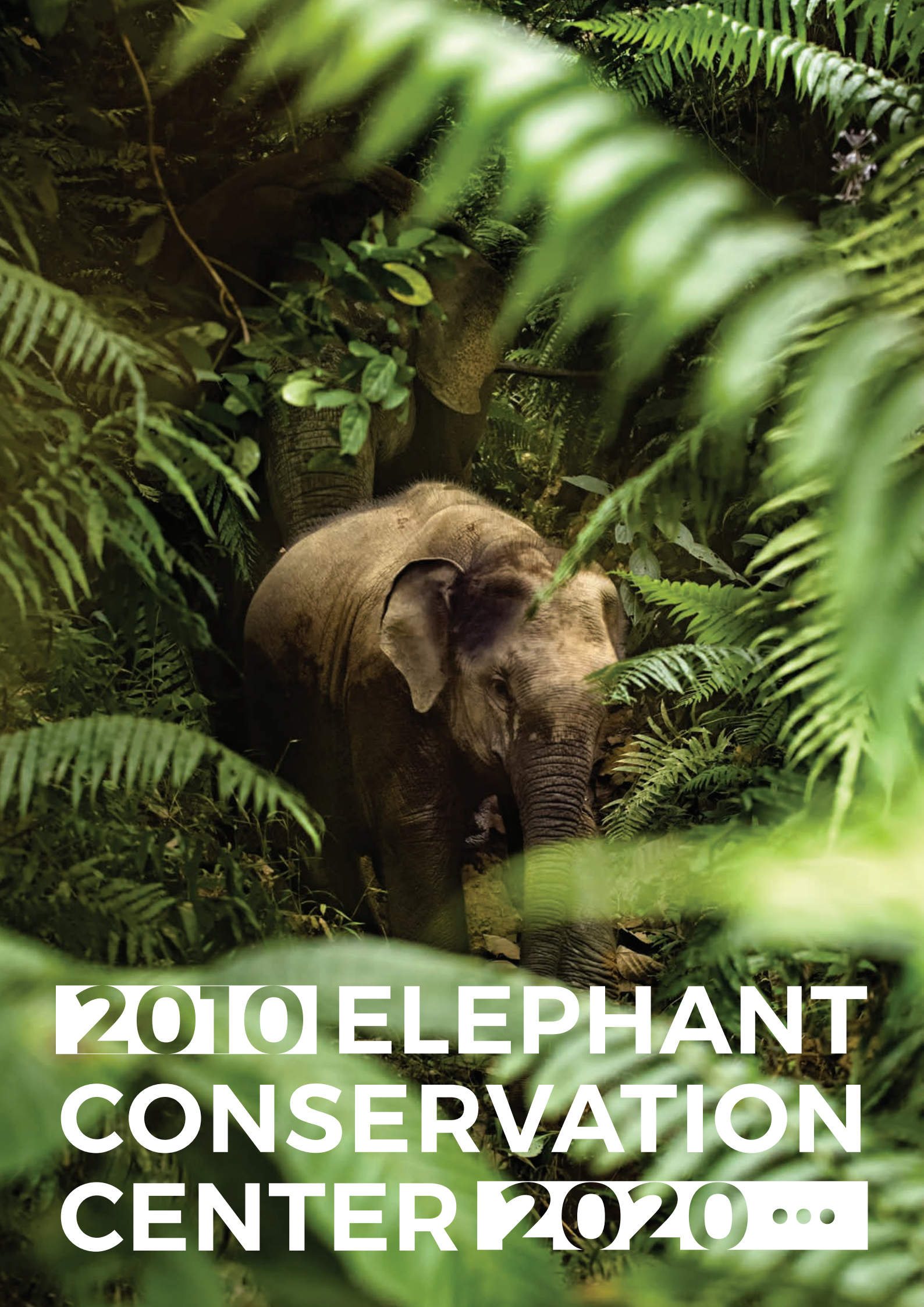


elephant conservation center

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

& 2020 perspectives



2010 ELEPHANT CONSERVATION CENTER 2020 ...

The Elephant Conservation Center, brainchild of ElefantAsia NGO's co-founder Sébastien Duffillot, was created in Laos in 2010. Pursuing the field conservation work initiated by the NGO while developing pioneering methods to rewild elephants, the ECC - as we affectionately call it - **is the oldest active elephant conservation group in Laos**, the "Land of a Million Elephants".

The specialists contributing their work towards elephant welfare and the habitat conservation goals of the ECC spare no efforts in protecting this emblematic endangered species and the world in which they live.

Over the course of **two decades** (ElefantAsia started work in Laos in 2001), our 70-strong team has been running **welfare, vetcare, breeding, herding and rewilding** programmes while conserving Lao mahout knowledge, an essential part of our success.

Elephants under human care in Laos were traditionally used for logging. Worked to the point of exhaustion to destroy their very own habitat, these elephants were no longer reproducing, with life spans, birth rates and quality of life considerably below acceptable standards. The forests of Laos have shrunk to worrying levels.

We are dedicating our efforts to increasing the number of elephant births through our breeding programme while offering quality health services at our Elephant Hospital. We implement a herding programme for elephants in free roaming areas with the support of our behavioural biology team. Behaviour observation and cutting edge technology at our endocrinology laboratory allow us to create socially compatible herds with a high rate of survivability and rewild them in the Nam Pouy National Biodiversity Area.

By doing so, **we hope to replenish a moribund wild elephant population, enrich the species' gene pool, give their ecosystem back to formerly captive elephants and conserve one of the richest biodiversity hotspots of South-East Asia.**

MISSION STATEMENT

CULTURE
To conserve Lao mahouts' traditional knowledge and transfer it to future generations.

NATURE
To secure a rich and diverse natural habitat for Asian elephants and increase their numbers in Laos.

FUTURE
To rewild captive elephants.

Cover photo: © Paul Wager
Photo (opposite page) © Paul Wager

CONDITION OF LAO ELEPHANTS

"GODS IN SHAKLES"

Centuries ago, the kingdom that made up much of modern-day Laos was called Lane Xang, or "Land of a Million Elephants." Yet while the Asian elephant may have endured as a cultural icon for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the numbers tell a story of a species in crisis. **There remain a mere 800 elephants in the country** — about 400 wild elephants, 400 in captivity. Both populations are not sustainable and are actually declining.

