

Notes from the Chair IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group

Vivek Menon

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Dear members of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group

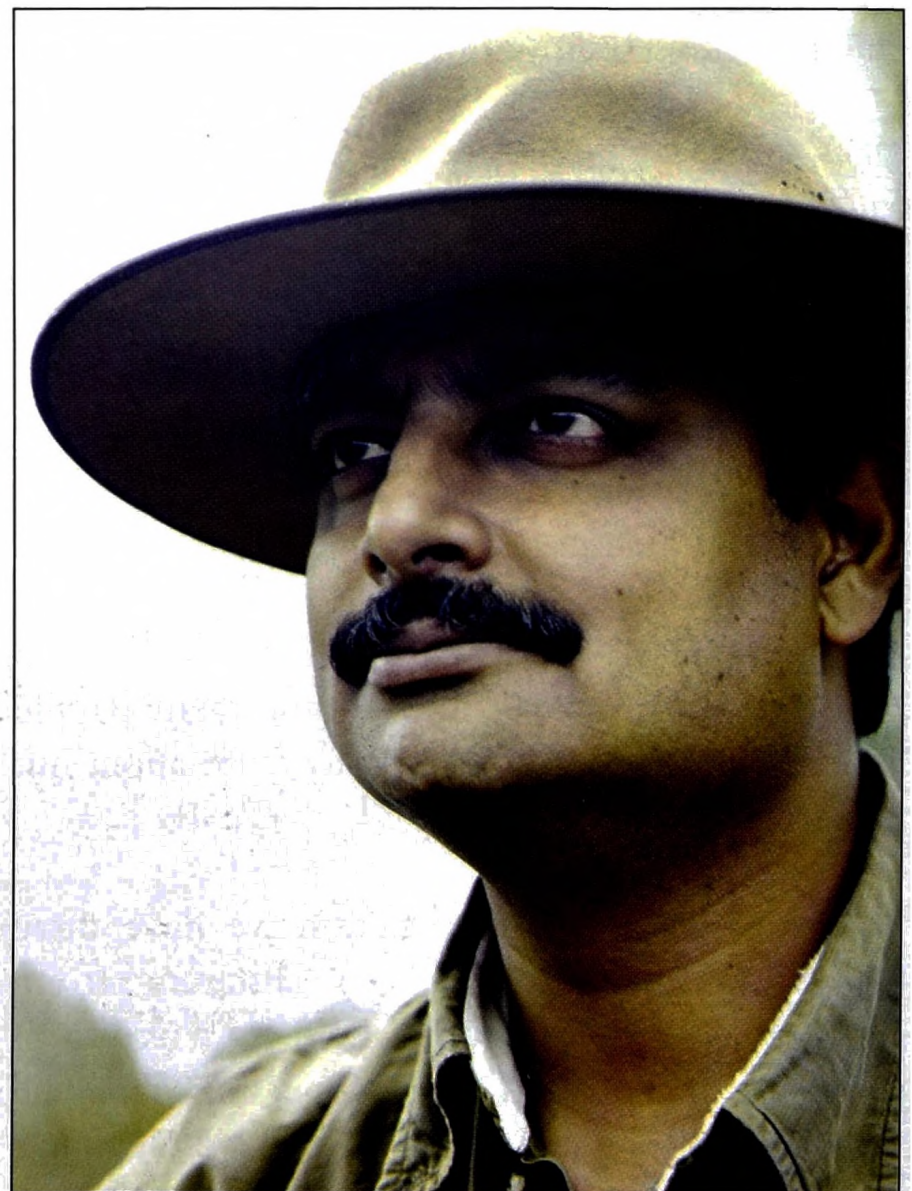
I am really honoured to take over as Chair of this key specialist group of the IUCN SSC. Every group has a different flavour in the varied ecosystem of SSC. Some of them have vast assemblages of fauna and flora to deal with, others deal with creatures found around the world and yet others are microscopically focussed. The Asian elephant is a single species specialist group but one that has an inordinate importance to policy and conservation management around the world. This, of course, is because of the mega charismatic flagship role that the elephant plays in the world today. It is thus an important role to be the custodians of such a key species that requires conservation across the 13 range states that it is found in.

I have been a long-term member of this group and in fact a longer-term member of the SSC through various other groups as well. This has given me, fortunately, a great ringside view of the challenges that it takes to bring such a diverse and talent-rich group together. I have also been fortunate in having been able to visit all the range states of the elephants during the three decades of my conservation work and in fact in seeing elephants in almost all of them. Now, in this new role I wish to call on all that experience of the past and embellish it with the rich experiences of all of you in order to guide the group moving forward. I have in my mind some guiding principles as I take on this onerous yet important role and I will be happy to share them with you in this issue of *Gajah*.

The first is regarding communication. Being primates, all of us yearn to communicate. Meet when possible, talk or discourse when meeting is not possible. I shall endeavour to get the long

pending meet of the whole group together in November 2016 in Assam in India organised. All of you will get a formal invitation for that once group membership gets finalised. I have also been fortunate to have two trips to Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom for other matters where I could meet many of the members based in those countries. These in country meetings shall also continue as I seek to meet and know all your needs and wishes to make this group a strong and vibrant one. We shall also seek to have online discourses using which methods people are happy to use. I personally prefer a variety of methods and not necessarily restricting ourselves to only one means of communication. I also think *Gajah* and the website need to be used more effectively to enhance such communication.

