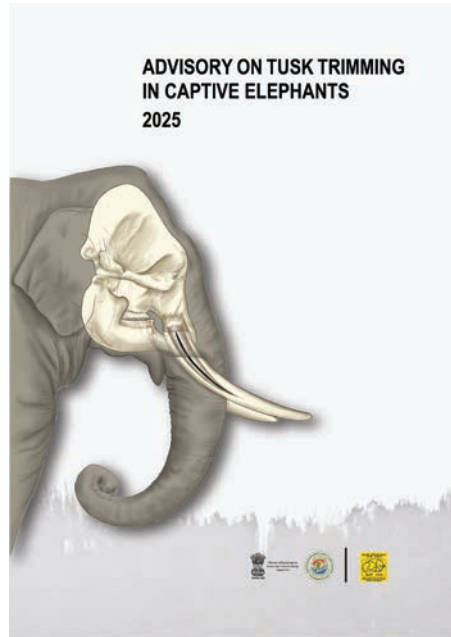
Asian elephant being a Schedule I category mega-herbivore with a declining wild population requires maximum conservation effort and security to ensure no malpractices at any stage. Captive elephants under the jurisdiction of forest department and private ownerships act as key individuals requiring utmost care by their respective handlers. In many cases, captive individuals are transferred between forest departments or private owners for various reasons. There have been reports of various illegal practises including transfers between such groups resulting into different types of wildlife crimes. To stop this the Project Elephant Division, MoEF&CC and Wildlife Institute of India has prepared this standard proforma for documentation of every elephant transfers along with collection of biological samples to confirm appropriate transfers of any captive animals across the country. This performa has been prepared to prepare a database including detailed physical information of the elephants as well as the official/owner details. It is expected that this proforma will be filled by the donor party before the legal transfer and the recipient party after the animal is received at its planned destination. Blood samples need to be collected in both places to ensure the genetic matching of the individual at Wildlife Institute of India.



19 caring for elephants: managing health & welfare in captivity

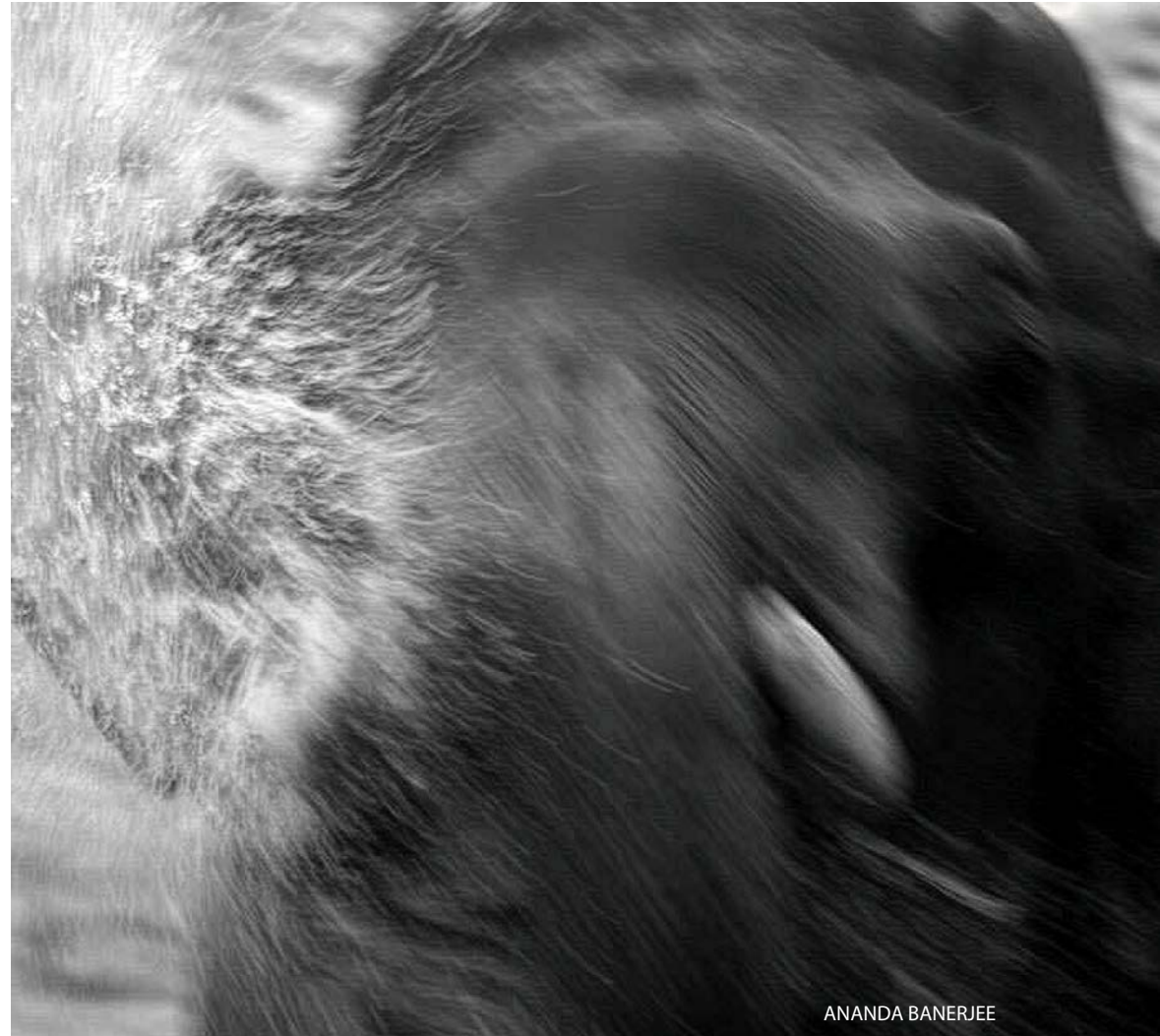
Improving the welfare conditions of the captive elephants is one of the stated objectives of the Project Elephant, MoEF&CC, Government of India. This book is an outcome of a workshop conducted by the Project Elephant and WII on aspects of captive elephant welfare during February 2022. The book contains chapters on various aspects of captive elephant management lucidly written and thus, highly relevant for field officers, veterinary professionals and elephant handlers. The individual chapters have been contributed by authors well-versed in their respective fields and edited by Dr. Parag Nigam & Dr. Bilal Habib, scientists from WII and Shri. Ramesh Kumar Pandey.