The root of the decline in wild elephant numbers is **deforestation**. Laos, which is notorious for over-deforestation thanks to demand for timber in neighbouring China and Vietnam, only has about 40% forest coverage today — down from 70% recorded in the 1950s. Dwindling forests lead to habitat fragmentation so elephants are unable to follow their normal migration patterns. This leads to **human-elephant conflicts.**

Elephants in captivity face their own challenges. Even though the Lao Government has placed tight restrictions on using elephants to transport wood for the logging industry, elephants in captivity are still dying in droves. They're fed unhealthy diets and **forced to work in poor conditions** at elephant tourism camps, or they get injured and aren't taken care of properly.

What's more, elephant owners have **little incentive to breed** the animals in captivity, as a pregnancy would take a female elephant from working for up to four years. Also, no one wants to employ male elephants since they tend to be more unpredictable than females due to their hormonal changes.

Poaching threatens both domesticated and wild Asian elephant populations, which is classified as an endangered species. The demand for elephant body parts continues to rise from places like China and Myanmar, where skin and ivory are used in traditional medicine. Another major concern are the **continued illegal exports of live elephants to foreign countries** such as China where as many as 140 specimens have been trafficked over the past 3 years...



Photo: © JLCourchelle



Photo: © Paul Wager

MEET THE

ECC TEAM

LAO ELEPHANTS HAVE A SECRET WEAPON



Photo: © ECC

Anabel López Pérez

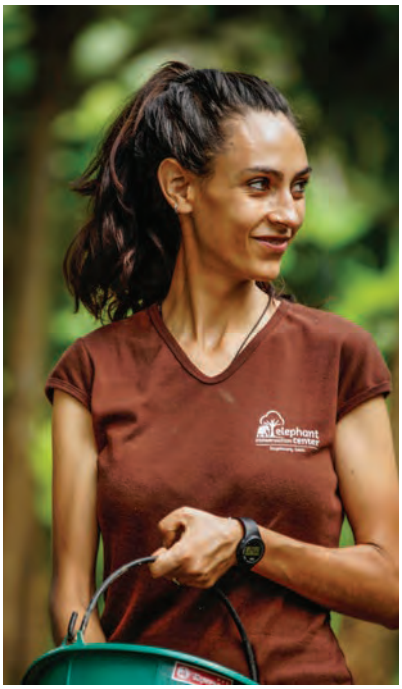


Photo: © Kiko Peltier

Anabel joined the ECC at its inception and never left. Her enthusiasm and energy are contagious. Her role at the ECC has shaped the past 7 years of our work. She began by limiting interaction with elephants, then by establishing herding protocols that formed the backbone of our re-wilding programme. A biologist with limited knowledge of Asian elephants when she arrived in Laos, Anabel's expertise has grown at a very rapid pace and today she is a renowned Asian elephant behaviour expert contributing the results of her work to several leading research institutes such as the Smithsonian Institution in the United States or via her membership at the Asian Captive Elephant Working Group. Anabel has a passion for elephants, and she entered into their very sanctuary where she can fully express herself and provide the best possible care and social life to the rescued elephants at the ECC. In 2020, Anabel started a PhD thesis at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, researching how management affects metabolic and stress physiology, social structure and reproduction in captive Asian elephants in Thailand and the Lao PDR.

"It is a privilege to be able to observe elephants in their natural habitat and to learn about their social dynamics up close." - Anabel López Pérez

Kan Thissamone



Photo: © Romain Willekens

Kan was working with Sebastien's NGO ElefantAsia for several years as an assistant veterinary technician, boarding the organisation's Mobile Veterinary Clinics to provide first aid to elephants wounded on logging sites. He developed an intimate relationships with the country's mahouts while learning veterinary techniques with international veterinarians and staff from the Lao Department of Livestock. When the NGO's projects were eventually autonomised in 2012, Kan naturally proposed to join the Elephant Conservation Center and help with the design and operations of the country's first Elephant Hospital.

Building his own house only a few miles away from the Center, Kan decided this would be the place to stay for his family and himself. Sparing no effort to improve the elephants' diet and health, Kan is supervising the supplementary food production units, positive reinforcement and musth control protocols, mahouts' daily meetings and planning sessions as well as providing veterinary care to elephants in need at the ECC or outside it. His skills, learned in the field sometimes with great difficulty, have earned him due respect from mahouts and the Asian elephant conservation community. His numerous contributions at various elephant care workshops throughout the region (India, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar...) are always highly valued and have largely contributed to the excellent reputation of the Elephant Conservation Center abroad.

"Laos was the Land of a Million Elephants. Now only 800 remain. I see my work as a contribution to the ecology and the culture of my country." - Kan Thissamone

Keo Inthavong



Photo: © Romain Willekens

A mahout at the ECC for 3 years, Keo, unlike most of his fellow mahouts, never worked in the logging industry and has not inherited his craft from his father or other family members. He became a mahout by choice, quite recently. Attracted by the mahout lifestyle most of his friends from Thongmixay district were enjoying, he joined the ECC when the Lao Government seized elephants from a trafficking ring in 2018 and were looking for mahouts to take care of them. When he arrived, he was discreet and shy, but month after month, his gentle but firm personality made him shine through the mahout team and he quickly became a respected member of the group despite his limited experience. His heart was still in the forest, however, and when ECC's 'soft release' project came to life early 2019, he was among the first candidates proposing to follow up on the released elephants in the Nam Pouy National Protected Area. Keo is now spending endless days in the forest with other ECC mahouts, making sure our newly rewilded elephants are safe.

"I feel proud about our release project, for the environment, the elephants and my country."

- Keo Inthavong



The Elephant Conservation Center works on the preservation of the Lao elephant population, both wild and those under human care.
With the former increasingly under pressure (poaching, deforestation...) and the latter declining due to ageing, lack of breeding incentives and overexploitation, solutions are urgently needed.

We must secure a healthy population of elephants under human care to act as a genetic reservoir if the wild elephant population were to collapse. To achieve this, we need improved veterinary care and elephant welfare regulations so as to increase their birth rate. We also need to secure natural habitats for wild populations and captive elephants suitable for rewilding.

In the years to come we will continue to develop the on-site hospital. We will also continue to invest in improved training and treatment facilities as well as a fully equipped laboratory for parasitology, hormonal research, animal auto-medication, diet and reproductive research.

