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## ElefantAsia

ElefantAsia is a registered non-profit organisation working to safeguard the Asian elephant, an iconic species the world over, and remains the only organisation in the Lao PDR committed solely to ensuring the health, wellbeing and perpetuation of endangered elephant populations.

Operating in Laos since 2001 in conjunction with the Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), ElefantAsia initiates elephant conservation programmes, elephant breeding incentives, environmental awareness and economic sustainability campaigns throughout areas of Laos populated by domesticated and wild elephants.

### In the beginning.....

The organisations journey in Laos commenced with a 1,300 kilometer elephant caravan travelling from southern to northern Laos. Taking three months to complete, this ground-breaking trek increased awareness to the plight of Laos' remaining elephant populations and served as a reminder to local people as to the importance of the species within cultural and religious traditions. The 'Caravan Xang' marked the start of dedicated Asian elephant conservation programmes in Laos, ElefantAsia was born.

With now over a decade of experience, ElefantAsia co-founders Mr Sebastien Duffillot and Mr Gilles Maurer are the leading experts in domesticated elephants in Laos. As such they have gained the confidence and respect of government officials and elephant owners alike. Together with a growing team, they continue to implement numerous grassroots projects in remote regions of Laos.

### Veterinary Care and Registration

In co-operation with the Lao National Animal Health Centre, ElefantAsia implements free veterinary treatment for working elephants suffering from illness or injury via the ElefantAsia Mobile Veterinary Units. Vehicles especially adapted for the treatment of elephants in remote areas of Sayaboury province visit logging sites, tourism centres and villages where elephants are employed. It provides advice to mahouts on basic care and medicines. The **"Lao Captive Elephant Care and Management Programme"** mobile veterinary units carry out approximately 20 national field missions per annum, with additional 15 - 20 emergency missions in the same timeframe. To date the units have undertaken over 1000 veterinary checks.

Since 2006 ElefantAsia and the DLF have undertaken rigorous paper registration of domesticated elephants in Laos and have currently visited 95% of the entire nation's population of domesticated elephants. **Microchipping** of captive populations has also been conducted by ElefantAsia and the DLF this forming a national computerised database. Currently the ElefantAsia team has successfully microchipped 453 elephants.

### Elephant Conservation Center and Breeding Programme

An important aspect of ElefantAsia's work to protect the Asian elephant lies in increasing breeding within remaining populations in order to promote the self-perpetuation of the species. Current breeding rates are 3 – 4 new baby elephants born per annum versus an average annual death rate of 13 - 15.

The majority of the domesticated population are employed within the logging industry where the elephants are made to work at a furious pace. They are overworked and exhausted and as a consequence do not reproduce. Despite high rewards for calves inside tourism sectors, reproduction is further hindered as elephants are refrained from breeding by their mahouts due to economic obstacles such as loss of earnings during gestation.

Through the newly established **Elephant Conservation Center** located in Sayaboury province, ElefantAsia has implemented their managed breeding programme. As such mahouts and their pregnant and nursing cows can register at the Center for up to 30 months, allowing appropriate resting during the final months of pregnancy and until the calves are fully weaned, whilst the Mahout's salary is supported by the Center for the duration of their stay.

Aligned with ElefantAsia's '**Baby Bonus**' programme, elephant owners are given a motorised tak-tak (hand-tractor) so the owner can still make an alternative income undertaking field work whilst the pregnant cows rest. In 2011, ElefantAsia has eight pregnant cows signed up to the 'Baby Bonus' scheme.

In addition to the breeding programme, the Elephant Conservation Center hosts the country's first elephant hospital. Managed by ElefantAsia, the hospital comes fully equipped with laboratory for pathology and disease diagnostics plus quarantine area. Free veterinary care will not only be available to mothers and babies throughout pregnancy and nursing, but to sick and injured elephants from across Laos whom can recuperate at the Center until fully recovered.

### Environmental Awareness

ElefantAsia conducts a comprehensive range of ongoing awareness campaigns to raise education and local awareness regarding the plight of the Asian elephant in Laos.

Implemented with other NGOs Room to Read and Action with Lao Children, ElefantAsia runs their Elephant Mobile Libraries, delivering vital resources in Lao language to rural schools in Sayaboury province.

The Elephant Mobile Libraries take an innovative approach to encourage literacy within schoolchildren through the distribution of books and other resources in Lao language with retired logging elephants. Agile, elephants are able to access remote areas where roads are nonexistent allowing the Mobile Libraries to reach those schools most in need. Interaction with the elephants increases knowledge of the endangered species and understanding of elephant behaviour amongst both young people and local communities, this being particularly beneficial in areas experiencing human-elephant conflict.

The non-profit organisation publishes informative literature in various formats including their elephant storybook 'Xang Phuan Keo' and elephant posters both aimed at schoolchildren, as well as anti-poaching announcements.

In addition ElefantAsia organises the annual Lao Elephant Festival hosting between 50-70 domesticated elephants which attracts both local and international visitors alike. The Lao Elephant Festival commenced in 2007 and has become an important event amongst the Lao people. 2009, saw the events largest attendance drawing some 82,000 visitors.

Other events organised by the NGO include photograph exhibitions, workshops and media conferences. Environmental Awareness is distributed to a wider audience through mediums such as newsletters, written articles published nationally and internationally, and documentaries produced by global media. ElefantAsia also utilises the worldwide web with its own official website [www.elefantasia.org](http://www.elefantasia.org) and associated webpages on Facebook and Twitter.

### Socio-economic alternatives

ElefantAsia has worked in remote regions of Laos with elephant owners and mahouts for over a decade. Concerns raised by both elephant owners and mahouts as to the sustainability of income generated from the logging industry has highlighted the need for reconversion of working elephants into more humane, environmental and financially viable activities such as eco-tourism.

The creation of the **Mahouts Association** in Hongsa, and in the near future, Sayaboury, works to strengthen the mahouts and their communities whilst assisting in the preparation for transition from logging into ecotourism.

Newly designed tourism products such as community-based elephant treks provide sustainable income generating activities through eco-tourism. In addition, mahouts receive professional training through the '**Mahouts Vocational Center**', based at the Elephant Conservation Center in Sayaboury. Here, mahouts can gain experience in the fields of elephant care and husbandry, tourism and foreign languages.

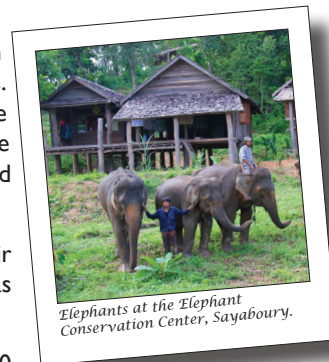
Training younger mahouts preserves traditional knowledge known by elder mahouts for future generations, transferring cultural tradition that is currently dying out. Traditional mahout skills are taught along with contemporary skills in the tourism industry so they can begin a new career in this profession.

### Mission Statement:

To increase the population and improve the welfare of Asian elephants in Laos while raising awareness, living conditions and socio-economic standards of local people living and working with elephants.



Elephant at Lao Elephant Festival in Paklay 2011



Elephants at the Elephant Conservation Center, Sayaboury.



Pupil receives book from an elephant during a Mobile Library



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