20 advisory on tusk trimming in captive elephants (2025)

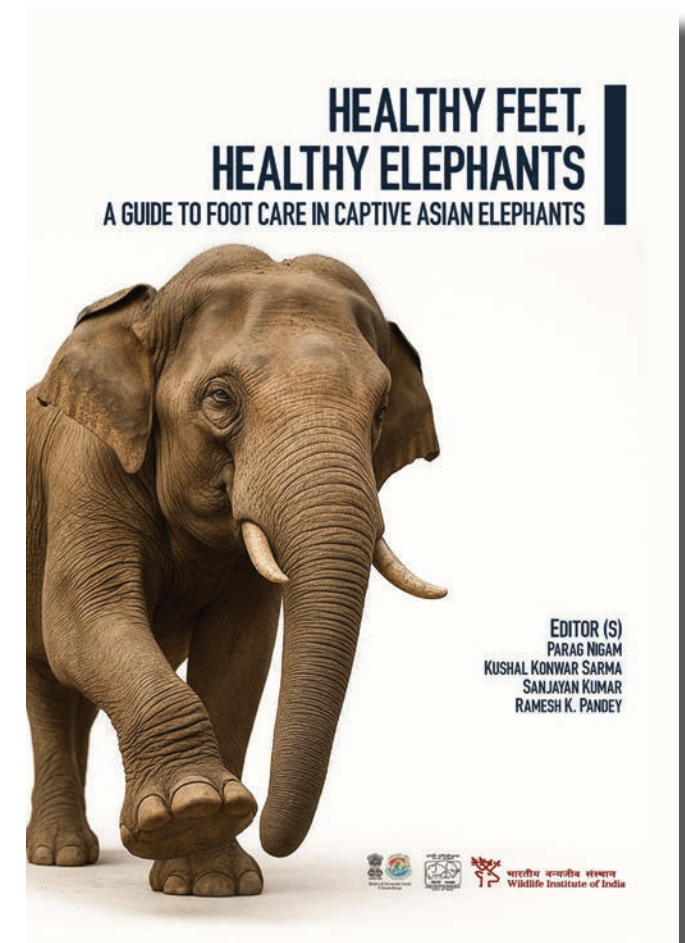
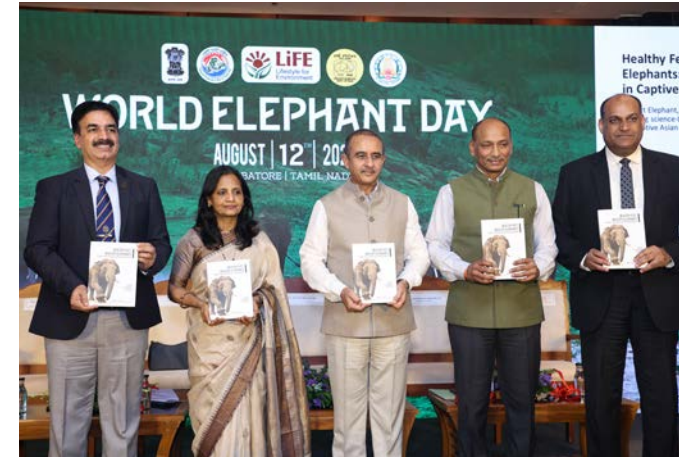
Elephant tusks are elongated incisor teeth that grow continuously throughout an elephant's life. Primarily composed of dentine (ivory), tusks serve multiple functions including foraging, defence, and mate selection. While strong, they are susceptible to fractures and other ailments, especially in captivity. Proper tusk care, including trimming is essential for an elephant's well-being. However, improper trimming can cause severe harm, even life-threatening complications. This advisory outline the key considerations, procedures, and precautions to be followed for safe and ethical tusk trimming in captive elephants. The advisory is intended to provide guidelines on the safe and ethical trimming of tusks in captive elephants, ensuring their well-being while complying with animal welfare standards and legal regulations. The advisory was released by Hon'ble Minister, EFCC during the 21st Steering Committee Meeting of Project Elephant at IGNFA, Dehradun.