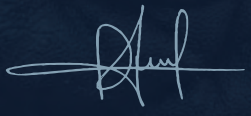
With the advantage of knowing the cycle of each of our female elephants, several sires can be hired or bought to ensure a genetically diverse herd. Although young elephants born at the Center are not 'broken' through the traditional training process to later work in logging or tourism, they do need to be controlled by their mahouts. This is achieved through positive reinforcement training.

Elephant welfare does not only refer to their physical condition. Elephants are very social animals with a complex group structure. For them to be able to live a fulfilling life, we strive to recreate an environment where a social group can be formed. The socialisation project is one of the initial stages towards the reintroduction of captive groups into the wild, which is our ultimate goal.

In Sayaboury Province there is still a biodiversity hotspot where a wild elephant population roams free. We need to make sure this area is safe and secured. This means running ranger patrols, understanding and preventing the causes of human-elephant conflicts and monitoring the movements of elephants using GPS-tracking.

To ensure the validity of its projects, the Center will have to house multiple elephants at different levels of its rewilding programme. A constant group of 20 to 30 is optimal. In 2018 we multiplied the area of our land concession by 5, going from 105 to 530 hectares. In 2019, this area spanned 6,000 hectares, providing plenty of food and space to our elephants before they can be released into the 192,000 hectares Nam Pouy National Protected Area.

In the meantime, we continue our membership in the Asian Captive Elephants Working Group to provide creative solutions to improve the welfare of captive elephants in tourism facilities across Asia.
In 2019, the Elephant Conservation Center received the highest distinction by independent auditing Asian Captive Elephant Standards: the "Conservation Gold Award".



SEBASTIEN DUFFILLOT

MEMBER OF THE ASIAN CAPTIVE ELEPHANT WORKING GROUP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sebastien DUFFILLOT, Founder
Inthy DEUANSAVANH
Jean-François REUMAUX

"CONSERVATION GOLD" AWARD BY



Photo: Opposite page © Kiko Peltier
Photo: © Paul Wager

WITH OUR PARK RANGERS

ON PATROL

SECURING THE NAM POUY NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA



Michael Falshaw and ECC mahouts in Nam Pouy NPA: © ECC

The Elephant Conservation Center and the Sayaboury Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office started the first patrols of their joint mission to tighten law enforcement in the Nam Pouy National Protected Area, home to Laos' second largest wild elephant population. These preliminary patrols mark the beginning of a safer habitat for elephants and other species. They were made possible by the generous support of the **International Elephant Project** and **Fondation Ensemble.**

Nam Pouy rangers patrolled the forest for 30 days throughout January and February covering a total of 140 km with 14 arrests made. Timber, chainsaws (4), illegal firearms (5) and snares (10) were among the items confiscated. Unfortunately due to global health problems and a national lockdown, future patrols where postponed until a clearer future is known; although both the Provincial Forestry Department and our ECC team are ready to move forward in our partnership to provide a safer habitat for Sayaboury's wild elephants. We aim to start patrols again once restrictions are lifted in May.

From our initial patrols it is clear that an incredibly high presence of rangers is needed to sufficiently manage this area. Nam Pouy NPA is over 190,000 hectares (roughly 270,000 football fields) and currently there are only 10 rangers patrolling this entire area. These 10 rangers are funded by the International Elephant Project, the Fondation Ensemble and the Elephant Conservation Center.



> "Initial patrols where useful for gauging the current competency of the rangers. I now have a better idea of which areas will require training in the near-future."
>
> - Michael Falshaw





Top Left: Phieng Ranger team with confiscated items © M. Falshaw © M. Falshaw
Bottom left: Installing Camera Traps © M. Falshaw / Bottom Right: Wild elephant footprint, Thongmixay district © M. Falshaw

Throughout 2020 and beyond we will be looking to secure more funds to **increase the number of rangers** patrolling this vast area. Along with creating a safer space for wildlife the ECC has some **income generating activities** planned for this area that we hope will bring an alternative source of revenue for the local communities. These consist in the development of scientific tourism and alternative agriculture projects. An **anti-poaching campaign** will also be launched as the programme develops.

Michael Falshaw, ECC's Conservation Officer in Nam Pouy NPA has been in charge of training and equipping the current Ranger Team and helping with the NPA Baseline Study since 2019.

FREEDOM AT LAST!

REWILDING

RELEASING ELEPHANTS IN NAM POUY PROTECTED AREA

In March 2019, the **ECC made Lao history by releasing 5 elephants into the wild**. After a lengthy process aiming at creating a compatible elephant herd (a vital prerequisite), elephants were eventually released into the wild on March, 18th, 2019.

The elephants have been microchipped and their ex-mahouts keep track of their whereabouts using **direct observation and GPS tracking** during their patrols in the Nam Pouy National Protected Area. So far, this experiment has been highly successful and we are extremely proud of our team for offering these elephants a new life. Of course, this couldn't have been possible without our supporters who we wish to thank here for their trust and donations!

