



BECAUSE THEY
DON'T HAVE A VOICE!



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

Our inability to think beyond ourselves or to be able to cohabit with other life forms in what is patently a massive collaborative quest for survival is surely a malady that pervades the human soul.

- Dr. Lawrence Anthony, Author, The Elephant Whisperer, South African Conservationist

VFAE Charitable Tax ID: 47-3943896





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SANGITA IYER

VFAE Founding Executive Director

I am honoured to present the 2023 Annual Report for Voices for Asian Elephants (VFAE). I hope everyone reading can use this report as an opportunity to celebrate the tremendous impact we are making in the lives of the endangered Asian elephants of India and local communities, while also reflecting on ways we can grow.

- ▶ The year 2023 has been a golden year that has produced quantifiable outcomes pertaining to the exact number of Asian elephants we've been able to protect in India. We have also produced positive results in previous years, by creating attitude and behaviour shifts through traditional and non-traditional education and awareness programs, as well as empowering vulnerable people living on the forest fringes in West Bengal and Odisha. Additionally, aside from land purchase for rewilding and creating safe space for elephants in the southern Indian state of Kerala numerous legal battles have resulted in legislative changes and enforcements in this state.
- ▶ Nevertheless, the reality is, we've been unable to catch up with the rapid rate at which Asian elephants are being decimated in India. During the three years of COVID lockdown, poaching became rampant. Especially in the COVID aftermath, elephant carcasses are still being exhumed in the central Indian state of Odisha. During COVID, the number of elephant deaths caused by speeding train collisions also surged to an all-time high across India.
- ▶ In response to these alarming numbers of elephant deaths, VFAE moved swiftly, and launched urgent measures to implement cutting edge technologies. In particular, EleSense – an early warning sensor system has averted 637 elephant deaths on the West Bengal (WB) train tracks between January and November 2023. Additionally, in our efforts to prevent elephant electrocution, our tech team installed elephant friendly fencing in vulnerable areas, resulting in zero elephant deaths in the 3,000 sq.km area in northern WB. We also planted 20,000 saplings and created large waterholes, providing year-round resources for around 210+ elephants in core habitats of Odisha.
- ▶ Regardless, the race to save Asian elephants is ever urgent. During the last week of November 2023, three elephants, including a newborn baby elephant, were crushed and killed on the train tracks cutting through the Buxa Tiger Reserve of WB same spot where a pregnant elephant was killed in August 2023. It is here that our team is focused on expanding our EleSense project, even as we consider a multi-pronged approach to tackle electrocutions in the three states.
- ▶ We simply could not have accomplished all this without the support of our generous donors from around the world who realize that the loss of this magnificent animal will have a cascading effect globally, as these megaherbivores play a crucial role in mitigating climate change and in sustaining critical ecosystems.
- ▶ On behalf of our VFAE family – human and elephant – thank you for being a valued member of our family and joining us in our mission to improve the lives of the most vulnerable, yet ecologically significant animal – the endangered Asian elephants of India.

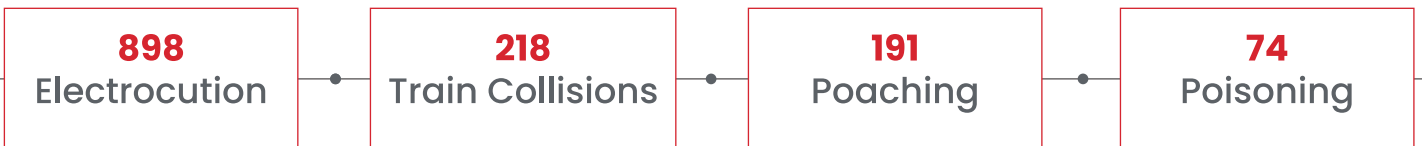


OUR MISSION

- ▶ **Voices for Asian Elephants (VFAE) mission is to protect endangered Asian elephants of India by preserving corridors for wild elephants and restoring their habitats, while providing basic survival tools to people living on the forest fringes. We alleviate human elephant conflict, fostering a peaceful coexistence and preventing elephant capture, with the ultimate goal to abolish elephant captivity.**
- ▶ **Peaceful coexistence is a cornerstone of our organization's mission. This is the key reason behind so many of our projects involving strong elements of community education and awareness raising. We take great efforts to ensure that our projects' mission can sustain in the long-term. The thriving of India's elephants depends on reacquainting our people with the sustainability ethic that originated here, something we have moved away from in recent times.**
- ▶ **While we are excited about the potential for technology-driven conservation efforts, we also remain firm in our commitment to people.**
- ▶ **Our Vision is to create sustainable human communities by caring for and protecting the endangered Asian elephants of India.**

THREATS FACING ASIAN ELEPHANTS

1,381 Unnatural Elephant Deaths (2009-2023)



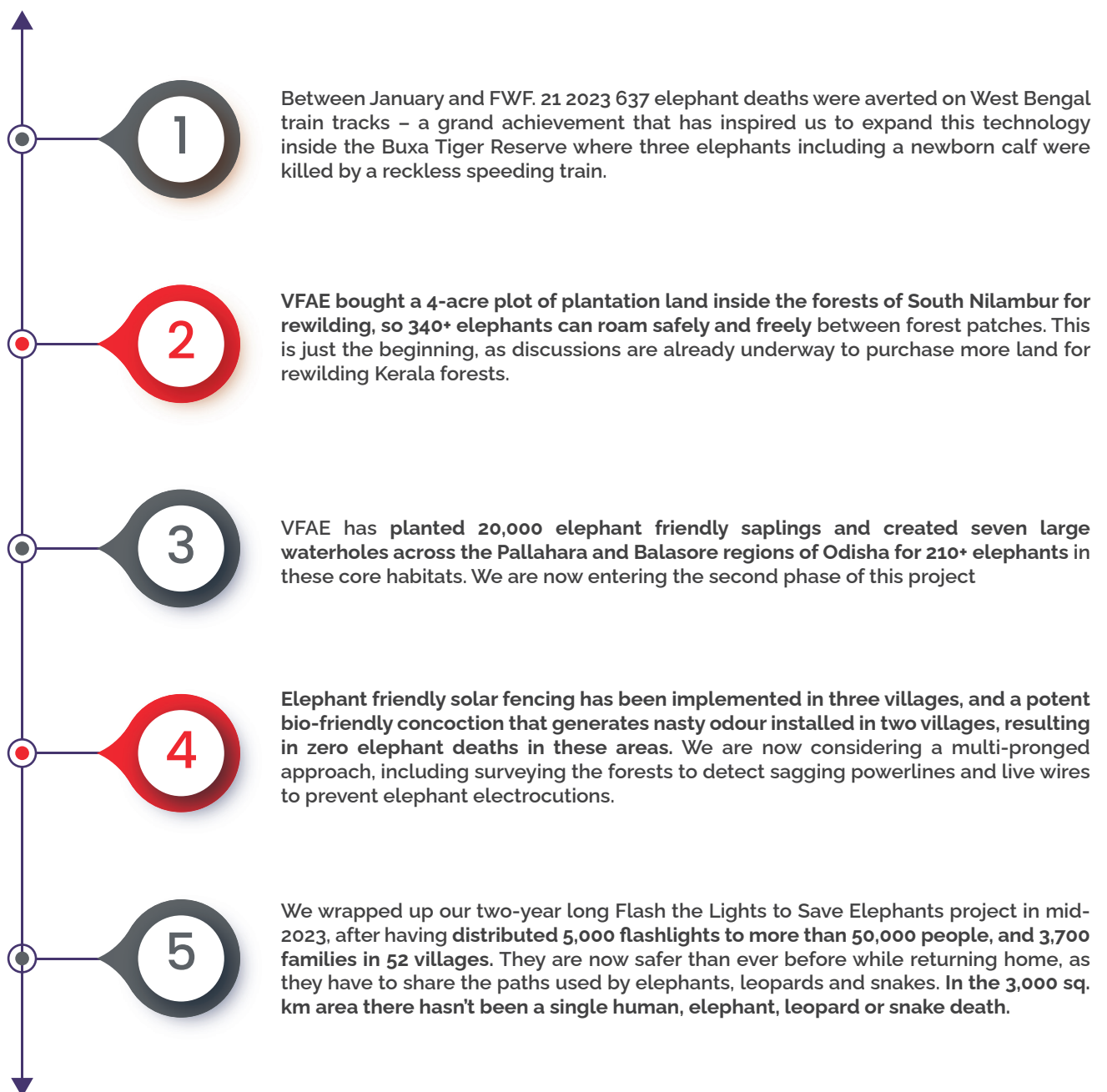
100 Elephants Electrocuted (2022-2023)