ANANDA BANERJEE

21 healthy feet, healthy elephants foot care guide (2025)

Foot problems are among the leading causes of morbidity in captive elephants across the globe. Conditions such as abscesses, cracks, foot rot, arthritis, and even fatal infections often result from a combination of poor hygiene, inadequate trimming practices, unsuitable substrates, and lack of routine inspection. Addressing these challenges calls for a well-informed, collaborative approach involving veterinarians, mahouts, animal handlers, and facility managers. Recognizing this urgent need, Project Elephant, in collaboration with expert veterinarians, field practitioners, and technical partners, has developed this document “Healthy Feet, Healthy Elephants: A Comprehensive Guide to Foot Care in Captive Asian Elephants.” This is the first structured attempt to provide science-based, field-friendly, and context-specific guidance for zoo professionals, sanctuary staff, mahouts, and veterinarians who are engaged in the daily care and management of captive elephants. The guide comprises seven structured chapters beginning with the biological and anatomical foundations of elephant feet, moving through the implications of diet and substrate on foot health, and offering practical, hands-on instructions for foot inspection, trimming, treatment, and prevention. The manual ends with templates for foot care records and a glossary of terms. This document is meant to be both a quick reference and a training resource that encourages regular, preventive foot care instead of waiting to treat problems after they occur. It reflects the determined efforts of a committed technical drafting team, with contributions from veterinary experts and experienced field personnel. Their insights and on-ground experience have shaped this comprehensive yet accessible manual.





N C DHINGRA

22

elephant care and management a guide for elephant handlers

The document titled “Elephant Care and Management: A Guide for Elephant Handlers” has been prepared through collaborative efforts involving elephant handlers, wildlife biologists, veterinarians, wildlife managers and conservation professionals. It draws upon traditional knowledge, hands-on experience, and also recent advancements in elephant biology and medicine to have a comprehensive, user-friendly reference for elephant handlers and facility managers engaged in the daily management of elephants in captivity. The objective of the manual is to guide elephant handlers and others concerned in elephant management to provide basic information on themes foundational for elephant welfare in captivity. The manual comprises six broad sections. The first introduces the biological and behavioural attributes of elephants for handlers better understand species-specific needs and natural behaviours. The second section focuses on building and maintaining strong handler-elephant relationships, emphasizing trust building, effective communication, and the use of positive conditioning techniques. Subsequent sections provide detailed guidance on husbandry, nutrition, health care, and hygiene, along with specialized topics such as foot, tusk, and skin care; management during musth; and care during pregnancy, lactation, and neonatal stages. Recognizing the dynamic nature of elephant management, the manual also covers essential topics like training, enrichment, transportation protocols, and safe handling practices. A dedicated section addresses occupational safety for handlers, and the annexures provide practical tools, checklists, and record-keeping formats to support daily management and monitoring. This manual is



intended to serve as both a training resource and an operational reference for improving captive elephant management across various institutions and facilities. It advocates preventive care, empathetic handling, and scientifically informed husbandry routines to ensure optimal welfare outcomes. We hope that this guide empowers elephant handlers with the knowledge and confidence to adopt humane, effective, and standardized practices in their work. The welfare of captive elephants is inseparably linked to the capacity and care extended by their handlers, and this manual is a step towards strengthening that critical interface.