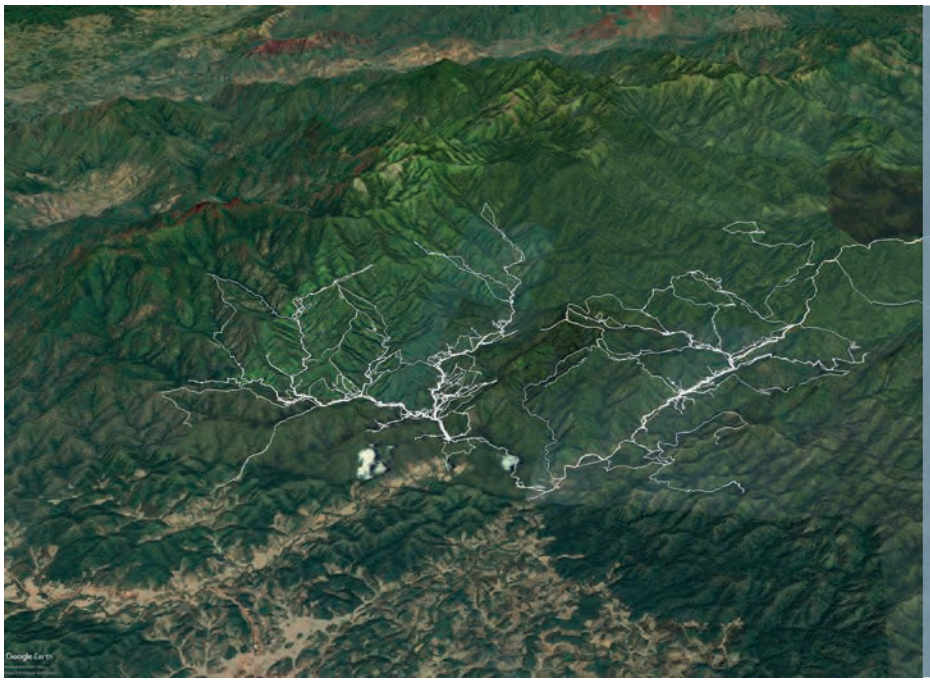
From Slavery to Freedom

As a reminder, a group of 16 elephants was rescued from an attempt to illegally smuggle them to a Zoo in the Middle East in 2018. The Lao Government took 12 of them to the ECC as a show of trust in our project. The ECC experts decided to include 5 of them in the 'Back to the Wild' programme past their herding period. Rewilding was possible thanks to intense cooperation between ECC's Biology Department and ECC Mahouts whose knowledge proved essential in carrying out this experiment.

Rewilding a group of elephants requires following social patterns found in the wild. The group we released consisted of four adult female elephants and one male calf.

Over the past 12 months, the **rangers patrolled 19,500 hectares of forest** to track the group of 5 which has so far been in contact **with a group of wild elephants** inhabiting the Protected Area.

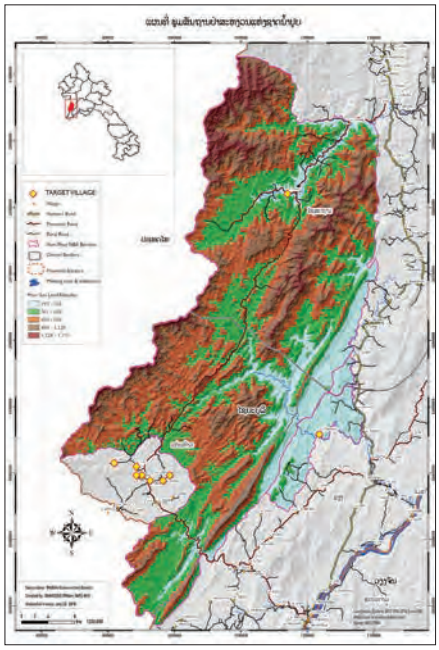
There are so **many essential parameters needed to successfully release elephants**.



Space...

From 390 Ha of land used during the first month of the release, in March 2019, the current area used by the group of 5 elephants spans a whopping 19,500 Ha.





> “The thing I think about most is that the calf tries to kill me all the time”. Falshaw knows that the creature’s new bravery is a sign of the rewilding project’s success.
>
> - India Bourke. NEW STATESMAN



ECC’s Anthony Philippe and Michael Falshaw attending a meeting in Nam Pouy NPA with Sayaboury Province Forestry and Armed Forces representatives. Released elephants and Nam Pouy National Protected Area map. © ECC

First, we need to secure **support from the Authorities in charge of the Park** and convince them that the released elephants will not wreak havoc in neighbouring villages. For this, we need to design a mitigation plan involving deterrents and a formal management plan for the protected area. Then, we need the **Armed Forces’ full cooperation** to ensure the protection of the released elephants from poaching. We also need **trained rangers** and to provide them with the necessary tools to enforce the law. Of course, the released groups must have already formed strong social bonds to survive in the wild. And last but not least, the **land used for reintroduction must be large enough** to accommodate the gentle giants and provide them with **sufficient food**.

We are lucky to have access to this pristine and rich ecosystem and be backed up by a wonderful team of rangers and a supportive Government to undertake our mission.

Releasing elephants into the wild has been our most pressing objective since the ECC was created. 9 years after inception, we are proud to announce that 5 elephants are now roaming free in Nam Pouy NPA.

APPLIED RESEARCH

ELEPHANT SCIENCE

BIOLOGY. ENDOCRINOLOGY. VETERINARY.

A healthy population of captive elephants is a necessity. Given the current pressure on wild elephants and their habitat, **keeping a sustainable captive elephant population capable of breeding is considered vital for the species' survival**. Although we are working toward rewilding formerly captive elephants, not all elephants can survive in the wild, and we will have to continue caring for large numbers of captive elephants. For this reason, strengthening our capacity to provide the best possible care to these elephants is important.



Kan Thissamone collecting blood samples: ©Olleksandr Rupeta

We do so via several partnerships and via our own methods. We have created the **first and only Elephant Hospital in Laos**. The **state-of-the-art treatment area** connected to the hospital provides a safe and clean environment for mahouts and vets alike to offer quality care to elephants in need. The facility is also used to keep elephants under control when they have to undergo treatment. This is done using "positive reinforcement" training on a regular basis. Elephants are able to learn standard commands - showing the right limbs when asked to - and receive rewards when behaving correctly. The hospital is also equipped to monitor health parameters like gastrointestinal parasite eggs, blood cell count and ultrasonography, among others.

Since 2019, and thanks to support provided by Australian Aid, the Smithsonian Institution and private donors (special thanks to Lynette Preston), we were able to establish a **fully equipped endocrinology laboratory**. The equipment and the training received by our staff allow for accurate monitoring of our female elephants' oestrus cycles which in turn allows us to pair them with sires at the right time to maximise breeding chances. Other hormones that are being studied at the lab include testosterone, the male hormone that leads to the state of 'musth' present in adult bulls, making them unpredictable and sometimes dangerous, and cortisol, the stress hormone.



> **"The combination of the endocrinology lab, hospital, behavioural observation and mahout skills creates a powerful tool to provide the best possible welfare to the elephants under our care."**
>
> - Anabel López Pérez





Ultrasound check of a newly rescued bull by Veterinary Surgeon Christopher Stremme. Top left: © Jimmy Beunardeau Anabel López Pérez at work at the treatment area and endocrinology lab. Bottom left: © Tradewindtravellers. Bottom right © Paul Wager

In 2019, our biologist, Anabel Lopez-Perez, started a **PhD at the Veterinary Faculty at the University of Chiang Mai, Thailand**. She will be working on **bull elephant welfare**, monitoring how reproductive and stress hormones change in relation to bull-bull and bull-cow introduction protocols. Bulls are so often overlooked and there is much to learn on how to better manage them, especially in relation to their social needs. Eventually, Anabel's research will contribute to our breeding efforts and allow us to include more males in our projects. Our ongoing **research on elephant diet and auto-medication** with the IRD (French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development) is also bringing fruitful results. The first paper published, the remarkable initial work undertaken by Ethno-Botanist J.M. Dubost with support from the ECC team, can be found here: *https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378874118345616?via=ihub* and a short video, here: *https://youtu.be/f4qWpnPM0xE*

Merging traditional knowledge and scientific research is our DNA. We believe in an approach based on indigenous knowledge with technical and methodological support from modern science.