The year 2023 has been monumental in terms of scope and scale of quantifiable outcomes, while engaging tribal community – critical to the survival of elephants and people impacted by elephants. Technology is certainly critical to tackling challenges caused in a modernized India, while at the same time, common sense tools such as flashlights are proving to be life-saving devices for people and elephants. Reclaiming and rewilding the forest land of the southern Indian state of Kerala that were sold to plantation owners is a unique project that the state government has undertaken, and it has been a privilege to be a key partner in this endeavour.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE TANGIBLE OUTCOMES IN 2023:





OUR IMPACT AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

VFAE works tirelessly to accomplish its mission of protecting the Asian elephant population in India through a multifaceted series of projects, in which we partner with grassroots organizations, tribal people, and state governments. Our multi-pronged approach of preserving Asian elephants, using a range of creative strategies is producing positive results.

- ▶ **Preserving Elephant Corridors:** After four years of patient and diligent collaboration, strategic planning and fundraising, **VFAE purchased four acres of plantation land from private owners for rewilding the South Nilambur forest of Kerala. The area forms part of the Nilambur Elephant Reserve and houses around 340 elephants, tigers, and leopards.** This rare public, governmental and nongovernmental partnership exemplifies VFAE's inclusive and collaborative approach to conservation. The story has garnered media coverage that can be found here: <https://www.VFAE.org/news-coverage>
- ▶ **Reducing Train Collisions:** With the support of foundation grants and private donors, and in collaboration with local partners and the West Bengal Forest and Railway departments, an early warning system EleSense was piloted in five separate locations to alert train drivers of elephant presence near the railway tracks. **Between January 1 and December 21, 2023, the warning system detected 637 elephants, potentially averting as many accidents.** We are now working to install EleSense in other vulnerable areas as well. The story has also received wide media coverage that can be found here: <https://www.VFAE.org/news-coverage>
- ▶ **Preventing Electrocuting Deaths:** Electrocuting is the leading cause of death for Asian elephants in India. In partnership with Nature Mates and SNAP Foundation, **VFAE replaced illegal electric fencing in West Bengal with biofriendly repellent fences and elephant friendly solar fencing, fully averting crop raids** in the two villages, and we are now expanding bio friendly fencing to a third village. We had installed solar fencing in three villages, while conducting community outreach and awareness campaigns. **This has significantly reduced human elephant conflict (HEC) with no elephant or human deaths in the area.** Given the outstanding success of the solar fencing, the West Bengal Forest Department has asked VFAE to expand the project to additional villages.
- ▶ **Preserving Habitat and Food Sources:** In partnership with Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) and Paribartan, VFAE has **grown and transplanted thousands of elephant-friendly saplings and created large water holes in an elephant habitat adjacent to an existing corridor**, in our efforts to create a forest rich in biodiversity and provide water for Odisha elephants. A total of 25,000 saplings were reared, with 90% surviving in their transplanted locations.
- ▶ **Preventing Accidental Nighttime Encounters:** In partnership with Nature Mates India, **VFAE distributed solar rechargeable flashlights across 52 villages** and tea plantations in West Bengal, while also conducting capacity building programs for villagers on avoiding unintentional nighttime encounters with elephants. **More than 3700 families have benefitted so far, impacting nearly 50,000 vulnerable people. To date, there have been no human or elephant deaths in the project area**, as villagers are consistently employing their flashlights at night. As an additional benefit, human deaths from snakebites have also decreased, **in turn resulting a reduction in the killing of snakes** in retribution.
- ▶ **Reducing Traffic Collisions:** VFAE partnered with Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) to **install large reflective billboards warning of highway elephant crossings in Odisha state.** In addition, we have collaborated with Paribartan, another local NGO, to **install laser devices that detect elephants trying to cross the road and trigger brightly flashing red lights and loud sirens.** This project has been embraced by the state forest authorities and received substantial publicity in national and regional newspapers.



OUR IMPACT AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ▶ **Saving Elephants from Abandoned Wells of Odisha:** Around 70 elephants, including babies, fell into open wells, killing many of them. VFAE, in partnership with WPSI, employed tribal people to build and install 100 T-shaped barricades around the open wells, saving many elephants
- ▶ **Advocacy for elephants and Public Outreach: Public Outreach:** In August 2023, Executive Director Sangita Iyer rang the closing bell at NASDAQ on World Elephant Day; addressed members of the UK Parliament the plight of Asian elephants, with MP Henry Smith writing a letter to India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi; she appeared on Good Morning America; and has spoken at the South by Southwest Festival and Conference. VFAE works tirelessly to educate the public about the threats facing the endangered Asian elephants through summits, interviews and media appearances, and other public communications.
- ▶ **Youth Education and Empowerment:** There is no conservation education in schools. Instead, youth are being brainwashed to form 'elephant clubs' to promote the exploitation of elephants in the name of culture and religion. **In 2019, VFAE held a groundbreaking youth empowerment program involving nature immersion, slow pedagogy, films, traditional in-class sessions, and other innovative methods to engage the youth. One hundred Kerala Student Police Cadets graduated and earned the certificate of 'Elephant Ambassadors'.**
- ▶ **Collaboration Among Stakeholders:** The government ministries and relevant private stakeholders, such as electrical companies and railways, work in silos, totally unaware of the unprecedented elephant deaths caused by train collisions and sagging wires resulting from poor maintenance. In collaboration with the Kerala Forest Department, VFAE brought government ministries and relevant stakeholders, such as the railways, electrical companies and policy makers under one roof for the first time, to ensure that legislative changes are holistic, and well informed, reflecting the welfare of people and elephants.
- ▶ **GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency:** VFAE has received this prestigious recognition for five consecutive years (2018 to 2023) after rigorous vetting of standards for trust and community support. In addition, the Global Giving Foundation has awarded VFAE the "Vetted" and "Top Ranked" status.