The second is regarding opening the group out to segments that are not adequately represented.



The young are not adequately represented I feel, as also many geographies and also social sciences as a sector. A careful balance of the specialists in the group can yield it newfound energies and be able to be relevant in this fast changing world of ours. This can be adjusted as we go into the new quadrennium this autumn with a new membership roll.

The third is proactivity. While maintaining scientific rigor and not necessarily falling into the traps of advocacy all the time, one must as a group do things for the elephant. Being specialists who do not lead in policy, dialogue and positive action will be interpreted by many as impotence and I shall look to all of you to make it a vibrant and effective group. One must keep in mind of course that we are not an implementing agency and neither a public advocacy or campaign group, but our joint expertise must be available proactively for governments and civil society to lean upon when conserving elephants

The fourth is engaging upfront with the range states. This can be done by having range state representatives as ex officio members of the group, by having meetings of the group with range state reps and also by my calling on them whenever possible to understand their needs. The elephant is finally protected in all our countries by the range governments and a constant dialogue is key to ensure that those who are mandated to protect the species in our watch, do their jobs with the best technical advice that is available globally.

The fifth and final area of my concentration will be to raise resources to keep the group in an active state. This will include resources needed for a program manager who can really help coordination as also for meetings, workshops etc. While we must not overreach, it is key that more resources than have been available in the past must be made available as we move forward.

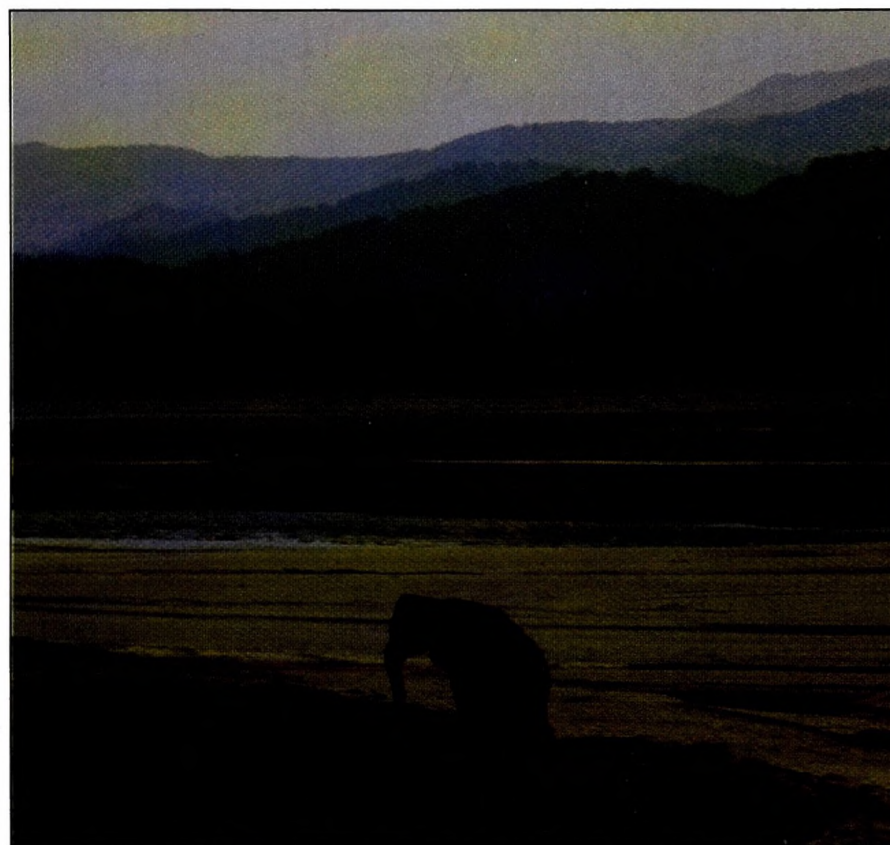
In all this, I look to both the *Gajah* and the website to be key tools of the group and I commit to writing more for both these instruments of the group. This message from the Chair will be a regular feature in *Gajah* and I hope all of you

would enjoy reading what I write. While talking of *Gajah* it will be remiss if I do not acknowledge Jenny who has done a wonderful job (alongside her husband Prithviraj Fernando) in bringing out this journal and the past one, ever since Jayantha Jayawardene has relinquished charge after many years of dedicated service to the group. I will also call on ALL members to contribute at least one piece to *Gajah* and also put all your news up on our website.

I was fortunate last month to visit Sri Lanka and see the wonderful elephants of the Yala National Park. Soon thereafter I was in Corbett watching an elephant that was attacked by a tiger die a natural death. Whether in an island setting, or in Himalayan foothills watching elephants is what gives me solace. I hope all of us in the membership will also enjoy elephants and while doing so also contribute to elephant conservation through this group.

Warm regards for the New Year

Vivek Menon
Chair AsESG, IUCN SSC



Keep the dates

**Meeting of the IUCN SSC
Asian Elephant Specialist Group**

Assam, India

8. - 11. November 2016