

**3,000 -
5,000**

kilograms an Asian elephant
can weigh

2 - 4

meters in height an Asian
elephant can grow to

0

human-elephant conflict
incidents experienced by
residents in the city of Pu'er
between 2009 and 2014

▶ Three Asian elephants in
the Xishuangbanna National
Nature Reserve in Yunnan,
southwest China.

conserving Asian elephant populations in China



About Asian elephants

The Asian elephant is an iconic species of vital ecological importance. Once widely found across tropical and subtropical Asia, the [wild Asian elephant population has estimated to have almost halved since the beginning of the century to currently at around 48,323–51,680](#), and occupies fragmented habitats in 13 range countries. The Asian elephant is listed as 'Endangered' by the IUCN Red list, and has been designated as 'Class I' protected animal in China's Wildlife Protection Law since 1988.

Challenges in Asian elephant conservation

Human population growth, rapid urbanization, infrastructure development and commercial agriculture expansion all contribute to habitat loss and fragmentation, the most significant threat to Asian elephants. As Asian elephants' habitats increasingly overlap with human population areas, their activities inevitably collide with local people. Elephants often destroy crops, damage properties and in some cases even killed people.

Currently, Asian elephants are only found in the Yunnan province of China that borders

Laos. This small population of only around 300 elephants, is of significant cultural importance to the Dai ethnic group in Yunnan.

IFAW's effort to promote human-elephant co-existence

IFAW launched the Asian Elephant Protection (AEP) project in 1999, covering Xishuangbanna, Pu'er and Lincang, the three last remaining Asian elephant habitats in Yunnan province of Southwest China. For more than 20 years, the project has been safeguarding human-elephant co-existence through implementing four strategies:

▶ **Support elephant movement monitoring and warning system to attempt to prevent human-elephant conflict, whilst conducting scientific research to inform elephant population conservation strategies.**

From 2009 to 2014, the project launched China's first ever village-level early warning system in Pu'er City, establishing a long-term and effective public safety precaution mechanism. The early warning monitoring system covered more than 40 communities in four townships in Pu'er city.



Photo: Xuan Zheng



Photo: Juan Li/IFAW

30%

of women from these villages are preoccupied with chores and farm work. This project gives an eye-opening experience talking about the wildlife the local community is dealing with and also how exactly to protect themselves. Such practical guidance provides actual help in people's daily life. Women make up over 30% of minority attendees

50,000

local residents in Menghai County with Asian elephant activities, benefiting from the monitoring equipment

◀ A drone photo of an Asian elephant herd in a field in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, China. When passing a tea plantation on their way to rest in the forest, they found drones being used to monitor the elephants. The elephant herd then surrounded and kept guard over the baby elephants. Having checked it was safe, they moved to the forest one after another.

▶ IFAW staff educated the local communities in Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve on how to avoid Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) accidents.

In recent years, growing elephant movement has been gradually expanded to regions that historically did not have Asian elephant presence and causing increased mortality from human-elephant conflict.

To mitigate this new threat, in 2016 the project supported the Asian Elephant Early Warning Monitoring Center in Menghai County of Xishuangbanna to improve its monitoring capabilities, equipping 20 forest and community rangers with monitoring equipment.

The system now covers more than 50 core villages in Menghai County with Asian elephant activities, benefiting more than 50,000 local residents. According to data provided by local government, as of May 2019 the system had successfully avoided about 57 human-elephant conflict incidents.

▶ Community Heroes – human-elephant conflict prevention ranger network

IFAW has been providing human-elephant conflict prevention trainings to at least 500 township government officials and more than 100,000 local citizens from over 50 communities in areas affected by elephant activities for the past two decades.

Due to increased elephant movement, in 2020 IFAW started collaborating with the government in Xishuangbanna to launch the first human-elephant conflict prevention ranger network. IFAW designs the curriculum and trains rangers on how

to carry out trainings themselves, enabling us to reach more people.

These rangers are trained on how to train others on human-elephant conflict resolution, which means the project can cover all villages in need throughout the year, providing more in-depth and timely support.

▶ Community development

Since the start of the project, IFAW has been supporting eco-friendly alternative livelihoods for communities affected by human-elephant conflict. This aims to improve local livelihoods whilst also enhancing people's resilience and tolerance to human-elephant conflict, essential for promoting co-existence.

From 2000 to 2005, IFAW provided microcredit loans to local communities especially women's groups in Pu'er to help them shift to alternative crops that elephants don't eat and have high economic value. The program covered more than 210 households from 7 villages, and achieved 35% average increase in income with 100% repayment rate.



Photo: IFAW



Photo: IFAW

500+

staff and tour guides from scenic spots have been trained by IFAW on how to promote Asian elephant conservation to people visiting Yunnan

Many of the women who have been through the program also have gone on to take leadership positions in village committees, because their leadership capabilities demonstrated during the project earned them respect from their family and neighbors.

► Environmental education initiatives to improve community awareness and knowledge of elephant conservation

In order to promote elephant conservation messages to more people in and outside Yunnan, IFAW has invested in providing nature education to local schools and trainings to local government officials and staff from all iconic scenic spots in Xishuangbanna.

◀ Under the guidance of the technician, the participants of the community development project are trying to find “queen bees” to prepare for swarming. The project provides villagers with an alternative source of income, easing the losses caused when elephants destroy crops. If there is no weather disaster, we estimate that the annual income for each beekeeper family will increase by at least 30-50%.

► Villager together with IFAW Senior Program Officer, preparing empty beehives for swarming.

Since 2020, IFAW started a pilot bee keeping project in a village named Daotangqing which connects a natural reserve and elephants’ habitats outside the reserve in Xishuangbanna. The ten first phase participating households each commit two days to support elephant habitat restoration near their village. After the first phase ends, they are also obligated to train next phase participants on bee keeping techniques to ensure sustainability of the project.

In the long run, households in the pilot villages will also gradually shift from the traditionally more natural resource-consuming crops such as rubber to crops that can contribute to carbon emission reduction, and IFAW will refine and scale up the eco-friendly community development model to cover more areas affected by human-elephant conflict.

IFAW collaborated with Xishuangbanna education authorities and local schools to develop the first animal-themed school textbook “Knowing Elephants” and a series of courses on Asian elephant protection reaching more than 30,000 students from at least 60 local schools.

IFAW has provided trainings to more than 500 staff and tour guides from scenic spots on how to promote Asian elephant conservation to people visiting Yunnan. Through interactions with the IFAW project, many local communities in Yunnan regained pride in protecting Asian elephants in China.

► **see more at [ifaw.org](https://www.ifaw.org)**



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