We have come a long way in five short years since the activation of VFAE. But none of this would have been possible without the support of our generous donors, volunteers and Board of Directors. Everyone enthusiastically supports our projects, as they are designed with inclusivity of local people!!





WHAT DONORS SAY ABOUT VFAE



"Samuel Beckett wrote- "In the landscape of extinction, precision is next to godliness."
Voices for Asian Elephants (VFAE) is a powerful and impactful organization, working on the precision of saving the endangered Asian elephants in India. It isn't easy but their multi-prong approach has already saved hundreds of elephants across the northern and southern landscapes of India. Buying land for rewilding creates safe passage between forest patches, necessary for their survival. VFAE's invention of the cutting edge EleSense technology is preventing elephants from dying in train collisions. The outreach programs using awareness and education through films and books is creating attitude shifts. We cannot afford to lose the elephants of the world! It would be a colossal tragedy with cascading effects on the entire planet's ecosystems."

Patty Shenker,
a life-long animal advocate and a staunch supporter of VFAE since 2016



"VFAE states their mission, intent, goals well & with clarity of structure and they follow through. VFAE Founder, staff/ volunteers are of stellar character. Projects are strategic to the survival of Elephants & are successful. I've been following the situations regarding Elephants over 30 years, especially in Asia & specifically regarding India. The difficulties, complications involved in getting things accomplished there are layered. Knowing this, and that they have earned the Platinum Seal of Transparency, I have faith and trust in VFAE with my donation money given."

Dolores Whitley,
elephant advocate and a staunch, supporting VFAE since 2016



"The world, especially our precious elephant kingdom, is so incredibly fortunate to have a proactive and strategic organization like Voices for Asian Elephants (VFAE), lead by a passionate warrior, Sangita Iyer, and her dynamic team. If only we had more of you, our sweet, majestic elephants would no longer be tortured and in pain, but rather free, and at peace. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts, for yours. Many auspicious blessings upon you and may Ganesha remain by your side."

Kathy Flora Treat,
Passionate Elephant Advocate, donating since 2018



"I began donating a few years back, when I became aware of Voices for Asian Elephants' (VFAE) focus on practical solutions that, with financing and cooperation, could be achievable and sustainable. From the flashlight and EleSense programs providing safe passage, to the purchasing of land for rewilding, I have seen VFAE's ideas come to fruition and succeed. And although I am halfway around the world, I feel that the money I am able to give is already making a difference in the lives of India's elephants. I look forward to being part of VFAE's many successes yet to come. I am grateful for VFAE Founder, Sangita Iyer's passion, tireless dedication and real time solutions toward making this world a safer place for these magnificent beings."

Elizabeth Palmer,
Passionate Elephant Advocate, donating since 2019



PROJECT 1: ELESENSE, SAVING ELEPHANTS FROM DEADLY TRAIN TRACKS:

Challenge

West Bengal (WB), with nearly 100 million people is the 4th most densely populated state in India and has the 2nd largest number of elephant deaths on train tracks. In the last week of November 2023, three elephants were mowed down by a speeding train inside the Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) and in August 2023 a pregnant elephant was killed on the same tracks that cuts through BTR. In another tragedy in 2010, seven elephants were crushed by a speeding train. Reckless encroachment, including train tracks, highways and other infrastructure cut through migratory routes, killing scores of elephants every year.

Solution

Our Phase-1 implementation of **EleSense technology, averted exactly 586 elephant deaths between January and November 2023.** EleSense is a state-of-the-art early warning sensor system that alerts train drivers of elephant presence, leaving enough time for the speeding train to apply the brakes and stop. When an elephant is within 750 meters of the sensor, the alarm is triggered, cautioning the railway authorities, while warning the elephants to prevent them from getting closer to the tracks.

Long-Term Impact

This sensor-based early warning system is outfitted with siren, light and GPS modules, designed by indigenous tech experts familiar with the terrain. The system is resistant to damage from the elements and wildlife, thus cutting down maintenance costs, and protecting the capital investment. It is also safe for elephants. VFAE partners with Nature Mates, SNAP Foundation, and WB government agencies.



Outcomes

- ▶ Averted a total of 637 elephant deaths between Jan. & Sept 13, 2023 as follows:
 - Averted **51** elephant deaths Oct 31 - Dec 21, 2023
 - Averted **114** elephant deaths Sept 13 – Oct 31, 2023
 - Averted **214** elephant deaths July 13 - Sept. 13, 2023
 - Averted **130** elephant deaths May 21 – July 12, 2023
 - Averted **40** elephant deaths April 10 – May 21, 2023
 - Averted **16** elephant deaths Feb 16 – April 9, 2023
 - Averted **82** elephant deaths Jan 1 – Feb 15 2023

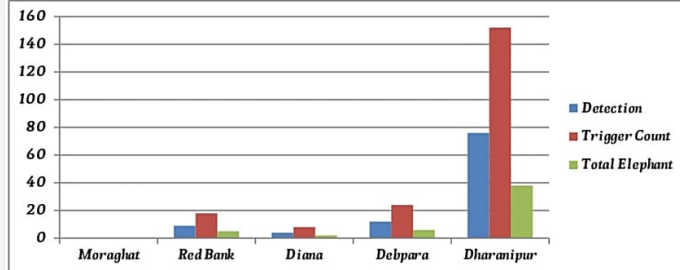
In the ensuing two pages, we present data, graphics, and map of elephant movements in specific regions of WB, as documented by VFAE team on the ground.





