

**PRESS RELEASE****Not For Immediate Release**

Contact: Mark Trayling

Organisation: H-ELP Foundation

Email: mark@h-elp.org

Website: <http://www.h-elp.org>

Australia Joins the Charge to Spotlight Asian Elephant Welfare

Melbourne, Australia, 11 August 2022 – On World Elephant Day (12 August) spare a thought for the Asian elephant. Unlike African elephants which have a population of 415,000 (down from perhaps 10 million in 1930), Asian elephants represent just a fraction, with only 40,000 left and right on our doorstep, in Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia.

Nearly half of all Asian elephants are “captive” meaning across Asia they assist with wildlife tracking with specialists using them to traverse through high grass where jeeps can’t go, participate in religious festivals at temples and also can be seen by tourists at parks and resorts. Many elephants have a difficult existence, particularly those kept in crowded urban temples who are often chained.

A lot of work has been undertaken though in recent times to improve their welfare.

Our very own H-ELP Foundation in Australia has pioneered positive reinforcement training methods to eradicate the use of mahouts’ historical control “tools” and instead replace them with voice command and hand signals. This has improved the welfare of hundreds of elephants across the region. During Covid H-ELP were distributing thousands of dollars in emergency funds to partners in Asia to assist with the elephant feeding crisis, brought on by droughts and the decline in tourism revenues.

Animal Doctors International (ANI) have just started a mobile veterinary unit in Laos, which will provide preventative treatment (e.g. deworming), treat wounds, trim nails and provide regular check-ups and diagnostic tests, along with emergency care as well. Elephants can suffer from chronic pain, distress or experience malnutrition, which mobile vets can help with. H-ELP Foundation thought it important to partner with ANI to help fund their efforts. Have you ever wondered how to take blood from the elephant? From the back of the ear where skin is thinner... in some places their skin can be up to 6cm thick!

In North Thailand the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF) have been facilitating elephant socialisation in friendship groups, ensuring they are physically and mentally healthy and given access to their natural environments. They have also undertaken workshops across the region to improve human elephant interactions. H-ELP partnered with GTAEF to raise money by putting elephants on Zoom calls, so anyone around the world can interact virtually live on their screen, with even a Q&A session. Great for schools or even a birthday present.

The Asian Captive Elephant Standards (ACES) have introduced accreditation to zoos and the tourism industry across Asia, which has strict requirements and audits on camp management, elephant welfare, elephant interactions, camp quality and infrastructure, visitor safety, biodiversity and conservation. This way tourists



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can check on the ACES accreditation of a tourism destination before visiting and be assured of ethical practices. They recently started talks with H-ELP Foundation for collaboration.

As part of World Elephant Day, the H-ELP Foundation is promoting the awareness of elephants right here at home by launching a free booklet, with the support of the Australian national commission for UNESCO, for use in early learning settings that includes in-class activities, #hugatrunkforelephants awareness challenge on social media (headlined by taekwondo world champion and three-time Olympian Carmen Marton) and colouring-in competition sponsored by Swarovski. It has already been sent to 1000 early learning settings across Australia and is being promoted by Early Childhood Australia. The Australian National Commission for UNESCO has also shared it with other UNESCO national commissions across Asia for distribution, putting Australia at the centre of these efforts.

Co-author of the booklet and H-ELP board member Mark Trayling reflects, “these magnificent and highly intelligent animals are right on our doorstep and this is an opportunity for us to learn from them. Elephants can teach us a lot about ourselves as individuals and societies, so we hope early learning settings and schools across Australia participate in World Elephant Day with us, to encourage greater awareness, knowledge and love for elephants, including their challenges as a critically endangered species. Even the adults can join in on the #hugatrunkforelephants awareness challenge!”

On World Elephant Day, 12 August, we can give greater thought to the Asian elephant and be glad that there have been so many great strides made in their welfare in recent times. H-ELP also encourages the public to make a tax-deductible donation through its website www.h-elp.org so they can continue to help these gentle giants across Asia.

About H-ELP

Founded in 2010 by Eureka prize for science awardee and world-renowned animal behaviourist Dr Andrew McLean, the H-ELP Foundation is an Australian organisation improving the welfare of working elephants in Asia via the systematic application of humane, evidence-based training initiatives, education, engagement with local communities and relevant stakeholders.



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Animal Doctors International visiting an elephant



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#hugantrunkforelephants social media challenge for World Elephant Day, with our goodwill ambassador taekwondo world champion and three time Olympian Carmen Marton.