

CMS Lists Endangered Asian elephants in Appendix I

Gandhinagar, India – 21 February 2020

In a major breakthrough, the proposal to enlist Asian Elephants in Appendix I of the Convention of Migratory Species has been accepted by the 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) which is currently underway (17th - 22nd of Feb). The Wildlife Trust of India had played a key role in drafting this proposal together with the Asian Elephant Species Specialist Group (AeSSG) and which was then moved in this COP by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Supported in the plenary session by Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, European Union, IFAW, Born Free Foundation and the Humane Society International, this proposal was accepted by all the 130 member parties to the COP with no opposition from any member party.

Classified as Endangered by the IUCN Red List, Asian elephants suffer threats from habitat loss and fragmentation as well as illegal killing for their ivory and other products, such as skin, which has fuelled poaching to supply a growing demand for elephant skin jewellery. In addition, Asian elephants are often victims of retaliatory attacks due to human-elephant conflict and contact with human infrastructure, such as low slung high voltage transmission lines, collisions with trains and heavy vehicles.

IG (Wildlife), MoEFCC announced India's intention to work with other Asian elephant range states to form a regional agreement with collective actions to safeguard this iconic animal.

"This listing corrects a historic oversight and gives the Asian Elephants its long deserving protected status. It's a big win for the Asian Elephants! For the first time, range country governments accepted listing of the Asian Elephant on CMS Appendix I" emphasized Vivek Menon, Chair of AeSSG and Executive Director, WTI.

While India is home to 60% of Asian elephants, some of these animals regularly cross borders into neighbouring states, such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal, where they face a range of threats. Several of these small transboundary populations are critical if the species is to survive in states beyond India.

At another side event organised by WTI, representatives from Bangladesh and Bhutan stressed upon the need for intergovernmental collaboration to ensure protection to elephants that move across these landscapes.

Although many Asian countries are not members of CMS, regional agreements with collective actions can include CMS member and non-member states, and the hope is that many Asian elephant range states will now work more closely together to protect this species.

The future of many other migratory species will be affected by decisions taken at this meeting, which began on Monday and is scheduled to run until Saturday (22nd Feb). The other key Indian species listed in Appendix I in this COP include the Great Indian Bustard and the Bengal Florican.