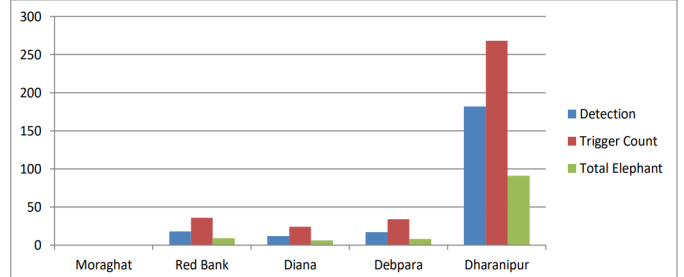
Elephant Detection by Elesense (1st November to 21st December, 2023)

Area	Detection	Trigger Count	Total Elephant
Moraghat	0	0	0
Red Bank	9	18	5
Diana	4	8	2
Debpapa	12	24	6
Dharanipur	76	152	38

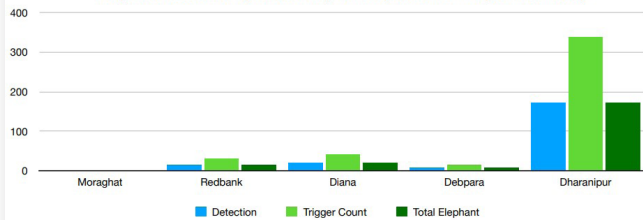


Elephant Detection by Elesense (13th September to 31st October, 2023)

Area	Detection	Trigger Count	Total Elephant	Remarks
Moraghat	0	0	0	
Red Bank	18	36	9	CR-RPT (9)
Diana	12	24	6	CR-RPT (6)
Debpapa	17	34	8	CR-RPT (8)
Dharanipur	182	268	91	CR-PR (88), CR-RPT (3)



Elephant Detection by Elesense (13th July 2023-13th September 2023)



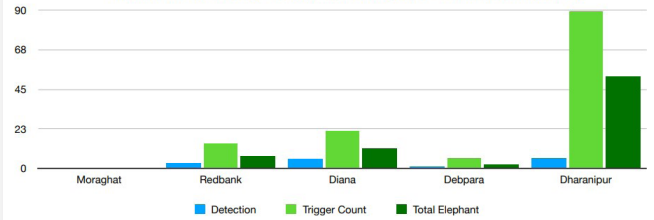
Data Table

Area	Detection	Trigger Count	Total Elephant	Remarks
Moraghat	0	0	0	
Redbank	16	32	16	CR-RPT (14), CR-PR (2)
Diana	21	42	21	CR-RPT (21)
Debpapa	7	14	7	CR-RPT (7)
Dharanipur	170	338	170	CR-RPT (14), CR-PR (156)

CR=Crossed, CR-RPT=Crossed Repeat, CR-PR=Crossed Parallel

Elesense Detection Map-NFR-NB-13th July-13th September 2023

Elephant Detection by Elesense (21st May 2023-12th July 2023)



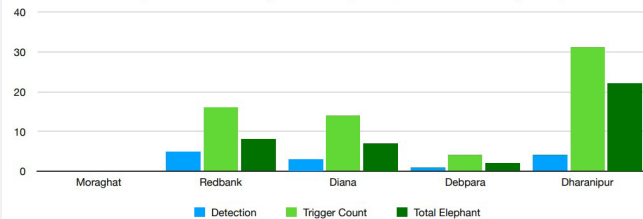
Data Table

Area	Detection	Trigger Count	Total Elephant	Remarks
Moraghat	0	0	0	
Redbank	3	14	7	CR-RPT (12), CR-PR (2)
Diana	5	21	11	CR-RPT
Debpapa	1	6	2	CR-RPT
Dharanipur	6	89	52	CR-RPT (37), CR-PR (52)

CR=Crossed, CR-RPT=Crossed Repeat, CR-PR=Crossed Parallel

Elesense Detection Map-NFR-NB-21st May-12th July 2023

Elephant Detection by Elesense (10th April 2023-21st May 2023)

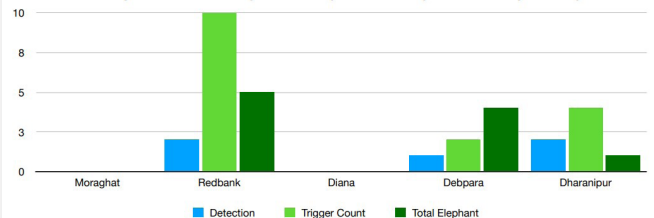


Data Table

Area	Detection	Trigger Count	Total Elephant	Remarks
Moraghat	0	0	0	
Redbank	5	16	8	CR-RPT (14), CR-PR (2)
Diana	3	14	7	CR-RPT
Debpapa	1	4	2	CR-RPT
Dharanipur	4	31	22	CR-RPT (9), CR-PR (13)

CR=Crossed, CR-RPT=Crossed Repeat, CR-PR=Crossed Parallel

Elephant Detection by Elesense (15th February 2023-10th April 2023)



Data Table

Area	Detection	Trigger Count	Total Elephant	Remarks
Moraghat	0	0	0	
Redbank	2	10	5	CR-RPT
Diana	0	0	0	
Debpapa	1	2	4	CR-RPT
Dharanipur	2	4	1	Kunki Testing

CR=Crossed, CR-RPT=Crossed Repeat, CR-PR=Crossed Parallel

Elesense Detection Map-NFR-NB-15th February 2023-10th April 2023



PROJECT 2: SAVING ELEPHANTS FROM ELECTROCUTION

Challenge

Asian elephants are endangered, with less than 40,000 remaining worldwide, around 25,000 of them in India. In West Bengal (WB) state alone, 5-10 elephants die each year from electrocutions. While some deaths are caused by sagging wires, deliberate electrocutions are surging rapidly. Farmers are protecting crops using illegal high voltage electric fences. Beehive fencing is unsuitable for this place, as the annual rainfall averages 3500mm.

Solution

We adopted a multi-pronged approach. The first phase entailed installation of low-cost, reusable solar fencing, designed to be easily set up and dismantled after the harvest season. However, the farmers maintain the fencing year-round, deterring elephants from entering villages and farmland, thus averting tragedies. We had also introduced a biofriendly formula emanating a potent odour in two villages. This cost-effective fencing is now being implemented in other villages too. Community outreach to educate landowners and farmers is critical, stressing the need to protect elephants and humans, and the legal ramifications of installing high-voltage fencing. Nature Mates and SNAP Foundation are our local partners.

Long-Term Impact

By installing elephant-friendly fencing, we show caring and concern for the villagers, which is fostering compassion in their minds and hearts, inspiring them to coexist harmoniously. This is crucial as food resources are rapidly dwindling, and competition for space will only intensify the conflict, as human population is the most densely populated in the world.





Outcomes

- VFAE has installed elephant friendly fencing in W. Bengal villages – 3rd phase in 2023
- Two villages used chilly, garlic, ginger, cow dung formula (VFAE obtained from Africa)
- One village installed the traditional galvanized wires – no barbed wired fencing
- Collaborating with SNAP Foundation & Nature Mates
- **No elephant deaths in the areas with these fences**
- The greatest problem is the sagging wires that runs through the forest. Our team is now involved in foot patrolling in order to detect live wires and report to the authorities





Cooking concoction that emanates potent odour to deter elephants



Awareness & Outreach programs in collaboration with Forest Dept.



Elephants use tea plantation as a corridor between forest patches



PROJECT 3: FLASH THE LIGHTS TO SAVE ELEPHANTS OF INDIA

Challenge

Asian elephants are endangered with less than 40,000 remaining on the planet, and approximately 25,000 of them in India. There are 90 million people in W. Bengal, with 700 of them crammed into every SQ. Kilometer. As elephant habitats have been decimated due to reckless land use, the state's 800 odd wild elephants are forced to range outside the National Parks, and share 80% of the land mass with humans. This has intensified conflicts, resulting in approx. 40 human and 6-10 elephant deaths per year.

