

Malaysia elephant sanctuary trumpets effort to cut human-animal conflict

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Selendang lost part of its leg after it was caught in a snare trap and has been fitted with a prosthetic limb

A herd of elephants tramp through jungle before lumbering into a river under the watchful gaze of their keepers, training at a Malaysian

sanctuary for their vital work in reducing human-animal conflict.

The sanctuary in Kuala Gandah, central Malaysia, is an area of secluded rainforest where "mahouts"—as the keepers are known—care for a 26-strong group of endangered Asian elephants.

A handful were rescued after suffering injuries or being orphaned, but most of them have been domesticated and trained to aid the National Elephant Conservation Centre's effort to help elephants who become embroiled in conflicts with humans.

They accompany a highly-trained team on their missions to find and subdue fellow pachyderms whose habitats have been encroached on, and are putting themselves and villagers at risk.

Since the centre started operations about 30 years ago, its staff have relocated more than 700 wild elephants, taking them away from inhabited areas and deep into the jungle.

Malaysia is home to vast tracts of rainforest and a kaleidoscope of exotic wildlife, from elephants to orangutans and tigers, but the numbers of many rare species have fallen dramatically in recent decades.

Some have been hunted for their body parts that are then sold on the black market, but a growing number are falling victim to human-animal conflict—which happens when rapid expansion of plantations or development of settlements encroaches on animals' natural habitats.



Mahouts care for a 26-strong group of endangered Asian elephants at the sanctuary

Many elephants in Malaysia have been injured or killed after coming into contact with humans when they wander onto the country's ubiquitous [palm oil plantations](#), or enter settlements and eat crops.

Villagers and plantation workers sometimes target them, viewing them as pests and not realising they are endangered and protected by law.

One elephant among the herd at the 30-acre (12-hectare) sanctuary, Selendang, lost part of its leg after it was caught in a snare trap, and has been fitted with a prosthetic limb.

On a recent visit to the centre, a dozen of the resident elephants marched in single file with their trunks swinging as their mahouts put them through the paces during a morning workout.

They emitted trumpeting sounds before splashing into a river, where the mahouts scrubbed their bellies and trunks.

There are believed to be some 1,200 wild Asian elephants in peninsular Malaysia, down from as many as 1,700 in 2011.

"If their remaining habitat faces rapid deforestation, I think before the end of the century, there will be no more wild [elephants](#) left," warned Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, a Malaysia-based elephant expert.

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