



PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL ELEPHANT FOUNDATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Announcement of the 2006 Elephant Conservation and Research Funding Awards

Improving Livelihoods for Farmers Affected by Human-Elephant Conflict

Cambodia is host to two of the largest contiguous elephant habitats left in Asia. The Cardamom Mountains region & the Province of Monduliri are approximately 1 million ha of forested elephant habitat, presently undeveloped by people. While elephant population sizes are low (approximately 100 animals in each area), the potential for long term viability of large herds is extremely high, if poaching and habitat loss can be controlled. Though Cambodia has an impressive 53% forest cover, the human population growth rate of 2.7% puts the large forest areas under severe pressure to be replaced by agriculture and industry. Key government policies on land reform, relating to land tenure for small holdings, as well as guidance on human-wildlife conflict mitigation are not yet in place. This leaves a chaotic set of circumstances for forest-edge communities who are unable to absorb the impacts of elephant damage. This phase of this multi-year IEF supported elephant conservation program will conduct studies at human elephant conflict sites and provide mitigation methods to farmers such as noise systems, deterrent methods (scarecrows and hammocks with smell of perfume), chilli fences, chilli ropes, and chilli dung to demonstrate that there are many options to prevent elephants destroying crops. Education programs and strategies for alternate crops will also be studied and provided. For example, traditional Cambodian religion encourages farmers to grow bananas and sugarcane for people to offer to the Goddess Yey Mao, to protect them. This project educates the farmers on alternative crops less appealing to elephants. In 2005, a pilot site for growing chilli was established with harvests already being sold in tourist spots. However, in order to improve harvests to a level where there is sufficient chilli to provide an income, wells need to be constructed as rainfall in Cambodia is seasonal. Though expensive, wells will not only improve the agricultural yield, but improve living conditions for the very poor families in the area. Recently it was discovered that Taro, a tuber used in soups and deserts with its leaves fried as vegetables, appears to be unpalatable to elephants and brings a good price in the markets of Cambodia and Vietnam. This project will assess the suitability of planting this crop in human-elephant conflict (HEC) areas. This project will also manage and advise on HEC events, providing short term emergency advice, as well as longer term mitigation strategies. Local farmers will be provided assistance to prevent and actively deter elephants in a humane manner, and specific training will be given in early warning and inter-plantation contact systems, as well as compiling HEC event report forms for central database deposition. Printed t-shirts will be provided to members of these guarding groups, to ensure they feel like part of the team. This will be combined with simple awareness raising initiatives throughout the year for local farmers and their families.

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