Solution

Our research indicates that tragedies occur when people and elephants are startled by each other in the dark. But poor and disadvantaged villagers can't even afford simple safety tools like flashlights, which can alert people and wildlife of each other's presence, and create safer shared spaces, helping prevent tragedies. Flashlights, along with education and basic resources is inspiring villagers to implement austere safety measures, fostering a peaceful coexistence with elephants. **VFAE distributed 5000 flashlights in 50+ villages in 2022-2023, benefiting more than 50,000+ people and 800+ elephants.**

Long-Term Impact

Flashlights are but a small piece of the larger pie, in demonstrating that we care about people and elephants. By providing basic necessities, we can foster compassion for elephants, and create a harmonious coexistence. This is crucial, as conflict is expected to intensify with India being the most densely populated country on the planet. Nature Mates, our partner in India, identified villages around the Gorumara tea plantation landscape for this project.

Outcomes

- No human casualty caused by elephants in any of the project village/tea plantations after the flashlight distribution and awareness sessions
- No elephant electrocution case in the 50+ villages
- Use of flashlights has reduced accidental snakebites
- More than 35 local ambassadors ensure proper usage of flashlights by local people
- Ambassadors report that local people are using flashlights regularly after dusk settles



Distributed 5,000 flashlights to around 50,000 people in 50+ villages





REWILDING PLANTATIONS INSIDE THE FORESTS

Challenge

In a critical elephant habitat, there are rubber & banana plantations inside the forests that are blocking the elephant migratory pathways. Kerala has less than 3,000 elephants, spread across 4 ranges - part of Western Ghats. It's among the top 10 global biodiversity hotspots. Nilambur – the Valley of Biodiversity, in Malappuram district, is the focal point of this project. Habitat loss caused by human encroachment is pushing elephants into human dwellings, leading to conflict and senseless deaths – human and elephant. Around 600 tribal people live on the forest fringes, and are encroaching the forests to extract resources.

Solution

OVFAE partnered with Kerala Forest Department (KFD) to buy private land from plantation owners and return it to KFD for rewilding. Funds were raised to buy a 2-acre plot of land, as demand for land is high! However, KFD negotiated land value, including crop productivity, allowing us to buy 4-acres of land from plantation owners inside the South Nilambur forests.

Long-Term Impact

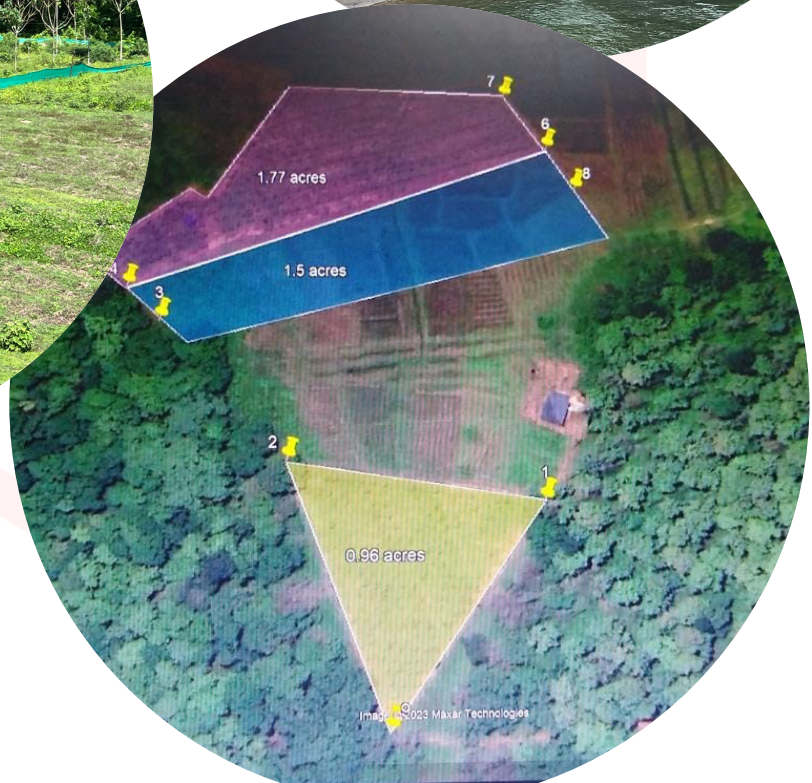
The phase-by-phase land purchase in Nilambur will increase landscape connectivity and facilitate elephant movements between forest patches, thus minimizing the risk of inbreeding and ensuring long-term species survival. Securing corridors that elephants have been traditionally using will also protect elephants and prevent conflict. This project will prevent capture of “rogue” elephants and “crop raiders”, allowing elephants to roam where they belong.

Outcomes

- With funds raised for 2-acres, KFD helped us purchase a 4-acre plot of land for rewilding
- **340+ elephants in South Nilambur can roam freely between two forest patches**
- Ceremonial launch took place in June 2023
- Electrical fencing and other barriers have been removed
- A small open well has been covered to ensure that elephants don't fall in



4-acre plot of land colored in blue, pink and yellow have been purchased. The image on the right shows the rubber plantations that currently exist on those two patches, which is currently being cleared for rewilding. The land in between is feral land and is rewilding naturally.





Our land is nestled in between these mountains, and elephants can visit this river safely





Employing tribal people to transport and transplant elephant friendly saplings in Odisha's fragmented forests





PROJECT 1: FOOD AND WATER FOR ODISHA'S FAMISHED ELEPHANTS

Challenge

Human-elephant conflict is escalating across the central Indian state of Odisha, with a whopping 947 elephant deaths in 10 years. The primary reason is the steep decline in elephant forage species and a lack of water in elephant habitats. Human population growth, demand for resources, relentless diversion of elephant habitats, loss of forest/canopy coverage, damage to corridor health due to mining, construction of canals, railway tracks and multi-lanes highways are all fragmenting the forests, driving elephants into villages.

Solution

The project's goal is to ensure availability of sufficient fodder and water in core elephant habitats/ corridors by growing nurseries of elephant favoured plants, such as Bauhinia vines, jackfruit, and mango, and monitoring them until maturity, while creating water bodies in core forests. Tribal people have been trained and employed, creating job opportunities and sustainable human communities. This will reduce human-elephant conflict, fostering compassion for elephants and harmonious/ peaceful coexistence.

