

Myanmar captures rare white elephant in western jungles

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(AP)—Myanmar's forestry department has captured a rare white elephant in the jungles of the country's western Ayeyarwaddy region, an official said Sunday.

The 7-year-old female was captured Friday, six weeks after it was initially spotted in a reserve in Patheingyi township, forestry official Tun Tun Oo said. It's the ninth white elephant in captivity in the country.

"We had to be careful," Tun Tun Oo said of the 1.9-meter-tall (6-foot-3) elephant. "It's wild. We didn't want the elephant or the forestry department officials to get hurt."

White elephants, actually albinos, have for centuries been revered in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and other Asian nations.

Often pinkish in color, with fair eyelashes and toenails, the animals were normally kept and pampered by monarchs as symbols of royal power and prosperity—and many people still believe they bring good luck to the country.

Myanmar already has eight white elephants in captivity, most from the Ayeyarwaddy region. Five are in the zoo in the capital, Naypyitaw, and three are in Yangon's zoo.

It was not immediately clear where the recently captured elephant would be housed.

Previous white elephants transported from Myanmar's jungles have been heralded in lavish ceremonies in which military leaders sprinkle them with scented water laced with gold, silver and precious gems.

A war was fought in the 16th century between Thailand and Myanmar—then known as Siam and Burma, respectively—over disputed ownership of four white elephants.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are between 25,600 and 32,750 Asian elephants remaining in the wild. Only males carry tusks and are the exclusive victims of poaching for their ivory.

The capture of [wild elephants](#) for domestic use has become a threat to wild populations. India, Vietnam and Myanmar have banned capture in order to conserve their wild herds, but in Myanmar [elephants](#) are still caught each year for the timber industry or the illegal wildlife trade, the WWF says.

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