



## PRESS RELEASE

### INTERNATIONAL ELEPHANT FOUNDATION

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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Announcement of the 2006 Elephant Conservation and Research Funding Awards

#### **Saving Elephants by Helping People: Developing a Sustainable Research Project for the Conservation of Elephants Integrated with the Restoration and Conservation of the Historic Somawathiya Chaitiya Temple Sustained by a Paying Volunteer Program**

This phase of this long-term IEF supported elephant conservation program focuses on the development of an integrative project for elephants/culture/nature conservation that takes into consideration the historic importance of the Somawathie Chaitiya Temple, which is nearly 2,100 years old. The Somawathiya Chaitiya National Park (SCNP) is situated in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka and is contiguous with the Flood Plains and Wasgamuwa National Parks to the south, and with the Trikonamadu Nature Reserve to the east, and the western side of the park provides a link to the Hurulu Forest Reserve, part of which is protected as a biosphere reserve. The area gets its name from the historic Buddhist temple – the Somawathie Chaitiya that is recorded to be 2,100 years old. The SCNP is 37,762 hectares and affords protection to a unique diversity of habitats consisting of riverine villus (natural water bodies) and flood plains, as well as to the largest concentration of elephants in Sri Lanka. The crucial components of the project will be to develop a partnership with the temple to help in its restoration, conduct an archeological dig in coordination with the Archeological Department and to initiate an elephant research and conservation program. The archaeological work will help to identify the ancient layout of the temple so that new constructions will not damage historic structures. It will also help to design new buildings that will reflect the historic time period as well as blend in with the natural environment. Due to the large number of elephants present, a solar powered electric fence to protect the human use areas without disrupting the natural wanderings of the elephants will have to be provided. It is also important to establish a project base in the temple premises to administer and manage the project and later to operate the paying volunteer program. By working in partnership with the temple to make sure the development plans for the temple do not conflict with the ecological needs and behavior of elephants and other wildlife in the area, the temple will provide access to a protected area that has been abandoned for 18 years due to past civil conflict. The conservation benefits to other the wildlife and flora will be far reaching since the park is rich in biodiversity. Most importantly this project offers an opportunity to develop a long-term plan for the conservation of the elephant by establishing innovative programs in an area that has a low human density and human-elephant conflict. This project could be a benchmark for conservation efforts being applied in an area before the usual processes that lead to problems for both humans and elephants.

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