Long-Term Impact

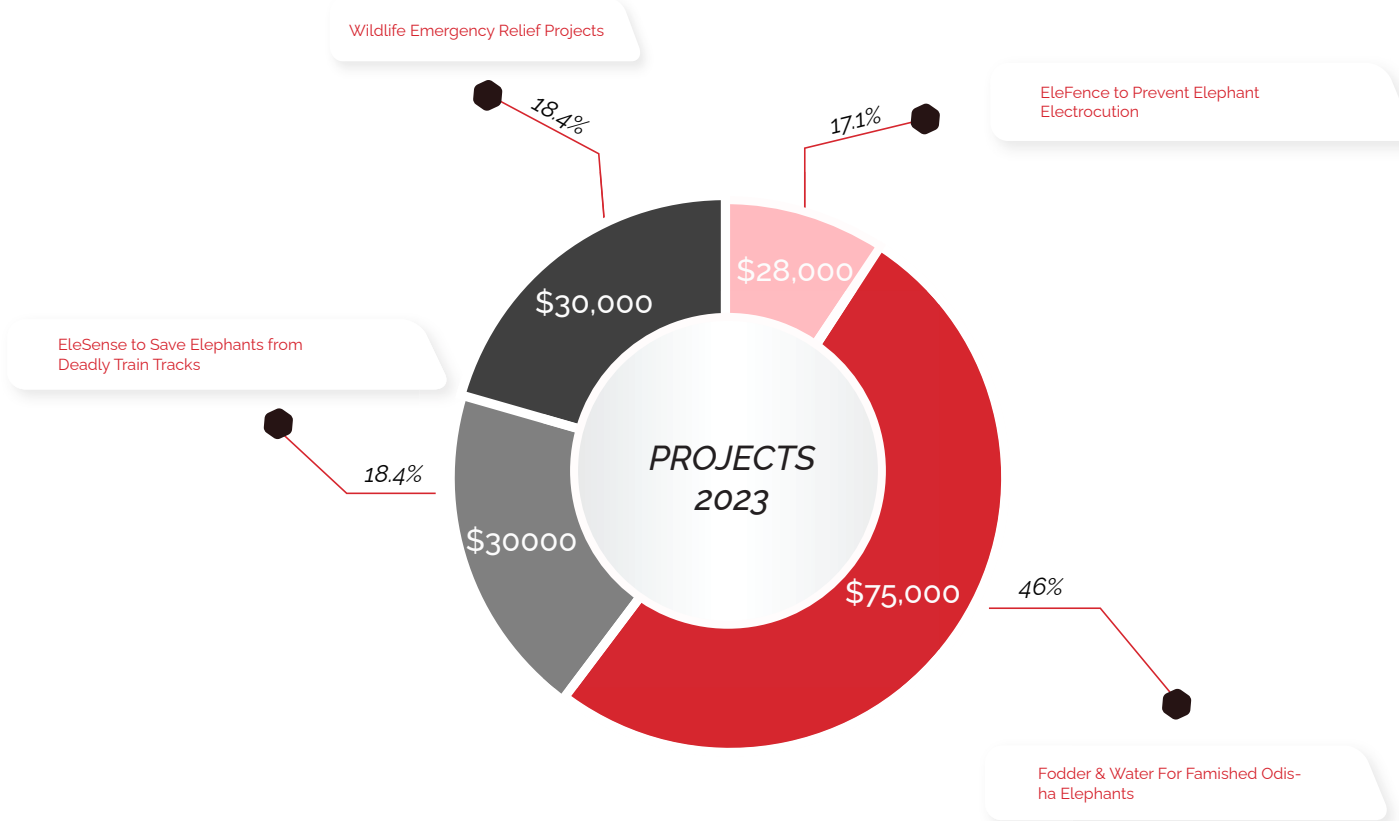
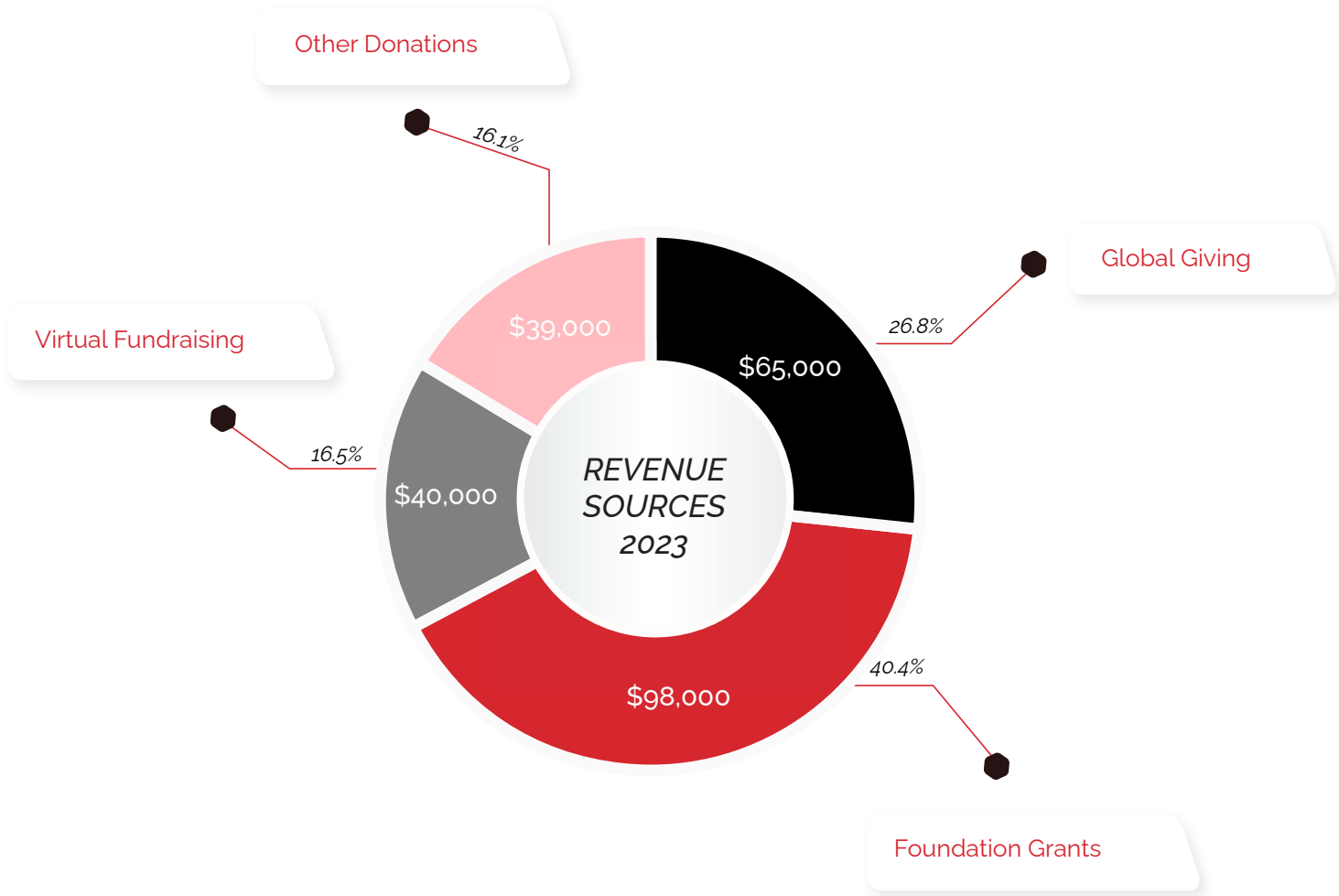
The proposed measures are a roadmap to protecting the endangered Asian elephants and their habitat/ corridor. In the long run this project will benefit elephants and humans - ecologically, culturally, and socio-economically, as people will begin to realize the value of protecting elephants. In collaboration with our local partner Paribartan we are involving villagers and forest officials to protect elephants and biodiversity, while creating livelihoods for people on the forest fringes.