23 celebrating world elephant day



Every year 12th August is celebrated as the World Elephant Day across the globe to reaffirm mankind's collective pledge in conserving one of the most iconic species in the planet. In India, elephants are regarded as the National Heritage animals and are deeply ingrained in our culture. The goal of World Elephant Day is to create awareness on elephant conservation, and to share knowledge and positive solutions for the better protection and management of wild and captive elephants.

World Elephant Day was celebrated as follows:

- In 2022, the event was held at Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala, with participation from national and state officials, including the Union Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change. The 17th Steering Committee meeting also took place there on August 12, 2022.
- In 2023, celebrations occurred in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- In 2024, Raipur, Chhattisgarh hosted the event, organized by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change and the Government of Chhattisgarh, to highlight elephants as India's National Heritage Animals and support conservation efforts. 20th Steering Committee Meeting of Project Elephant, chaired by Hon'ble Minister, MoEFCC Shri Bhupendra Yadav
- In 2025, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu hosted the celebration, led by the Ministry and the Government of Tamil Nadu, and attended by government officials, conservationists, students, and civil society representatives.

24 gaj gaurav awards



The forest staff of Elephant Reserves and elephant bearing habitats are assigned the responsibilities of protection and conservation of the area and the wild animals including elephants. However, in the process of safeguarding the Protected Areas and the elephants in such landscapes the frontline staff are vulnerable to several risks including from poachers and elephants. Considering this, in the 16th meeting of the Steering Committee of Project Elephant held on 29th April 2022 under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Minister, MoEF&CC, it was decided to recognise the good practices outstanding works done by field officers, frontline staff and private custodians in elephant conservation. It was decided that Gaj Gaurav awards will be given to field officers/frontline staff/local communities for extraordinary performance in field. The awards are given for extraordinary efforts put in overall elephant conservation in elephant bearing areas as well for elephants kept in captivity in the following fields:

- i. Species protection
- ii. Elephant habitat management
- iii. HEC management
- iv. Elephant trade control/patrolling/ wildlife crime detection etc.
- v. Local community participation for elephant conservation
- vi. Captive elephant welfare and management

Between 2022 and 2025, the Gaj Gaurav Awards were presented at World Elephant Day events to recognize notable contributions to elephant conservation and management. Honorees included the Malasar Community of Tamil Nadu, mahouts from Kerala and Assam, forest management committees, protection squad members, forest guards, veterinary officers, and watchers from various Indian states such as West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.



25

gaj utsav & trumpet

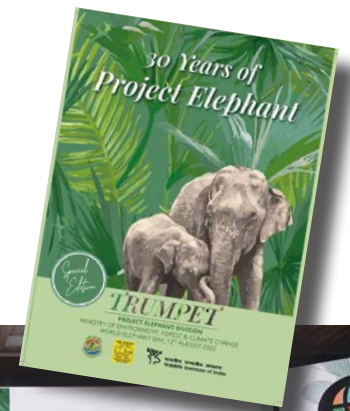
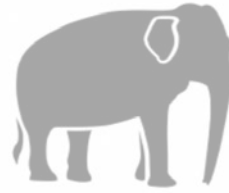
- 30 years of project elephant

The Government of India launched the “Project Elephant” in the year of 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the mission to protect the elephants and its habitats and improve the connectivity through the protection and restoration of corridors. The main mandates of the program included:

- i. to protect elephants, their habitats and the corridors
- ii. to address issues of man–animal conflict and
- iii. to improve the welfare of the captive elephants.

The Programs launched not only to protect the wild elephants and also to ensure the welfare of elephants in captivity. Since the

launch of this program, the Government of India has been taking various measures to achieve the objectives and mandate of the Project Elephant. Financial and Technical assistance have been given to the state Governments, guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures have been issued to tackle the human elephant conflicts. To commemorate the successful completion of 30 years of Project Elephant in 2022 and to give more impetus to conservation efforts, the Ministry celebrated the Gaj Utsav, 2023 at Kaziranga National Park on 07th-08th April 2023 by bring together various stakeholders. The programme was inaugurated by Smt. Droupadi Murmu, Hon’ble President of India, on 07th April 2023.