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

KIDS IN CONSERVATION

ELEPHANTS: A KEYSTONE SPECIES & NATIONAL EMBLEM.

Education has always been a major component of our conservation approach. Children are the future. They will inherit their country's forests and its wildlife. Back in the early years of the ElefantAsia project in Laos, producing outreach educational material made up for the NGO's first successes. With a cartoon book "Keo's Elephant Friend", illustrated posters, a Mobile Elephant Library and other spectacular events like the Elephant Caravans, the ECC team always included children's education in their conservation strategy. This has developed into our **Kids in Conservation Programme.**



Photo: © ECC

Despite recent progress, environmental threats continue – deforestation, poaching, threats to protected areas and urban environmental problems are common in Laos. These have been exacerbated by rapid growth, lack of human resources, inadequate financing, uneven enforcement of environmental laws and growing demand for natural resources from neighbouring countries.

At the ECC, we are well aware of the limited impact of outreach material able to be produced and distributed without adequate onsite training. The ECC has thus developed the "Kids in Conservation" programme, currently being operated with the **Department of Education of Sayaboury Province** with students from Vientiane and Luang Prabang now participating.

The ECC provides school teachers and students with posters and books on elephants while inviting them to discover the animal in its natural ecosystem. After a field visit to ECC's various stations, a picnic is served, games are played along with a quizz. This entire programme is offered to schoolchildren free of charge.





> **"Despite living in the Land of a Million Elephants, most Lao children have never seen an elephant. Empathy and education are vital for the species' survival."**
>
> - Sébastien Duffillot, Founder, ECC



Photos: © ECC

Educational messages can be delivered effectively to schoolchildren when the approach is based on the **'fun-and-learn' philosophy**. Inviting entire classes to the ECC with our guides acting as eco-teachers has proved to be a very efficient way to captivate schoolchildren's attention while showing the elephant in a positive light to rural communities.

During the day-long activity, **students get up-close with the elephants**, learn about their anatomy, biology, social life and the role they play in their ecosystem. Explaining to children that elephants are a **keystone species and a national emblem** allows us to disseminate vital information about ecosystems and the need to protect them for future generations.

A meaningful experience in nature is a powerful way of developing a connection that can guide people toward care for the Earth. Connecting to nature is a predictor of positive conservation behaviour.



“The ECC breeding programme seeks to (re)create sustainable breeding populations in the wild.”

- THE DIPLOMAT

Photo: © XXXXXXXXXX

20 YEARS IN THE FIELD

KEY NUMBERS

ANIMAL WELFARE. POPULATION MANAGEMENT. HABITAT PROTECTION.

For the past 20 years, we have used a mix of traditional local knowledge and science to improve the well-being of the Lao captive elephant population. Since 2018, our main focus has been on creating the conditions necessary to return elephants to the wild. Our achievements are shown here and we hope that, with the continued help of our supporters and local communities we can continue our work in Laos and beyond.

20 YEARS. Our team started work in Laos with the ElefantAsia NGO back in 2000. In 2010, the ECC was born. From humble origins, our conservation programmes now employ 70 people.

450 Captive Elephants microchipped & registered in a **NATIONAL DATABASE** at the Department of Livestock, Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry of Laos (90% of the captive population.)

50,000 Lao **CHILDREN** reached via our "Kids in Conservation", "Mobile Elephant Library" and "Elephant Caravans" educational projects & publications.

192,000 monitored and protected hectares of forest in the **NAM POUY** National Protected Area.

14 elephants **RESCUED** from illegal trafficking rings operating in Laos, China and the Middle-East.

34 ELEPHANTS and **70 STAFF** under our care on the **6,000 HECTARE** Nam Tien concession used by the ECC in Sayaboury Province.

90% of our staff is **LAO** from the **SAYABOURY** Province.

> "An innovative project to utilise Laos' elephant experts in the service of protecting the country's natural treasures."
>
> - GEOGRAPHICAL UK -

5 elephants **RETURNED TO THE WILD** in the Nam Pouy National Protected Area in 2019.

3 PHDs since Year 2007.

10 RANGERS working alongside ECC conservationists in the Nam Pouy NPA.

22,000 FOLLOWERS on social media and the Internet.

$350,000 raised in **DONATIONS** and **SUBVENTIONS** over the past 3 years of activity.

11 MALE ELEPHANTS now under our care at the ECC.

NEWS

Rescued from a Chinese Casino

Thanks to a massive turnout, our crowdfunding campaign to **rescue Joumban and Mae Seang**, a 34-year-old male and 32-year-old female respectively, from a casino in the "Boten Special Economic Zone", deep in the Golden Triangle, has been a success. Joumban and Mae Seang were kept in a parking lot, chained to the pavement and used for a night time laser show. Thanks to **Karl Ammann, a prominent Environmental Journalist, and his wife**, who provided the initial sum needed to acquire the elephants, the campaign allowed us to raise the money needed to pay for their translocation and the wages of the mahouts now caring for them at the ECC.



Photo: Karl Ammann © 2019



Photo: ECC ©2020

Run for Elephants!

The ECC was very glad to organise the Run for Elephants! during the 2020 edition of the Sayaboury Elephant Festival. Although not a direct sponsor of the yearly festival, ECC was happy to organise awareness raising actions during this huge event. This year, the run was followed by over **400 students** and by Mr. Phongsavanh Sitthavong, Governor of Sayaboury Province, Mr. Naniong Sipaseuth, Mrs. Bounpack Inthapania and Mr. Phengnilan Khampampeng – Vice Governors, as well as the French Ambassador, H.E. Florence Jeanblanc-Risler.

