

Rare Cambodian elephant footage raises survival hopes

January 15 2016



An elephant herd roaming through Cambodia's biggest forest sanctuary is seen in a rare footage captured by Conservation International environment group, in July 2015

Rare footage of an elephant herd roaming through Cambodia's biggest forest sanctuary signals the success of a 14-year conservation programme and raises hopes for the endangered species' survival, an environment group said on Friday.

The camera trap footage, taken in the spectacular and remote Cardamom Mountains, shows 12 elephants, including young, grazing and lumbering through the forest.

Conservation International released the footage on Friday as it launched a trust fund that aims to secure long-term funding for the programme in the Cardamoms, one of Southeast Asia's most biodiverse areas.

"That several young are here indicates that the elephants are reproducing, which we think is a good sign that their environment is stable and they are not under stress," David Emmett, CI senior vice president for the Asia-Pacific, told AFP.

Emmett said the footage, taken a few months ago, was the first time so many elephants had been captured on film in the Cardamoms, which is home to about one third of Cambodia's endangered and rare species.

"For there to be so many in the area is therefore a great sign that the protected forest programme is working at scale," he said.

The Cambodian government established the Central Cardamom Protected Forest with the support of CI in 2002, covering roughly 400,000 hectares (one million acres) of pristine land in the remote southwest of the country.



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While vast areas of forest have since been illegally logged in Cambodia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia since then, the conservation efforts in the Cardamoms have been regarded as a success.

Forests in the protected area declined by two percent between 2006 and 2012, compared with 15 percent in areas immediately outside it, according to CI, citing an independent study.

Although there were no more recent specific surveys, Emmett said satellite images showed the area was still not experiencing the widespread destruction seen elsewhere.

Asked if illegal logging could be taking place without CI's knowledge, Emmett emphasised the evidence of the satellite imagery as well the fact 90 percent of the area has no road access.

"Illegal logging at any significant scale requires road access into the forest for logs to be taken out," Emmett said.

There are believed to only be about 200-250 elephants in the Cardamoms, with another population of similar size in eastern Cambodia, according to CI.

However these are still some of the largest remaining wild populations for the endangered Asian elephant, which once roamed from the Middle East across to China and into Southeast Asia.

The new trust fund for the protected to be launched in Phnom Penh by CI has initial funding of \$2.5 million from CI's Global Conservation Fund and Japanese air conditioning firm Daikin Corporation.

CI is aiming to secure another \$7.5 million for the fund from developed nations and the corporate sector.

It says this would guarantee funding for the protection work—such as paying for rangers and community engagement—in perpetuity.

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Citation: Rare Cambodian elephant footage raises survival hopes (2016, January 15) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-rare-cambodian-elephant-footage-survival.html>

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