

Asian Elephant

Key facts

- **Common name:** Asian Elephant
- **Scientific name:** *Elephas maximus*
- **Weight:** 3.5 to 5 tons
- **Length (head - body):** 4-6m
- **Life expectancy:** 50-70 years
- **Conservation status:** Critically Endangered - CR (Vietnam Red Book)



An elephant's trunk is actually a combination of both its nose and upper lip. Elephants use their trunks for breathing, watering, feeding, touching, dusting, sound production and communication. The trunk contains over 100,000 muscles and has a fingerlike feature at the end for holding smaller objects.

Distribution

Asian Elephants are distributed in 12 Asian countries. In Vietnam, they can be found in North, Southern Central, Highlands and Eastern South. Vietnams elephants were often recorded in Nghe An, Dak Lak, Binh Thuan and Dong Nai provinces.

Appearance

Asian Elephants are the second largest mammal on Earth, just slightly smaller than their African cousins. Elephants' trunks are extremely versatile; it helps them grab food easily. When crossing rivers or lakes, the trunk can also be used as a snorkel. Asian elephants are almost hairless. Only the males have tusks.

Diet

Elephants are megaherbivores. Their diet includes grasses, leaves, twigs, bark, and bamboo shoots. Elephants have a very big stomach that can hold about 30 litres. They have to spend most of the day foraging for a large amount of food to fill this. Elephants are able to consume up to 150 kg of vegetation and drink up to 200 litres of fresh water everyday.

Habitat

Asian Elephants live in the scattered jungles, disturbed forest with bamboo, mixed grassy plains in the valleys or low hilly terrain. Elephants need a vast territory to meet the huge demand for food everyday.

Behaviour and breeding

Asian Elephants live in cohesive herds made up of related females and their young. The "Matriarch" is usually the

oldest, largest and strongest female. Males tend to leave herds at puberty, around their 10th year. They reach sexual maturity at 12-15 years old. The females usually give birth to one calve every 4-5 years. The gestation period is the longest in the animal kingdom, up to 22 months. At birth, elephants can weigh up to 100 kg and suckle until 2-3 years.

Threats

The most dangerous threat to elephants in Vietnam is habitat lost due to deforestation. Not being able to find enough food in the forest, elephants must go to residential areas, and shifting cultivation. Lack of food means they become aggressive and could attack anyone they meet. In the past, elephants were captured for their ivory or domesticated for purposes such as serving the tourism industry and carrying heavy objects.

Vietnam is home to roughly 75 - 130 wild Asian Elephants (according to the FPD, 2010). In the past two years, 20 wild elephants and 7 tame ones have been killed. Many scientists and conservationists anticipate that the elephants in Vietnam could soon be facing extinction in the next decade if no strict conservation and management initiatives are applied.

Help me

- Don't buy any ivory products
- Report to WAR and other authorities if you see elephants in the wild or in residential areas, or illegal ivory trade
- Tell everyone about elephant protection.