



PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL ELEPHANT FOUNDATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Announcement of the 2006 Elephant Conservation and Research Funding Awards

Mahouts and Their Elephants Working as Conservation Response Units in Sumatra

The long-term conservation of the elephant in Sumatra requires that elephants and people co-exist with minimal conflict, otherwise demands for the removal of elephants will be politically difficult to ignore, resulting ultimately in the depletion of elephant populations on the island. The Conservation Response Unit (CRU) concept is founded on the belief that diversity is only secure when diverse conservation strategies are employed. The CRU model utilizes once neglected captive elephants and their mahouts for direct field based conservation interventions to support the conservation of wild elephants and their habitat, and achieve positive outcomes for both elephants and people. By creating this link, and ensuring that these elephants are seen as an important resource and doing positive deeds, it is expected that local communities, decision-makers and other stakeholders will recognize their contribution and hopefully focus greater attention on protecting Sumatran elephants, in the wild and in captivity. The CRU teams are composed of 14 captive elephants from two ECCs (Aceh and Seblat) and 14 of their mahouts, 14 government forest rangers, and 3 FFI conservation officers spread over three CRU posts placed in targeted working areas. The CRU project has 4 main objectives: 1) mitigating human-elephant conflict; 2) reducing wildlife crime activities in the important elephant habitat through forest patrol and monitoring; 3) raising awareness among local people of the importance of conserving elephants and their habitat; 4) establishing community-based ecotourism to ensure long-term CRU financial sustainability. Captive elephants play an important role by providing transportation during forest monitoring patrol activities, as a tool for gaining local community interest during awareness events, and driving away crop raiding wild elephants should conflict incidents arise. Mahouts, as part of the CRU team, not only take care of the elephants but are involved in all CRU activities and have gained training in wildlife observation techniques and basic use of navigation devices and mapping. Most of the CRU team members have little educational background, yet through a series of capacity building activities have been trained in assessing and selecting priority areas for CRU activities and field patrols, operating hand held GPS units, filling in standardized data-sheets for forest patrolling and conducting HEC assessments. This empowerment has provided a sense of dignity to the mahouts, a yet unexplored potential source of human resources working for field based conservation. Additional goals of the CRU in Bengkulu Province in 2006 are:

- to support the first mahout workshop to establish a communication forum and share knowledge amongst representative mahouts from each of the various camps in Sumatra
- to expand the protected area and establish a corridor to the Kerinci Seblat National Park. The proposed corridor will increase the protected forest area from 6865 ha. to 18.000 ha. Establishing a good management plan for the new proposed protected corridor and elephant camp forest has become a focus of the CRU work in this area.

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