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## FACTSHEET

# SUMATRAN ELEPHANT

*Elephas maximus sumatrensis*

Elephant has been portrayed in children fables since long time ago. The big animal with long trunk and wide ears is known to children as an animal that is cheerful, helpful, and also confident. Of course we don't want to only live in the story book. Elephants-especially Asian elephants and their sub-species-are considered to be critically endangered animals and included in IUCN's red list of critically endangered animals. Sumatran Elephant is on the list. Illegal logging, degradation and fragmentation of their habitats and slaughtering of their species due to conflict and hunting activities are some of the threats to Sumatran Elephant existence. In the long run the sustainability of life of the Elephant will be endangered by the fast conversion of forest into plantation and commercial plants. Currently the population of Elephant tiger is between 2,400-2,800.

## Physical Characteristics

The tusks of male Sumatran Elephant are relatively shorter in compared to the other sub-species of elephant. The height of adult male Sumatran Elephant is between 1.7 and 2.6 meters. While the female elephant has very short tusks and are hidden behind their upper lips. Elephant's age strongly depends on their living condition. A well-maintained elephant may reach 70 years of age, while elephants that live in the wild, due to very high threats to their life usually have shorter life span.

Sumatran Elephant is an "umbrella species" or it represents the biodiversity in its habitat with complex ecosystem. Conserving elephant means helping maintaining biodiversity and ecological integrity in its ecosystem. The conservation of this large animal directly saves many other smaller species that live around the elephants' habitat. An elephant consumes around 150 kg of food and 80-200 litres of water in a day. Therefore an elephant needs 20 sqkm of home range in a day. The seeds contain in this large mammal will be naturally dispersed to all areas of forest that it passes through and help regeneration process of natural forest.

## Threats

Sumatera Island is one of areas with the worst deforestation rate in the world. The transformation of function of forest into palm-oil plantation, mining and housing area, as well as illegal logging have narrowed the elephant's habitat. The reduced source of food has made elephant enter human settlement area and triggered conflict between human and elephant. The elephant hunting activity has also increased. As the consequences elephant population has decreased drastically in compared to the forest degradation rate.

In Aceh, the Sumatran elephant's population is estimated to only 500 animals, and they are distributed to all low land area of Aceh. Since 2006 the deforestation rate has continued to increase. These elephants are entering and destroying people's plantation and agriculture land. People who do not have the compassion will take quick measure by poisoning and installing traps for the elephants. During 2012 there were 16 elephants died and they were allegedly poisoned to death mostly in palm-oil area. These cases are actually the biggest in Aceh.

The Province of Riau is a capital habitat of elephants. However for the past 25 years the population of elephant in Riau has decreased for 84%, which leaves only around 300-330 elephants by 2010. If this decrease of population continues and the remaining vast forests-Tesso Nilo and Bukit Tiga Puluh-are not protected then the population of elephants in Riau will not last long and will experience local extinction.

What happened in Aceh and Riau show that there is massive threat against elephant's population in Sumatera. Elephants are entering plantation area and eating their favorite young palm-oil trees. The people consider them as pest and trigger the killing (either by hunting them or poison bait) and capture of elephants.

Maintaining or re-creating wild life corridors in forest area, which means providing sources of food and safe territory for reproduction purpose, is important for the sustainability of elephants population.

## Efforts Taken by WWF

WWF is currently working in three areas in Sumatera that are considered very important for elephant conservation. By the Ministry of Forestry's declaration of Tesso Nilo National Park in 2004, WWF established the first Flying Squad Elephant Patrol Team in Lubuk Kembang Bunga Village, which is located around the National Park. The Patrol Team consists of nine tamers and four trained elephants. One of their tasks is to redirect wild elephants that have entered people's plantation or field into their original habitat in the forest. Since its first operation Flying Squad Team of Tesso Nilo has been successful in reducing economic loss from elephants' attacks and preventing the killing of elephants due to conflict.



Tesso Nilo Flying Squad Team, 2013

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Currently, APRIL's and Musi Mas Palm Oil Plantation enterprises in cooperation with Tesso Nilo Foundation have adopted the Flying Squad Patrol Team. They have tried to establish additional teams for their enterprise as part of their effort to mitigate conflict between human and elephant that is comprehensively coordinated. In 2006, the Ministry of Forestry determined that the Province of Riau serves as the Conservation Center of Sumatran Elephant. This is a huge step for rescuing the habitat of elephants in Sumatera.

The establishment of patrol team is also carried out in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (TNBBS), which is located in Lampung and Bengkulu. Community Patrol Ranger Unit has the task to support security and protection of the National Park area. Based on the 2010 Survey, the population of elephants in this National Park was around 250-400. The team, which consisted of WWF, Forest Police, TNBBS, community member and other conservation institutions aside from patrolling to prevent illegal loggers and hunters to practice within the TNBBS area, also disseminates information on handling conflict between elephant and human to the local community.

In Aceh, WWF supported the development of policies and creation of qanun draft of protection of key species in Aceh. The drafting of qanun involved academics and environmental observers from some civil society organizations. Moreover, WWF also disseminates information on mitigating conflict between elephants and tigers in the program areas, which are Krueng Sabee Rivershed Area and Krueng Peusangan Rivershed Area.



### Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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