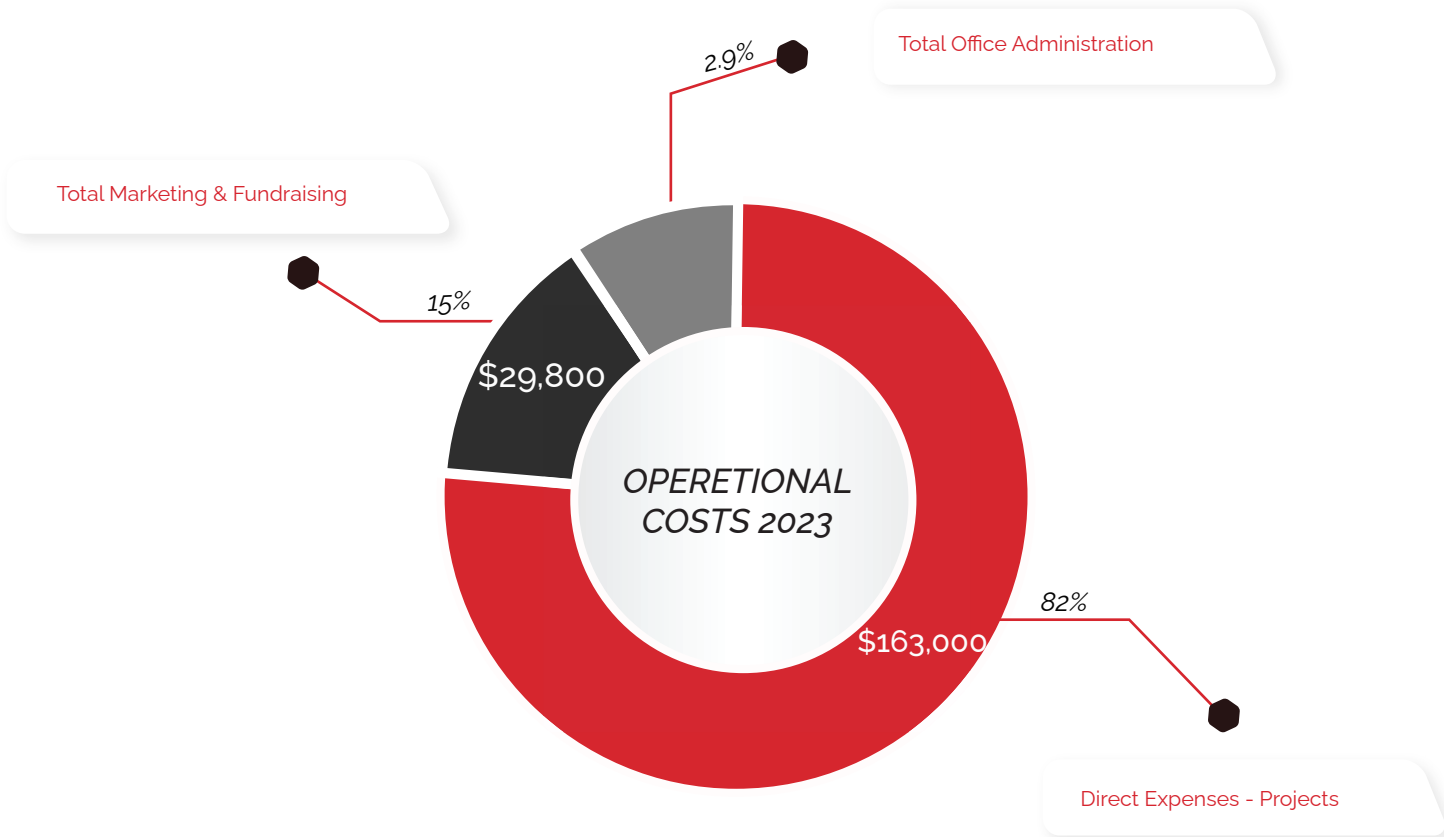




Employing tribal people to create waterholes for elephants in Odisha's fragmented forests









During the production of Gods in Shackles film, Founder of VFAE, Sangita Iyer, was deeply saddened by the plight of Kerala's festival elephants. She realized that there was a significant lack of awareness regarding the plight of captive elephants, and used her multiple-award-winning documentary, Gods in Shackles, as an educational tool to empower the people of India, particularly students, who hold the key to the future.

She soon realized that it was also necessary to implement tangible solutions to protect the endangered wild Asian elephants that were elevated to the status of India's Heritage Animal in 2010. This inspired her to create Voices for Asian Elephants (VFAE) and offer resources to the people of India, to protect wild elephants and their habitat, prevent human-elephant conflict, and stop capturing and exploiting elephants.

About VFAE

- VFAE is grounded in nonviolent thoughts, words, and deeds, openness to diverse worldviews and cultures, transparency, and science
- For us, humans are intrinsically compassionate and empathetic
- We believe if people are made aware of their actions, they can discern how the behaviors of every individual are impacting the world
- VFAE has been able to successfully launch and complete several projects, and receive awards of recognition within a short span of five years
- VFAE believes in frugal spending, allocating only 18% for administrative expenses

We dream of a day when elephants can roam the jungles of India freely, and captivity is a thing of the past.



Elephants are Emotional, sensitive and supremely intelligent

- They live in tight-knit and loving families, protecting their young fiercely
- Elephants respect the role of others, and their own within the herd
- Elephants are cooperative, and extremely disciplined
- Elephants thrive in a matriarchal society
- They grieve the loss of their own kind
- Extremely gentle and tolerant, even towards intruders
- Elephants are a cultural icon, revered around the world
- Elephants matter because they RESERVE the right to live on this planet as much as humans

Elephants are a Keystone species; Climate mitigators and ecologically indispensable

- Known as farmers of the earth, they disperse seeds in their dung
- Promote dense tree growth in forest ecosystems
- Trees give all living beings O₂ to breathe and absorb carbon-dioxide
- Trample trees and create pathways to waterholes for other animals
- Survival of many species depends on the survival of elephants





Why they are significant for our planet

Solar energy

Forest Elephant Carbon

All living things are made of carbon and thus serve as carbon reservoirs throughout their lifespans. The larger and more long-lived the animal, the more carbon is stored.

Forest elephants' fecal material fertilizes plants.

Forests sequester carbon by capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and transforming it into biomass through photosynthesis.

While moving through the forest and foraging for food, elephants reduce the density of smaller trees and plants, leading to an increase in the proportion of larger trees, which leads to more carbon being stored in the forest.