The Gaj Utsav, 2023 celebrations begun with the cultural programme at Kohora, Kaziranga National Park on 06th April 2023. Then inaugural session on 07th April 2023, followed by 18th Steering Committee Meeting of Project Elephant and Plenary Session on “Taking the Elephant Conservation Forward in Modern India”. The Gaj Utsav, 2023 ended with 3 technical sessions and discussion on the matters related to Elephant conservation in the country by comprising experts from the Government of India, State Forest Departments, scientists, bureaucrats, policymakers, lawmakers, NGOs, and members of civil society. All the discussions resulted into recommendations on various aspects of Elephant Conservation.

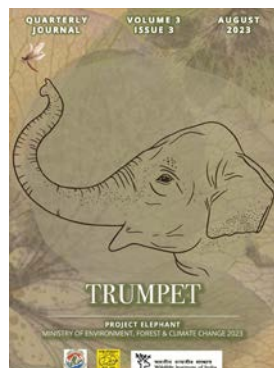
Celebrating the 30 successful years of the Project Elephant,

the Ministry released the special edition of the newsletter titled “Trumpet 30 years of PE” during the World Elephant Day, 2022 celebrations at Periyar, Kerala. The newsletter serves as a repository of information and valuable source for conserving and managing elephants. Since its inception, the Project Elephant along with the partner institutions that included State Forest Departments across India had striven hard to prioritize elephant conservation while at the same time reconciling the livelihood needs of local communities that live alongside elephant habitats through diversity of conflict mitigation strategies. “Trumpet” showcases the conservation news about the elephants in the country and the works done by the MoEF&CC and the State Forest Departments for the conservation and protection of elephants.

26 trumpet quarterly newsletter

The Project Elephant (MoEF&CC), Government of India, publishes a quarterly magazine entitled “Trumpet” [available at: <https://moef.gov.in/trumpet-quarterly-journal>]. This publication is devoted entirely to research, conservation initiatives, and management strategies relating to elephants in India. It consistently features articles from distinguished researchers and seasoned forest officers, showcasing diverse methodologies, best practices, and outcomes in elephant conservation nationwide. As a comprehensive resource, “Trumpet” assists forest officers, State Governments, civil society organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders in effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges involved in elephant conservation.

Since its inception, Trumpet has shown steady continuity and growth. To date, five volumes comprising a total of thirteen issues have been published, reflecting sustained institutional commitment to documenting and promoting elephant conservation efforts nationwide. Through this quarterly publication, Project Elephant has established Trumpet as an important knowledge repository and outreach tool, contributing meaningfully to the long-term conservation and management of elephants in India.



27 launch of MEE for all elephant reserves

The Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) framework for Elephant Reserves (ERs) in India was officially launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) in April 2023 as a strategic initiative to strengthen elephant conservation and management across the country. Prior to its national rollout, a pilot MEE was conducted in four representative elephant reserves namely Shivalik, Kaziranga–Karbi Anglong, Mayurbhanj, and Nilgiri to refine indicators and assess on-ground applicability.

The primary objective of the MEE framework is to enhance landscape-level management of elephants across shared and interconnected landscapes, recognizing that elephant conservation extends beyond administrative boundaries of individual reserves. The framework seeks to standardize elephant-specific management practices, identify conceptual, administrative, financial, and legal constraints, and systematically evaluate the effectiveness of planning, protection, habitat management, conflict mitigation, and stakeholder engagement within and across Elephant Reserves.

India currently has 33 notified Elephant Reserves across 14 states, covering approximately 80,778 km², established under Project Elephant, a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 1992. The MEE framework is structured around six core elements of protected area management and employs a 10-point Likert scale to ensure objective, comparable, and transparent assessment of management performance.

Building on insights from the pilot phase, discussions held in June 2023 proposed scaling up the MEE to all Elephant Reserves in India, with financial and technical support from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). The CAMPA have approved the funding of ₹2.29 crore and have released the first instalment to Elephant Cell, WII for initiation of MEE-ERs. The nationwide implementation of MEE is envisaged as a critical tool to promote adaptive management, facilitate cross-sectoral and inter-state coordination, disseminate best practices, and ultimately strengthen landscape-scale conservation planning for long-term elephant persistence and human–elephant coexistence across India.