New Endocrinology Lab

Through the support of the **Australian Embassy, the Smithsonian Institute, Lynette Preston and private donors**, Anabel López Pérez was able to travel to the United States, where she studied endocrinology research for over three months. Back in Laos, the first endocrinology laboratory fully dedicated to elephants was established with the purpose of **Conservation Research**. Anabel and her team analyse blood samples from all of our breeding females. By monitoring their progesterone levels we are able to improve our breeding programme and ensure the continuation of the species.



Photo: ECC © 2019

Lao PDR Top Leadership Visits the ECC

On February 22nd 2020 we were very honoured to welcome a delegation of 60 representatives from the Lao Government led by the **Vice President of the Lao PDR H.E. Dr. Phankham Viphavanh**. Amongst our distinguished guests were also Dr. Phongsavanh Sitthavong, Governor of Sayaboury Province, H.E. Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, French Ambassador to the Lao PDR and Mr. Sousath Sayakoummane, Director General of the Department of Forestry of the Lao PDR. We were delighted to welcome them at the Elephant Conservation Center for lunch and a tour of our facility.



From left to right: Masayuki Tanaka, Director of Center for Research and Education of Wildlife, Kyoto Zoo, H.E. Dr. Phankham Viphavan, Vice President of the Lao PDR, H.E. Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, French Ambassador to Lao PDR, Sébastien Duffillot, Founder and General Director of the ECC, Mr. Sousath Sayakoummane, Director General of the Department of Forestry of the Lao PDR, Mr. Samlane Souvanasouth, Director of Sayaboury Province's Finance Department, Mr. Phengnilan Khampanpheng, Vice Governor of Sayaboury Province, Mr. Samlane Sayavout, Authority Inspection Director. © ECC

5,000 Trees Planted

In 2019, the Elephant Conservation Center planted 5,000 trees in the Nam Tien Protected Area where it is established. The volunteers of **Volunteer Eco Students Abroad (VESA)** purchased trees and planted all of them on June 1st, "National Tree Planting Day" in Laos. The Governor of Sayaboury Province, Dr. Phongsavanh Sitthavong joined VESA at the ECC and planted the first tree. VESA and the ECC are committed to fighting the battle against deforestation in Laos and to providing forage and food for the elephants.



Photo: ECC © 2019

Supporting Other Camps

Anabel Lopez Perez, biologist, and Kan Thissamone, vet technician & elephant welfare manager, both went to the **Mekong Elephant Park** (EMP) in Pakbeng, Oudomxay Province. The purpose of their visit was to check on the health of EMP's elephants. Anabel introduced EMP staff to her research on captive breeding. She taught EMP's manager how to undertake blood sample collections from the camp's female elephants. Samples are then analysed at the ECC laboratory. Kan taught the camp's mahouts how to proceed with simple veterinary procedures and trained them on foot care and target training. It is always a real pleasure to share our experience with other teams.



Photo: ECC © 2019



© ACES

"Conservation Gold" Award

The ECC was honoured to receive the **"Conservation Gold" Award by the independent auditing organisation Asian Captive Elephant Standard**. The audit took place in September 2019 and the ECC obtained 100% of their mandatory criteria, 100% conservation criteria and 93% advanced criteria. **ECC is the only elephant facility in Asia that has reached the "Conservation Gold" level so far**. You can learn more on ACES' policies and audited camps on: *https://www.elephantstandards.com/*

Fondation Ensemble

Our 10-year **Elephant Conservation and Community Livelihood Development** in and around the Nam Pouy National Protected Area has received **substantial initial funding from France-based Fondation Ensemble**. The **120,000 € grant** will help us start this ambitious programme which includes the monitoring of Laos' second largest wild elephant population, capacity building within the park's Ranger Patrol, Law Enforcement and the development of Income Generating Activities for communities living in the park's vicinity. We warmly thank the Foundation for its trust and greatly appreciated support.



Elephant Reintroduction Workshop

In early February 2020 team members from the ECC's soft release project were asked to speak at a workshop in Thailand hosted by **The Elephant Reintroduction Foundation**. The three day event saw speakers from across South Asia present their work and discuss elephant reintroduction. Kan Thissamone (Veterinary Technician and Elephant Care Manager) and Michael Fashaw (Conservation Project Manager and Release Co-ordinator) spoke about **ECC's efforts to release captive elephants back into the wild**. The workshop consisted of a day of presentations, a field trip to an elephant release site and a day of discussions, including the **ethics of releasing elephants and community engagement**.



Photo: Elephant Reintroduction Foundation © 2020

United National Conference on Scientific Tourism

ECC founder Sebastien Duffillot participated in the **#EarthToo** event held at the **United Nations Headquarters in Geneva** and the Geneva Forum, a Think Tank on Scientific Tourism organised by **Objective Sciences International** in December 2020. Sebastien gave a presentation on ECC's achievements and described the steps followed by the organisation since its creation, from a welfare-based project to a multi-disciplinary conservation programme.



