

Regional Asian Elephant and Tiger Veterinary Workshop in Kerala, India

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Elephant and tiger veterinarians from around Asia participated in the Regional Asian Elephant and Tiger Veterinary Workshop held in Pookode, Kerala, India, from February 1-4, 2016. This workshop was jointly hosted by the Centre for Wildlife Studies, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Science University, and the Department of Forest and Wildlife, Government of Kerala. The workshop was supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Asian Elephant Conservation Fund in collaboration with Asian Elephant Support.

The Regional Asian Elephant and Tiger Veterinary Workshop continued the efforts of two earlier regional workshops hosted in Aceh, Sumatra-Indonesia in March 2012, and in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in March 2014. These workshops build local and regional capacity in elephant veterinary care, which improves the expertise needed for effective wildlife conservation in Asia.

The Kerala workshop included tiger health issues to broaden the scope of wildlife health and strengthen the capacity of field veterinarians

in range countries. Asian elephants and tigers are highly endangered and in threat of local extinction in some range countries. Veterinary expertise is important to conservation efforts, especially at the interface of wildlife, humans, and livestock, and for mitigating human-wildlife conflicts. The Regional Asian Elephant and Tiger Veterinary Workshop addressed wildlife health from the ecosystem perspective and discussed topics such as disease spill-over from humans and/or livestock to wildlife, emerging diseases and/or disease prevalence, as well as reducing stressors in the environment.

Evidence of emerging diseases in wildlife has already been established in Kerala. Furthermore, in the past two years, Kerala experienced more than 200 cases of elephant and tiger conflict incidents causing loss to human life, property, and agriculture; 44 of these incidents required health and veterinary expertise. Wildlife health studies have been ongoing in this region, and this workshop served as a catalyst for networking with the wider regional communities of wildlife health experts in Asia.





Presentations covered not only veterinary issues but also broader topics of human-wildlife conflicts, Asian elephant and tiger ecology and behaviour, and also introduced Siberian tiger health issues. The Regional Asian Elephant and Tiger Veterinary Workshop hosted almost 70 participants, including representatives from many of the Asian elephant and tiger range countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, as well as veterinarians from Great Britain, and U.S.

The workshop offered a field visit to a nearby protected area, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, which has wild populations of elephants and tigers. Additionally a Forest Department elephant camp is located in the reserve. Participants were able to view wild elephants during a drive through the Reserve. At the elephant camp, Forest Department staff discussed the camp elephant management and feeding strategies, as well as elephant health issues. This visit was a unique opportunity for participants to see the traditional use of Forest Department elephants in a protected area in India, and discuss the comprehensive veterinary program that the Department has in place for these working elephants.



These regional veterinary workshops underscore the importance of veterinary science for wild and captive elephant and for tiger conservation in Asian range countries. As a result of these three workshops, there is better communication amongst wildlife veterinarians in Asia, and the sharing of information and experiences has increased. Additionally several field course initiatives to continue practical training opportunities for wildlife veterinarians in Asia have resulted from these workshops.