C Carbon

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The carbon value of a single forest elephant is \$1.75 million

How much is one forest elephant worth?

Major threats

Poaching
Centuries are required for forest elephants to recover to their historic population level of **1.1 million**, from their current population of **100,000**

Elephant Biomass Carbon
The amount of carbon on each elephant is equivalent to **2.64 metric tons** of carbon dioxide

2.64 TONNES

Elephant Forestry Increase
Each forest elephant can stimulate a net increase in carbon capture in central African rainforests of **9,000 metric tons** of carbon dioxide per km²

Major threats

Deforestation
Deforestation in Africa is happening **4x** faster than the global rate, resulting in an average loss roughly of **40,000** square kilometers per year

Source: African Wildlife Foundation 2015

Major threats

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FACTS ABOUT ASIAN ELEPHANTS

- ▶ Asian elephants are endangered (International Union for Conservation of Nature)
- ▶ Female elephants live in tight knit herds, and bond for life
- ▶ The gestation period of a cow elephant is 22 months
- ▶ They nurse babies until they turn 5-years-old
- ▶ They produce babies only once every 5-6 years
- ▶ Nannies, aunts and siblings nurture the babies
- ▶ Bull elephants are kicked out of the herd at around 11-years-old
- ▶ They form bachelor groups to support each other
- ▶ < 40,000 Asian elephants are alive on the planet
- ▶ India houses 60% of all Asian elephants (> 25,000), mostly in the Western Ghats
- ▶ In 2010 Elephants were declared India's Heritage & Schedule One Animal receiving highest degree of protection
- ▶ However, babies and sub-adults are still abducted from the wild, and their spirits broken to be trained and exploited in cultural festivals
- ▶ Elephants were used in wars and for logging, but have been replaced by sophisticated weapons and machines
- ▶ Female Asian elephants don't grow tusks, only bulls have tusks
- ▶ Bulls are slaughtered for ivory, captured and exploited in festivals, tourism & logging
- ▶ Only 4% of the elephant population in India are bull elephants
- ▶ This causes skewed gender ratio, threatening their long-term survival



THANK YOU DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Our alliance of chapters in three elephant range states continued to push forward, despite the extreme challenges created during the COVID era, the aftermath of which we still continue to tackle courageously. But we couldn't do this work without the support of generous donors and loyal supporters who believe in our mission and always respond to our call for help.

On behalf of all of us at Voices for Asian Elephants, thank you for being a valued member of our family and joining us in our mission to improve the lives of a most vulnerable species on earth – the endangered Asian elephants. Our sincere thanks to our monthly donors, your consistent donation helps us immensely. Many thanks also to supporters, volunteers, and our allies for helping protect the endangered Asian elephants of India, leaving behind a proud legacy and healthy planet for future generations.

We would like to give special thanks to our largest supporters and those who helped organize special events around the world. Thank you for helping us to make our achievements possible.

Charitable Organizations:

Action for Elephants UK	Animal Defense Partnership	Arthur. L & Elaine. J Foundation
Asia Wild	Future for Elephants	Gary Sambol Charity
The Elephant Initiative	Stews 4 Elephants Global	

Individuals:

Gerri Bukovinski	Richard Chiger	Satish Dharmaraj
David Ezekiel	Ganesh Hariharan	Gary Hodges
Joanne Ibbitson	Andrew Mackay	Elizabeth Palmer
Patty Shenker	Samantha Smith	Kathy Flora Treat
Luveen Wadhvani	Michael Wallace	Dolores Whitley
Sonja Wong		

If this is an area of concern and interest for you, we invite you to join forces with us in meaningful ways to bring about a healthy, flourishing, and vibrant world for the benefit of all life.



WHAT STAKEHOLDERS SAY ABOUT VFAE

We, from Future for Elephants, a German non-governmental organization based in Hamburg, take pride in our collaboration with Voices for the Asian Elephants (VFAE) towards the preservation and survival of Indian elephants. VFAE offers a comprehensive range of efficient, innovative, and cost-effective methods aimed at facilitating the existence of these magnificent creatures within India within India's last remaining natural habitats. Moreover, the involvement of local communities in numerous projects allows them to either supplement their income or directly benefit from various initiatives. Subsequently, this fosters an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence and the mitigation of human-elephant conflicts.



Numerous projects have already been successfully implemented, resulting in the salvation of numerous elephants' lives. If you harbor concern for the welfare of Indian elephants, supporting VFAE is an appropriate course of action to secure a future for these beloved creatures.

**-Heike Henderson-Altenstein and Brigitte Gaschnitz,
Future for Elephants**



It's been satisfying, enthralling and a lot of learning for us. We have always received the fund in due time and from inception to execution, the journey was very cooperative and assuring. In all the projects, the ground execution has yielded the desired result and helped in developing a strong bond with the local community and other stakeholders.

-Arjan Basu, Secretary, Nature Mates India



"Voices For Asian Elephants stays true to its name be it for wild elephants or captive populations in India. VFAE has been supporting a suite of evidence-based elephant conservation projects that addresses major threats like habitat fragmentation, railways collisions, and electrocution. Furthermore, VFAE also endeavours to raise the profile and challenges faced by Asian elephants to the wider community, thereby furthering the cause of their conservation through raising awareness and garnering support."

-Aritra Kshetry, Wildlife Biologist



"Actions speak louder than words" this is most certainly the case with VFAE! Their projects are inspiring, working towards a better future, for both elephants and the communities, they live in. Their goal to make a better world for elephants is relentless, despite the many challenges they face. It has been a pleasure to work with Sangita and her team and they have the continued support from Action for Elephants UK!"

-Action for Elephants U.K.



"VFAE disseminates funding on time, and our consultative approach regarding the projects have significantly benefited tribal communities and forest fringe village stakeholders, particularly the working men and women. The project focuses on restoring habitats with water bodies, fostering the conservation of Asian elephants, and promoting a long-term, peaceful coexistence between both species. This initiative aims to strengthen efforts in mitigating negative interactions between elephants and humans. Sangita Iyer's insights, and regular virtual meetings fuel timely completion of Asian elephant conservation project successfully. VFAE's prompt funding facilitates the timely achievement of planned deliverables, ensuring effective execution and adherence to project objectives."

-Subranshu Swain, Executive Director, Paribartan, Odisha



"India is a region where people and elephants have lived together in harmony for millennia. VFAE focuses on bringing in these local communities to drive conservation and reforestation, and we pride ourselves on fostering community leadership. Our projects have improved the prospects for India's elephants in temples and the wild, while propelling people in these landscapes towards better socioeconomic outcomes and active stewardship of this endangered iconic species. This is just the beginning for our projects on the ground. After the success of EleSense at keeping elephants safe from trains in West Bengal, we are strongly investing in multiple technology-driven initiatives. At the same time, we remain firm in our commitment to community-led conservation."

-Luveen Wadhvani, VFAE Technical Officer (Software Engineer)



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REPORT **END**