Photo: © OSI

FINANCES

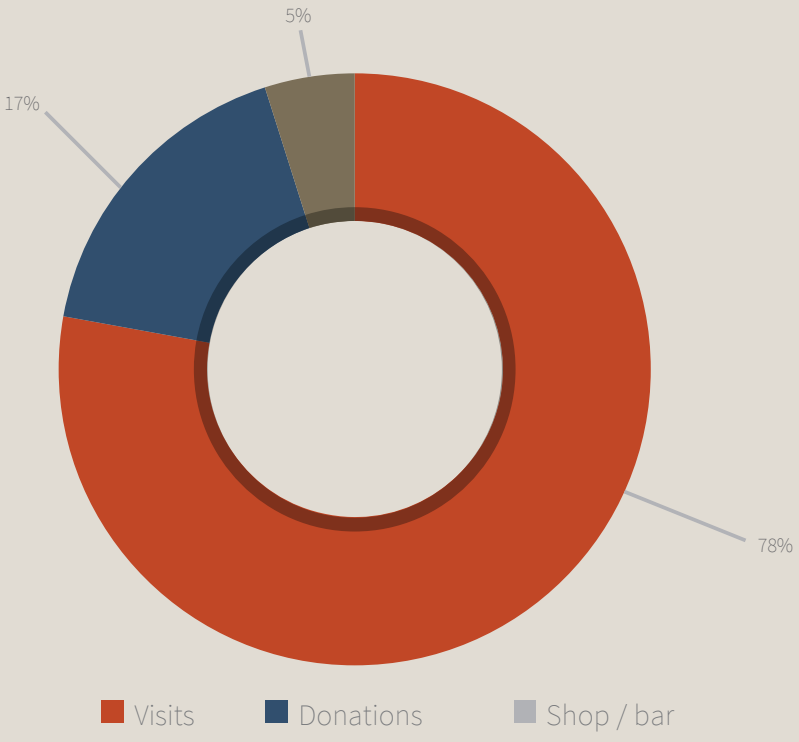
Revenue & Expenses

	2017	2018	2019	% Growth 2019/2018
Number of Paid Visits	**2 928**	**3 265**	**3 227**	**-1%**
Turnover	$584 784	$687 739	$715 557	4%
Bar & Shop	$37 473	$44 796	$44 164	-1%
Donations	$39 380	$88 453	$221 927	151%
Total Revenue	**$661 637**	**$820 988**	**$981 648**	**20%**
Total Expenses	**-$579 963**	**-$772 213**	**-$992 688**	**29%**

Our expenses increased significantly in 2019 due to the rescue of new elephants, the setting up of our endocrinology laboratory and our elephant reintroduction programme. Meanwhile, thanks to Karl Amman, his wife and all our partners, we have been able to collect enough funds for new rescues; especially the two elephants that have been rescued from a Chinese casino.

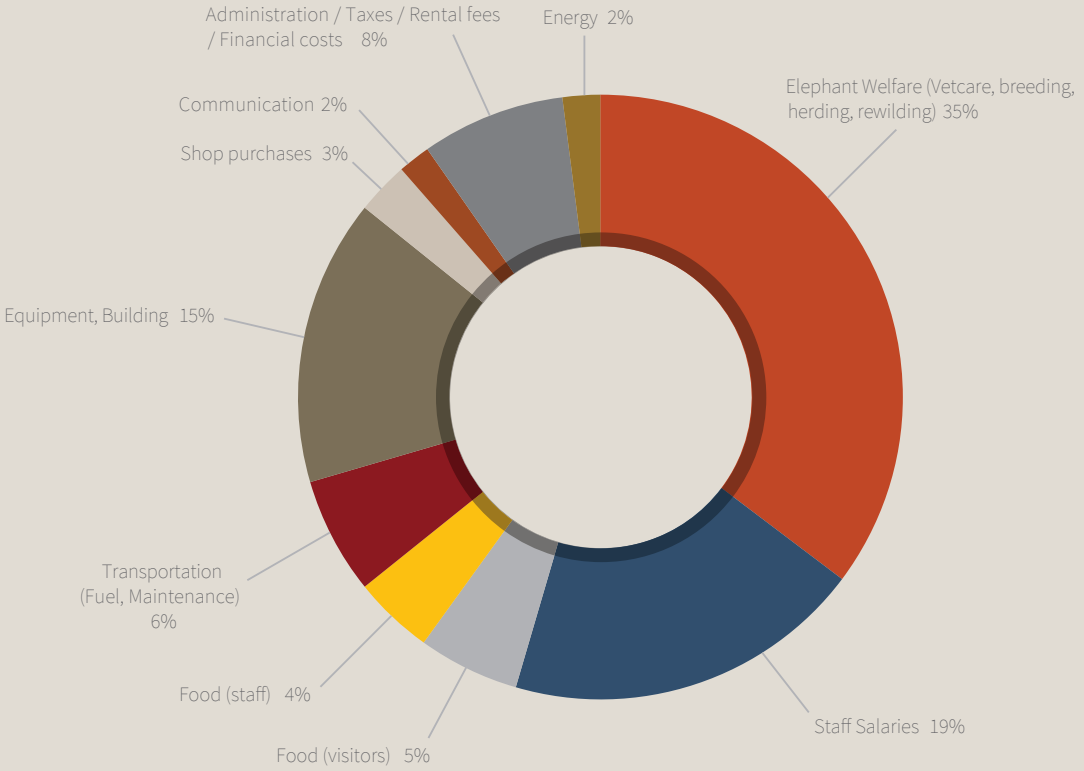
2019 Revenue

AVERAGE 2018-2019

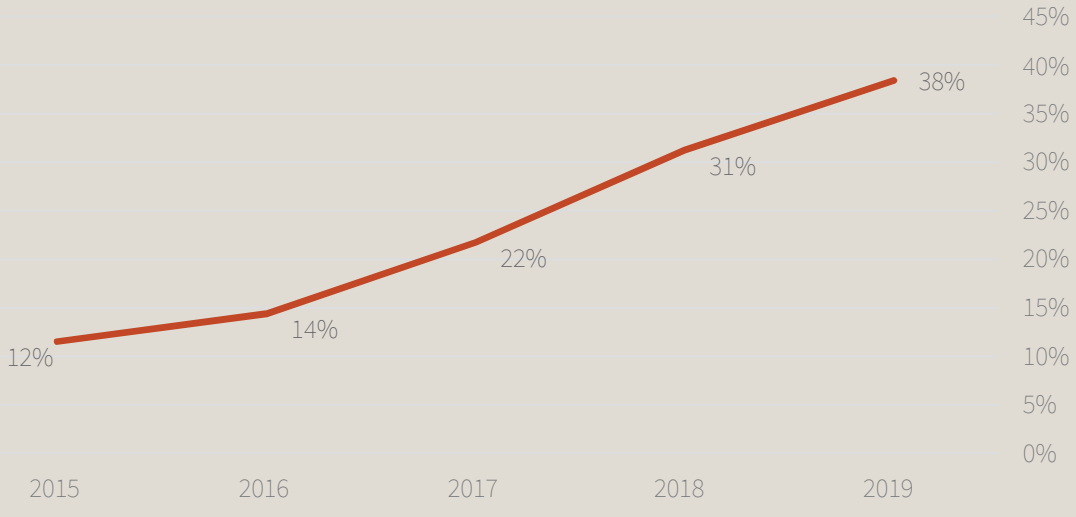


2019 Expenses

AVERAGE 2018-2019



Evolution of elephant welfare budget



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OUR PARTNERS

Australian AID

Fondation Ensemble

Smithsonian

International Elephant Project

EleAid

Les Machines de l'Île Nantes

VESA CHANGE. MADE BY YOU.