PUSHPENDRA NATH DWIVEDI / BANDHAVGARH

28 launch of assessing elephant corridors, habitat utilization and conflict hotspots in the bandhavgarh region

In the last two decades there is a peak in human-elephant conflict in the Central Indian landscape. Historically, elephants were found in parts of northern Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh but by the early 20th century they were considered locally extinct in Madhya Pradesh. Due to various anthropogenic pressures elephants are forced to move towards further west. In 2018 a herd of 40 elephants from Chhattisgarh move to Madhya Pradesh. The herd initially entered through the panpatha buffer range exploring various parts of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve before settling down. Forest Department closely monitored this process forming, tracking teams to observe and manage the elephant's movement and behaviour. Elephant population in Bandhavgarh has increased to 60 by 2023 including five solitary bulls. In October 2024 a rare and disastrous incidents occurred adjacent to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh where ten wild elephants died after consuming Kodo millet (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*). Subsequent investigations revealed that the millet was contaminated with cyclopiazonic acid (CPA) a mycotoxin produced by fungal infestation. This incident highlights the growing environmental risks posed by mycotoxins particularly in the context of climate change which accelerates the proliferation of fungal pathogens in food crops. To study the habitat use, movement ecology and potential risks factors affecting the Asian elephant population in and around Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve as study has been designed by Elephant Cell, WII.

The objectives are as follows:

- To understand the habitat, use and movement ecology of Asian Elephants Bandhavgarh landscape.
- To map the corridor connectivity and factors influencing movement of elephant.
- Investigate environmental risks associated with Kodo millet cultivation.
- To investigate the patterns of human-elephant conflict and the factors influencing them.

The funding of ₹97,000,00 has been approved by NA CAMPA and the first instalment has been released to Elephant Cell, WII to initiate the project.

29 integrated conservation & management strategies for chirang-ripu elephant reserve: a multifaceted approach

Human–elephant conflict (HEC) represents socio-economic challenge in Assam, particularly within the Udalguri district of the Chirang–Ripu Elephant Reserve (CRER) landscape, which encompasses Manas National Park and its buffer zones. Accelerated land-use change, driven by agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, and settlement has intensified human–elephant interactions, leading to increased human casualties, crop loss, property damage and elephant mortality. The study was initiated to understand the spatial, demographic, and conflict data and analyze the drivers of HEC and to identify priority areas for mitigation and habitat restoration.

During the study it was found that Land-use and land-cover from 2015 to 2025 have substantial transformation in Udalguri, with a 28.54% decline in forest cover and a 58.32% increase in built-up areas, reflecting heightened anthropogenic pressure and fragmentation of elephant habitats. Demographic assessment through photographic identification documented 201 individual elephants in Udalguri and 159 in Manas National Park. As expected, both landscapes exhibited female-biased population structures; however, Udalguri lacked adult tuskers, with all recorded adult males being tuskless

Makhnas, while Manas maintained a more complete age–sex structure, including adult tuskers. Analysis of HEC records from 2011 to 2024 documented 221 human casualties, with incidents peaking during the monsoon and post-monsoon seasons and clustering along forest boundaries, especially near Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary and Khalingduar Reserved Forest. Crop raiding was prevalent, with over 90% of incidents occurring in paddy fields, and property damage primarily impacting residential structures. Elephant mortality analysis recorded 96 deaths, disproportionately affecting males and subadults, with most mortalities occurring near protected area edges, primarily due to electrocution and suspected retaliatory actions. Overall, the findings suggest that HEC in the CRER habitat fragmentation, seasonal crop availability, differences in demographic structures between core and buffer areas, and unsafe infrastructure. The results highlight the necessity for a landscape-level, science-based and community-integrated Conservation strategy that prioritizes habitat restoration, corridor protection, infrastructure safety, early-warning systems, and coordinated management between Manas National Park and adjacent buffer landscapes to support long-term coexistence.





