

## **ASERC – A HOLISTIC IN SITU, EX SITU, AWARENESS, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR ASIAN ELEPHANT (ELEPHAS MAXIMUS MAXIMUS) CONSERVATION IN SRI LANKA**

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The conflict between humans and elephants has become a serious conservation problem in Sri Lanka, where a combination of deforestation, agricultural expansion, and human population growth has substantially reduced the available elephant habitat.

In July 2005, ASERC (Austrian Sri Lankan Elephant Research & Conservation Project) was founded by Dr. Harald M. Schwammer (Deputy Director, Vienna Zoo), Gaby V. Schwammer (Head of the Zoo Educational Department, Vienna Zoo), Brigadier H.A.N.T. Perera (former Director Department of National Zoological Gardens), and Lalith Seneviratne (HEC Project Pokunatenna). ASERC marks a cooperative effort between the Vienna Zoo and Sri Lankan experts in elephant research and management, veterinary medicine and technical resources. It conducts research and conservation on elephants in-situ and ex-situ and is designed to guarantee species-appropriate management and to help settle the animal-human conflict in habitat use.

Moreover, ASERC helps fund the elephant care centres in Sri Lanka and provides support in the form of experts in the veterinarian and management sectors. In addition, ASERC funds the work of teachers, field excursions and workshops in rural areas to better educate local residents and children in schools. Biologists, veterinarians and wildlife rangers were sent to special training workshops and international conferences.

Examples of successful programmes include:

- Tripwire Elephant Alarm System
- Rural Electrification Programme of Lanka Gasifiers Ltd. (LGL)
- Austrian Sri Lankan Elephant Research and Conservation Trust
- Awareness & Conservation Education Aspects  
Science (biology), math and English tuition programme
- Wildlife and Elephant Books

ASERC pursues a holistic approach for in-situ, ex-situ conservation, awareness and education programs and is cooperating with the government and NGOs coordinated by the authors of this paper. By involving local residents in rural area, it also has social-economic aims. In the future, these activities will be extended to other regions in Sri Lanka.

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