IRD Institut de Recherche pour le Développement FRANCE

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Des Elephants & des Hommes

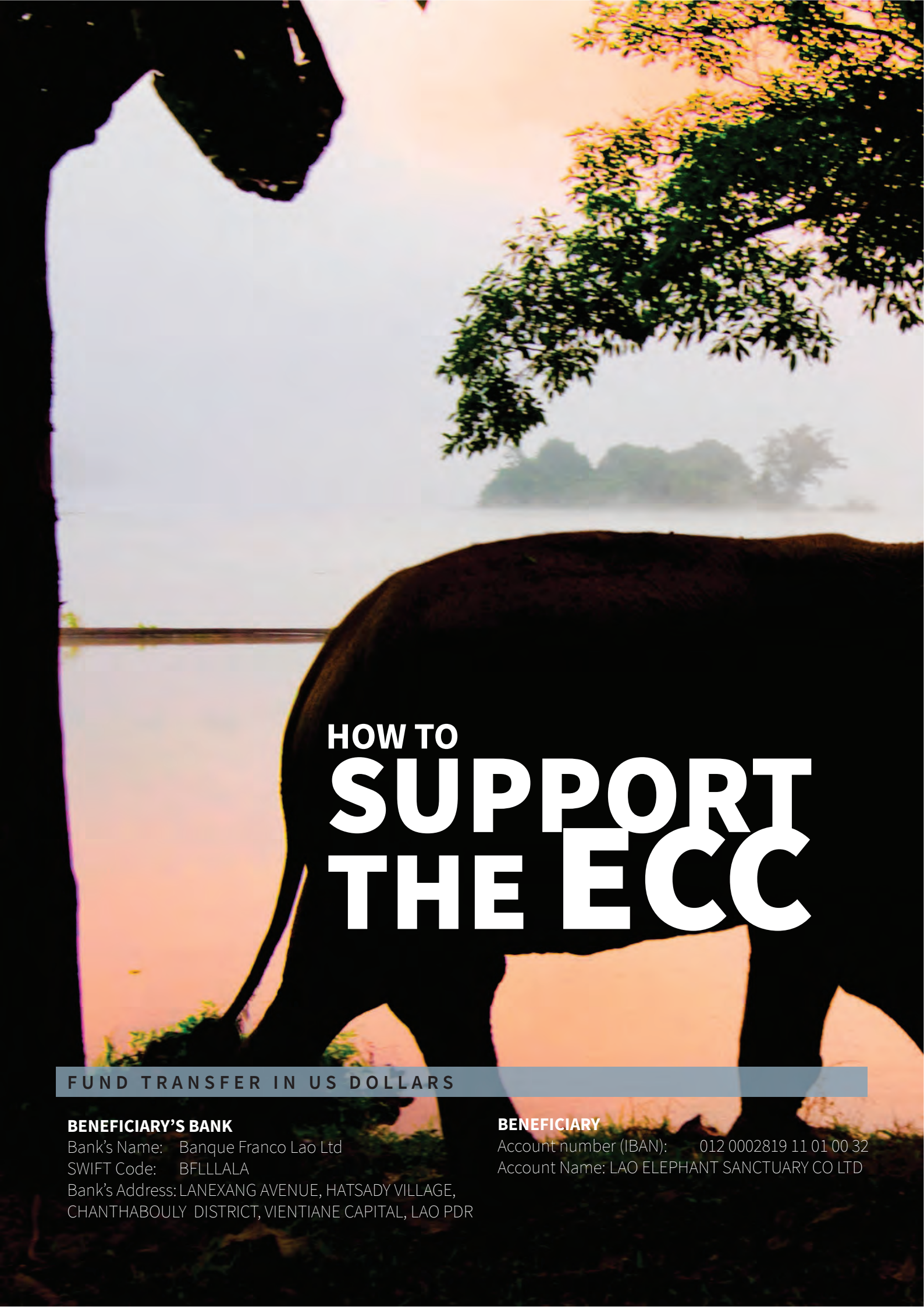
SENSPA refresh your senses

basmati authentic help

Lao Skyway

Zoo de la Barben

The Elephant Temple



HOW TO SUPPORT THE ECC

FUND TRANSFER IN US DOLLARS

BENEFICIARY'S BANK
Bank's Name: Banque Franco Lao Ltd
SWIFT Code: BFLLLALA
Bank's Address: LANEXANG AVENUE, HATSADY VILLAGE, CHANTHABOULY DISTRICT, VIENTIANE CAPITAL, LAO PDR

BENEFICIARY
Account number (IBAN): 012 0002819 11 01 00 32
Account Name: LAO ELEPHANT SANCTUARY CO LTD



More Rewilding

Reintroducing elephants into the wild comes at a cost... The herding programme required prior to releasing elephants can last up to two years and employs a team of vets, behavioural biologists and one mahout per elephant. Once elephants are released in a sustainable group, mahouts remain employed to follow up on their former charge, track and report elephant movements to the rangers and the ECC for improved protection. **THE YEARLY COST OF RELEASING AN ELEPHANT IS ABOUT $20,000.**

Protected Area Suveillance

To ensure the protection of both the elephants and their habitat, a well-trained and highly equipped team of rangers is required. There are currently 11 rangers employed in the Nam Pouy National Protected Area. Although their wages are paid by the Lao Government, the ECC pays for training costs and equipment, patrols per diem and bonuses when arrests or confiscations are made. **A TYPICAL MONTHLY BUDGET FOR THE RANGER TEAM ADDS UP TO $6,000.**

Breeding

Keeping a healthy and sustainable captive population of elephants is necessary should wild members of the species disappear in the wild. Although elephants born at the ECC will never be used for work or entertainment, breeding is essential to maintain a viable population for future reintroduction into the wild. It takes 20-24 months for a cow to deliver her calf. Another 3 years before the calf is weaned. Pairing elephants is not an easy task either. We need to monitor cows' progesterone levels with constant blood and faecal sample collections and analyse them at the lab. Finally, when an opportunity arises, we need to hire sires when our own males show no signs of interest in the ovulating cows... The process is very lengthy... and expensive. Mahouts and biologists wages, laboratory costs, sire rental, food for mother and calf during 3-4 years... **GIVING BIRTH TO A BABY ELEPHANT COSTS A MINIMUM OF $60,000!**

Photo: © Paul Wager



elephant conservation center

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Instagram: #elephantconservationlaos