

Jumbo-sized discovery made in Malaysia

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This is a herd of Asian elephants in Taman Negara National Park in Malaysia, now home to SE Asia's largest-known population. Credit: Simon Hedges/Wildlife Conservation Society

New data released today by the Wildlife Conservation Society and Malaysia's Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) reveals that a population of endangered Asian elephants living in a Malaysian park may be the largest in Southeast Asia.

WCS and DWNP researchers estimate that there are 631 Asian elephants living in Taman Negara National Park - a 4,343 square kilometer (1,676 square mile) protected area in the center of Peninsular Malaysia. The new results confirm the largest-known population of elephants remaining in Southeast Asia.

The WCS/DWNP team counted elephant dung piles to estimate population size—a scientifically proven technique that produces accurate

figures. There were no previous scientific population surveys for elephants in the park, according to DWNP and WCS.

"The surveys reveal the importance of Taman Negara in protecting wildlife especially those species that need large home ranges. DWNP will continue to safeguard this national park, which is the crown jewel of Malaysia's protected areas system. The numbers of elephants is testament to the importance of the park in protecting wildlife," said Dato' Rasid, Director-General of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

"This new survey shows that Taman Negara National Park is one of the great strongholds for Asian elephants in Southeast Asia," said Dr. Melvin Gumal, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's conservation programs in Malaysia. "People were unsure of how many elephants lived in the park before our survey, although there were good reasons to think that the population was substantial."

The park, which contains one of the world's oldest rainforests—dating back 130 million years, also supports tigers, leopards, dholes, numerous monkey species, and 350 types of birds.

Asian elephants are endangered due to habitat loss and poaching; between 30,000 and 50,000 may remain in 13 Asian countries.

The Department of Wildlife and National Parks protects wildlife and manages federal protected areas throughout Peninsular Malaysia, and the Wildlife Conservation Society works to protect Asian elephants throughout their Asian range.

Efforts to save the Asian Elephant have come from various levels of government and the international community, including the United States Government. Since 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

through its Asian Elephant Conservation Fund has invested over \$9 million across Asia which has leveraged an additional \$13 million through conservation organizations such as WCS, private donations, corporate and other support. The U.S. Congress recently reauthorized the Asian Elephant Conservation Act to ensure uninterrupted conservation assistance to protect Asia's cultural and ecological icon. The Asian elephant is listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and has seen a drastic reduction in total population across its range as a result of illegal poaching, increased human-wildlife conflict and other threats. This project was partly funded by the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund and the CITES MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) program, a monitoring tool used by CITES in the complex business of assessing policies for trade in elephant products which also helped the Government of Malaysia meet its obligations to CITES.

Source: Wildlife Conservation Society

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