



Elephant Working Group

2009 CBSG Annual Meeting, St. Louis, MO, USA

Participants

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Developing a framework for how captive elephant management can best serve conservation of the species

Elephant themed working groups were held at the annual CBSG meetings in 2004 and 2005. This year's working group reviewed suggestions from both of those groups, and discussed whether earlier recommendations had led to progress.

The discussion topic for the CBSG 2009 Elephant Working Group was introduced: agreeing on a better framework linking captive elephant management to the needs of conservation of the species. The unique situation of Asian elephants was also mentioned, with almost one third of the worldwide population in captivity and a majority of those animals managed in the Asian range countries. Discussions considered these range country facilities, and how these animals are able to serve the needs of conservation.

Initial discussions within the working group listed all the ways in which participants felt that captive elephant management serves conservation. Next, the group identified major threats to elephant conservation worldwide. Then participants agreed on the major "roadblocks" which hinder the ability to effectively leverage captive elephant management to support conservation. It was also noted that there was a need for improved communication from captive management facilities and from conservation representatives from elephant range states in Africa and Asia, and this working group did not have any such participants.

It was agreed that overall there should be a better message from captive management facilities, and that there is an urgent need for current global action plans and priorities for the conservation of Asian and African elephants.

The working group then focused on setting a Goal, Objectives, and Actions that can be carried out to effectively develop the framework linking captive elephant management and conservation of the species. The following describes the overarching goal agreed to by the working group participants, as well as objectives with proposed actions to achieve these objectives.

This group's goal is to ensure the conservation of elephant populations to ensure their survival in the wild.

It was agreed by the working group participants that Objectives and Actions should be prioritized on the basis of conservation urgency and needed expertise.

Build partnerships for elephant conservation

- Reduce distrust by getting the message out via increased communication such as hosting face-to-face meetings
- Provide training to field staff
- Capacity building and a special focus on younger generations
- Provide increased opportunities for personal contact (i.e. meetings, internships)
- Reach out and share information with the IUCN Elephant Specialist Groups
- Involve range-state partners in captive management planning

Maximize the use of captive elephant populations to leverage support for wild populations

- Link elephant exhibits and visitor programs to conservation projects on a long-term basis
- funding examples: Pledge a percentage of construction costs to conservation project;
- “conservation tax” per exhibited individual elephant, etc.
- Provide research opportunities
- Increase awareness and education, and promote the following concepts:
 1. captive facilities are clearing houses for elephant conservation information
 2. captive facilities inspire via detailed information about elephants (anatomy, physiology, human-animal connection, cognition, etc.)
 3. captive facilities provide a platform for partner organizations (NGOs, etc.)
 4. improved public awareness should lead to behavior change (i.e. “affective learning”) but needs to be monitored
 5. captive facilities can influence policy-makers
 6. the notion of elephants as umbrella species/ landscape architects – its protection helps other species
- Provide technical support
- Provide training (staff, veterinarians, etc.)
- Achieve high standards of captive management
- Identify innovative projects (ele-cam, collars, etc) that use both captive and wild elephants

Cooperation between captive and wild population management

- Identify strengths of captive and wild communities
- Manage captive and wild populations in range countries in an integral manner
- For example: registration/microchips; unifying administration
- Provide research opportunities
- Provide training (staff, veterinarians, etc.)
- Bank bio-samples

Identify priorities

- Identify which elephant populations need urgent action
- Research and raise awareness of population management, and population control
- Facilitate trans-boundary agreement and protection laws
- Solicit advice on priorities from both IUCN Elephant Specialist Groups

Maintain self-sustaining populations in representative habitats across the ranges

- Facilitate identification of genetic background of wild populations, especially fragmented populations
- Facilitate research into the correlation between genetics and habitat
- Facilitate research and conservation action into fragmented populations and improve their connectivity
- Facilitate restoration of degraded habitat

Manage HEC

- Educate and prevent conflict to minimize human and elephant fatalities
- Facilitate research into mitigation measures/compensation strategies
- Facilitate research into consequences of translocation

Save Habitats

- Facilitate action to set land/corridors aside for elephants
- Raise awareness about global consumption patterns (i.e. palm oil)
- Facilitate identification of home range size, habitat preferences, and carrying capacity
- Facilitate identification of long-term human use
- Facilitate restoration of habitat



Reduce/stop trade in illegal elephant products and live elephants

- Educate the public/consumer
- Support use of public relations/communications against poachers
- Improve tools to identify origin of ivory
- Promote effective registration to address live elephant trade
- Develop certification for elephants used in the tourist industry

Immediate Action Items

- Circulate discussion notes and draft report among working group participants
- Take report to conservation committee or population management committee of WAZA and to South and SE Asian Zoo Networks, and African Zoo Networks
- Request conservation priorities from IUCN Elephant Specialist Groups
- Request Bob Lacy (Chair of CBSG and Head of the SSC Sub-committee on Strategic Species Conservation Planning) to coordinate Strategic Plan for Species Conservation for Asian elephants, then African elephants
- Ask IEF or ISIS to host elephant web portal
- Host and support more face-to-face meetings, and establish a business model for affordable meetings

