



Working Together, for Their Sake and Ours...

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Global Giving Project No. 37368 - Investing In Communities to Conserve Elephants

Asian elephants are classified as “endangered,” with fewer than 30,000 individuals believed to exist in the wild. The number one threat to elephants is habitat loss and fragmentation due to human activities. Asia’s largest land mammal cannot live inside protected areas alone, moving through a complex landscape dominated by settlements, agriculture, roads and other infrastructure.

Sri Lanka has the second largest wild elephant population in the world, and is densely populated by both people and elephants. The lives of elephants and rural people are therefore interlinked. The tendency of male elephants to raid paddy fields and other crops imposes severe financial costs on the people who live most closely with them. And yet, elephants need these lands to survive. For elephants and people to coexist, we need to understand how elephants use these human-dominated landscapes. Communities must also derive a direct benefit from the presence of elephants on their land, to compensate for the hardships they face.

This project has two major components:

- 1) We want to understand how elephants and people share space to better understand what sorts of risks people perceive elephants to present vs. the risk they actually do.*
- 2) We want to support communities willing to work together with us by providing a direct benefit – educational resources for local schools.*

In the first phase of this project, we deployed 16-20 camera traps inside and outside a protected sanctuary. We captured hundreds of photographs giving us a fascinating glimpse of the activities of people and wildlife in these areas.

At the same time, we surveyed community members and held meetings to understand the challenges people faced due to elephants and how we could help. From these, we determined that providing resources to local pre-schools as something that would be of tremendous benefit and encourage continued engagement with the program.

Thanks to the generous support of sponsors from around the world on **Global Giving** as well as the **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Asian Elephant Conservation Funds**, we were able to provide resources to **7 schools** in different villages, with classrooms consisting of 20-30 children each. Support included new desks and chairs, clean drinking water supplies, books and classroom teaching materials, media players, and even wire grilles for windows to keep out monkeys and other animals!

In the next phase, we want to expand this program to at least four additional villages, strung along the borders of a sanctuary connecting two national parks. We hope you will support this unique project that aims to benefit the lives of people and wildlife!



Dilena Tharu Pre-School

Students work on their custom-built desks and chairs, with books, abacus and many other new learning materials provided by the program.



Wanamal Pre-School (left)

This school received cupboards and dish rack, as well as installed a new water tank and sink.

Chathuri Pre-School (below)

Children are able to watch educational programming on their new classroom television.

