

## Editorial

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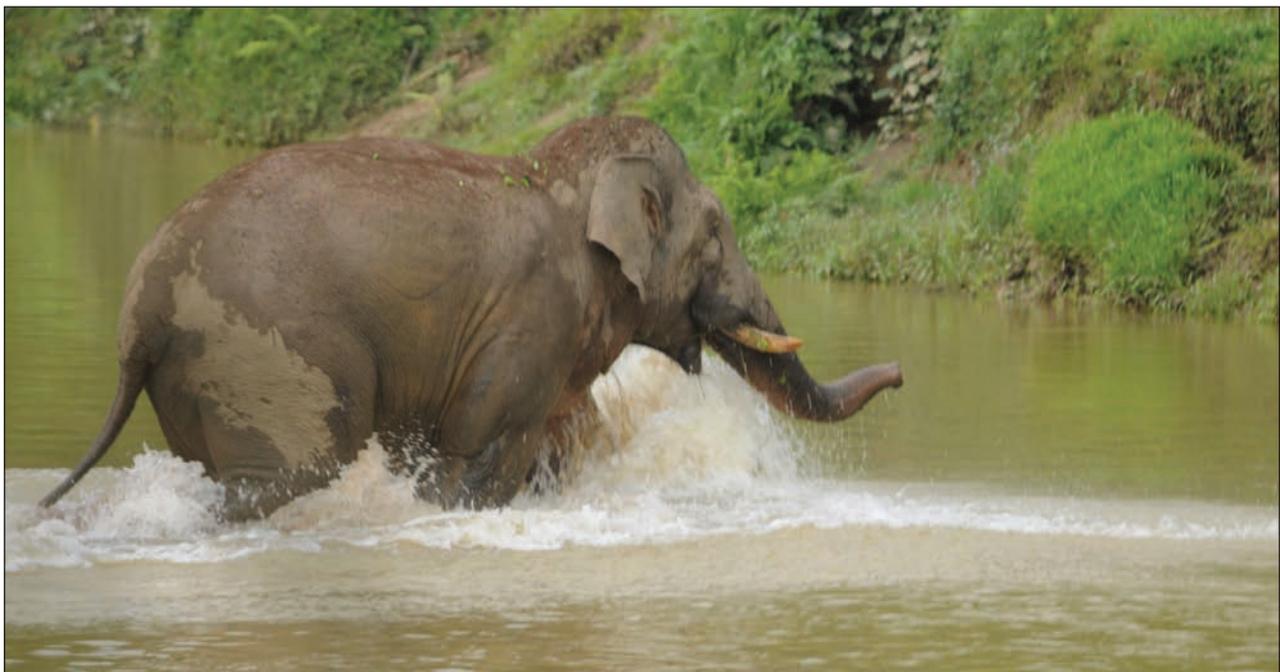
This journal, *Gajah*, is the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG)'s best asset. Through submitted reports, notes, and manuscripts, *Gajah* presents a broad array of views and knowledge, and offers input on a wide range of elephant conservation issues. *Gajah* addresses the most important reason for the existence of this group – sharing ideas, experiences, and challenges regarding elephant conservation.

Through this primary communication tool, the AsESG takes part in conservation education. Members of the AsESG have a responsibility to promote and support ongoing public education about elephant conservation by sharing information, creating awareness of problems and issues facing elephants, and encouraging advocacy. Is the AsESG membership truly capitalizing on its role in education, and has the effectiveness of conservation education been adequately assessed?

Due to the variety of conservation education efforts and the differences within environments implementing such programs, it would be

difficult to get a consensus response to the above questions. But one thing is clear; there is room for improvement and a need to expand the overall approach to education in the context of elephant conservation. Education and awareness programs are often treated as secondary issues in conservation work; yet effective education, especially in local communities where elephants are present, is one of the most important components of wildlife conservation.

Elephant conservation is not solely the responsibility of wildlife experts; a variety of skills are beneficial, as no single area of expertise can fully implement successful conservation work. Existing tools and knowledge should be used more effectively to address education as a significant facet of conservation. There are many ways to educate; contributing a manuscript to a journal such as *Gajah* is only one approach. Using opportunities for oral presentations, distributing pamphlets, or publishing posters are commonly used educational tools. Building capacity within local communities through various avenues of outreach and awareness is another essential aspect.



Wild elephant in Sampoenit, Aceh  
Photo by Mahdi Ismail

Conservation education should also target those people who directly work with captive elephants, as increased understanding of environmental management enables these people to better understand and support conservation actions. Other possible concepts, such as the creation of mentoring programs to support ongoing education at a grassroots level, are often overlooked; yet there is a real need to continuously challenge ourselves as conservationists and find ways to improve education programs if sustainable elephant conservation is to be effective.

In Asia, broad issues of elephant conservation (i.e. habitat loss, HEC) are common across all the range countries, yet cultural, religious, economic, and social differences exist from region to region, from country to country, and even within countries from a state or province to a village level. When we talk of educating local people about elephant conservation issues, we need to be aware of, and consider such variations because peoples' sensitivities of these issues and of elephants differ greatly. A better understanding of people's feelings, how they actually perceive elephants and wildlife in general, how these

perceptions affect interactions amongst their communities and between themselves and the surrounding environment, all help create more valuable education programs. Careful consideration of the individual environments will facilitate communication of appropriate messages and strengthen education efforts. Conservation education often does not reach the majority of local people who live with the threat of elephants in their daily lives, so efforts should increase to ensure that these people truly benefit from education and awareness programs.

Education work is ongoing, but approaches need to be periodically evaluated to ensure that every opportunity is leveraged, and that attitudinal and behavioral changes beneficial to elephant conservation are being shaped. As education is an important element of successful elephant conservation, the AsESG should constantly strive to better share information and experiences. *Gajah* is an existing tool that supports the AsESG's education efforts. Continuing to communicate your thoughts and achievements through *Gajah* is an effective step in improving conservation education.



Elephants in Tangkahan, North Sumatra  
Photo by Mahdi Ismail