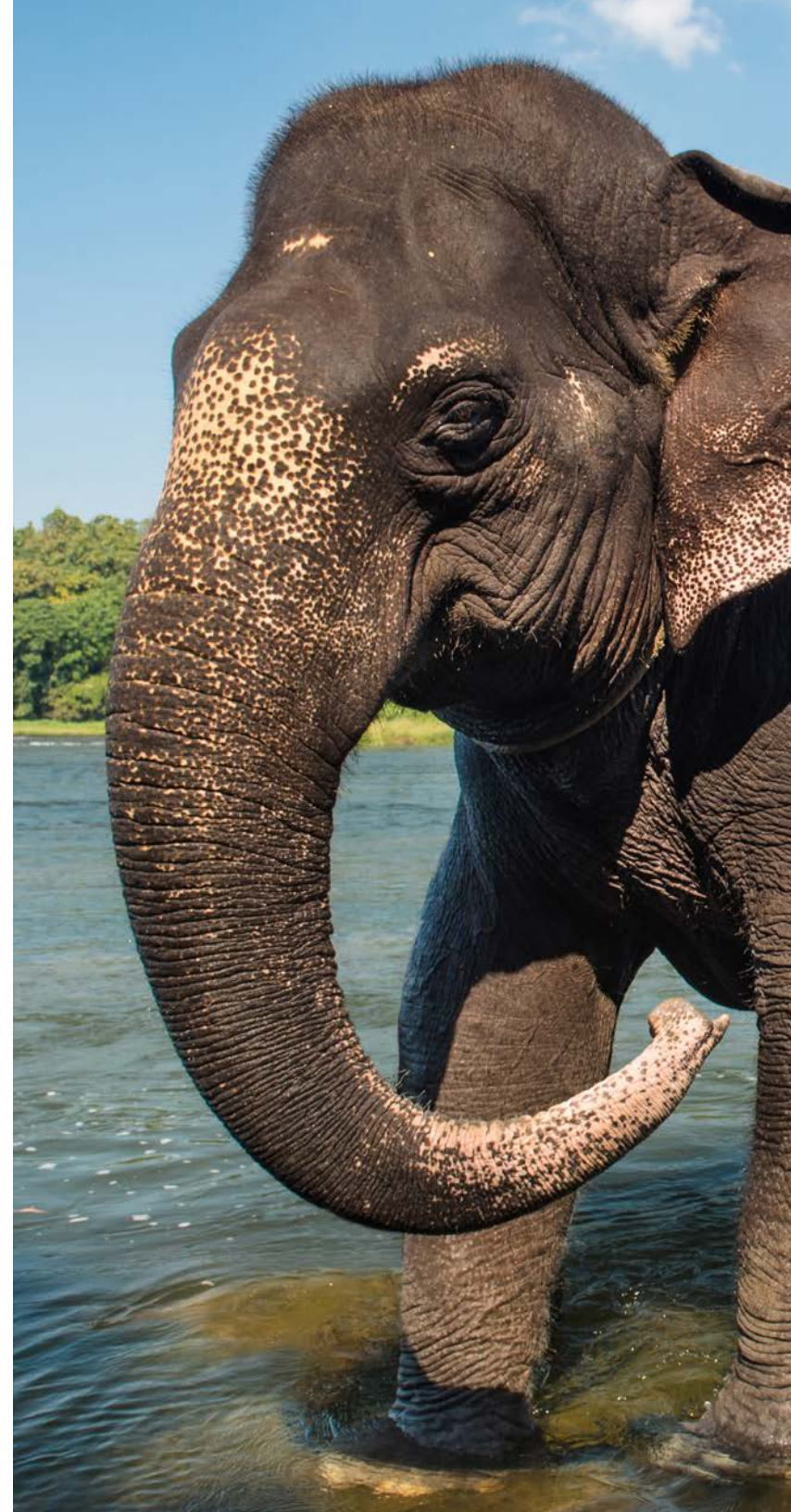
30 captive elephant database

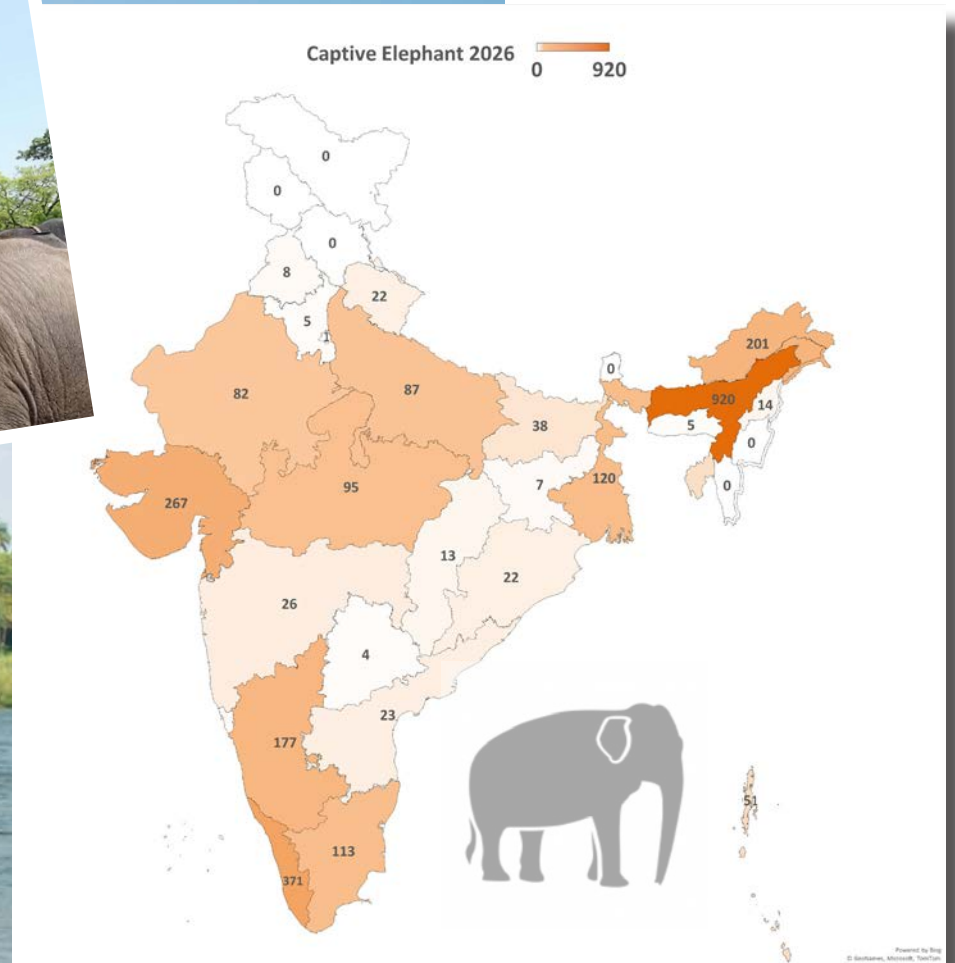
To create database of captive elephants a communication dated 12th June 2024 was sent to all State and Union Territory Governments requesting updated information on captive elephants in the prescribed format. The data received from various States/UTs were compiled and shared again with them for verification and confirmation. After incorporating the revised inputs, the updated national status of captive elephants has now been consolidated.

India currently has 2,725 captive elephants as on 21 January 2026, which is an increase of 50 individuals compared to the 2019 figure of 2,675. Kerala reported a substantial decline of 147 elephants, with numbers dropping from 518 in 2019 to 371. This reduction is largely attributed to deaths due to health-related issues. In contrast, Gujarat recorded the highest increase, rising from 52 elephants in 2019 to 267 at present, a 413% increase. Of these, 247 elephants are housed at the Radhe Krishna Temple Elephant Welfare Trust. Arunachal Pradesh also showed a notable rise of 84%, increasing from 109 to 201 elephants. Moderate increases were observed in Andhra Pradesh (+20), Assam (+15), and Maharashtra (+26). Meanwhile, declines were recorded in Rajasthan (-31), Bihar (-28), and Tamil Nadu (-25).

Ownership-wise Trends (2019 vs 2025)

There has been a significant shift in ownership patterns over the past six years. Elephants under private individuals have decreased sharply from 1,678 to 1,020 (a reduction of 658). Circus elephants have reduced from 47 to zero. Temple elephants have increased substantially from 96 to 551 (an increase of 455). The number of elephants with Forest Departments has remained relatively stable, decreasing slightly from 768 to 759. Zoos and Rehabilitation Centres together have shown a major increase, rising from 86 to 395 (an addition of 309 elephants). Of these 395 elephants currently under Zoos and Rehabilitation Centres, 63 are housed in recognized Zoos, while 332 are maintained in Rehabilitation Centres. These numbers may vary due to birth/mortality and transfer of elephants from one State to another. Therefore, States and UTs may maintain updated figures on the same day.





**India now proudly hosts roughly 60% of the global Asian elephant population,
a testament to the long-term ecological impact from the establishment
and protection of 33 Elephant Reserves across the country**

