



ELEPHANTS OF ODISHA: A LEGACY OF COEXISTENCE AND COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE

A strategic blueprint for proactive conservation and
harmonious human-elephant coexistence



The Sacred Giants of Odisha: an Introduction

A Divine Legacy, An Ecological Imperative

Our national heritage animal Elephants are inseparable from the history, ecology, and economy of Odisha. Historically, 'Gajapati' kings commanded vast armies, a power immortalized in sacred art across the state. From the iconic Dhauli Elephant rock-cut sculptures and intricate temple carvings at Konark to the divine elephant adornment of Lord Jagannath, their presence signifies deep reverence.



Ecologically, elephants are a keystone species, acting as ecosystem engineers of forests by shaping vegetation and supporting biodiversity. This living legacy also drives livelihoods. They generate income primarily through eco-tourism, supporting local guides and businesses. Additionally, conservation initiatives create income opportunities by employing community members as trackers and anti-poaching squad members, directly linking wildlife protection to sustainable income and fostering a culture of coexistence.

Protecting them is not just a duty; it is essential for the health of our natural world.



Lifespan:

Up to 60-80 years



Weight:

Up to 2.7-5.4 tons.



Height:

Up to 6-12 feet tall at the shoulder.
Females are smaller.



Habitat:

Grasslands, Evergreen, Deciduous and scrub forests etc.

Diet:

Herbivore, Grass, leaves, roots, bark, flowers etc., consuming up to 150 kg of vegetation daily.



Breeding:

20-22 months Gestation period, One Calf; protected communally and looked after for 3-4 years



Social structure:

Complex, Herds led by the oldest and wisest Matriarch.

Threats:

Poaching, accidental death due to road, railway and electrocution, retaliatory killing etc



Odisha State population:

2103 (2024 Winter Census);
2098 (2024 Summer Census)



Ex-situ Conservation Population in Odisha:

04



No. of elephants in Rehabilitation Centres in Odisha:

17



Appendix-I

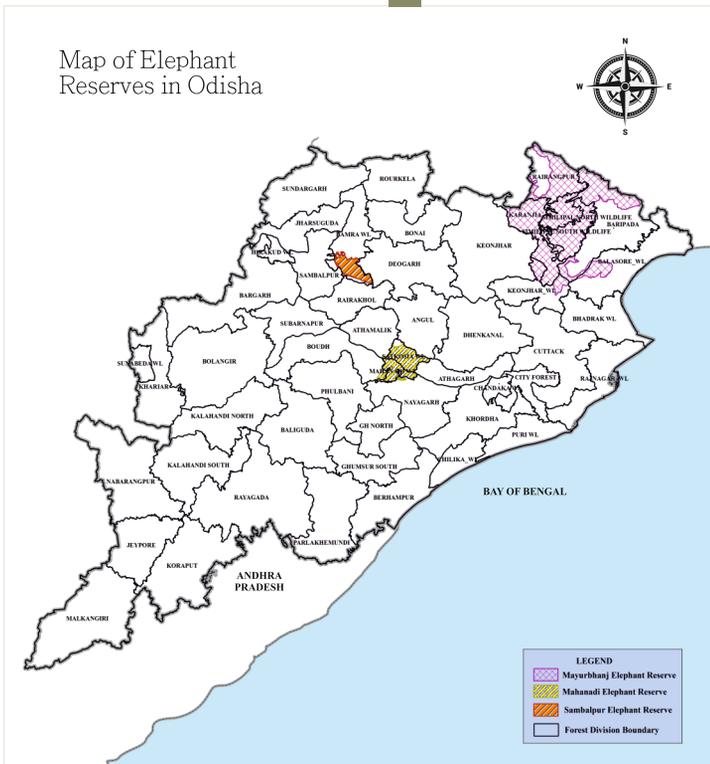
Where the Giants Roam: The Elephant Landscape

Mapping the way of Life

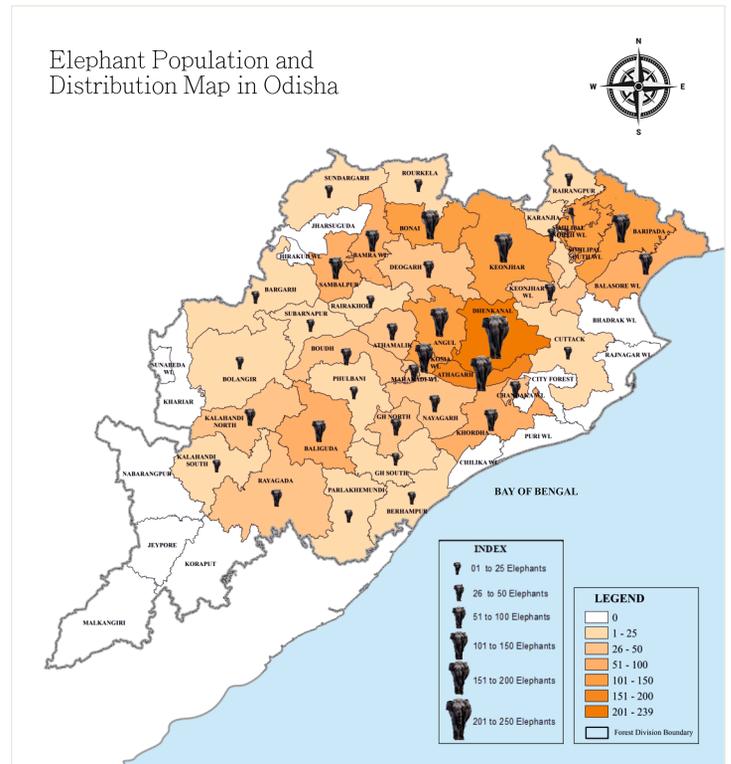
Odisha, being a major stronghold of the wild Asian elephant population in the East-Central Landscape of India, accounts for 63% of the region's population and 6.6% of the total population of the country, as per the 2017 All-India Synchronized Elephant Census report. They roam across a vast landscape of the state, primarily within three Elephant Reserves, namely Mayurbhanj, Mahanadi, Sambalpur, and thirteen of the nineteen wildlife sanctuaries. These Elephant Reserves (ERs) have been constituted and notified under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, for better protection and conservation of Asian elephant in their natural habitat. Within three ERs, Seven Wildlife Sanctuaries are located. About 584 elephants, i.e., 28% of the total elephant population of Odisha are residing within the ER Network. Similarly, fourteen traditional pathways known as corridors have been identified throughout Odisha.



Map of Elephant Reserves in Odisha



Elephant Population and Distribution Map in Odisha



The Challenge: A Clash of Worlds

Human-Elephant Conflict: The Two Sides of the Story



Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) is a complex socio-ecological phenomenon defined by antagonistic interactions at the interface of human and elephant populations.

Impacts on Humans:

- Human injury and death
- Crop and property destruction
- Profound community stress

Impacts on Elephants:

- Retaliatory killings and injury
- Physiological stress
- Habitat degradation and loss

Primary Drivers of HEC:

The root causes are human-driven activities that shrink elephant habitats.

- **Human Factors:** Population growth and socio-economic changes.
- **Land-Use Change:** Expansion of agriculture, mining, and infrastructure.
- **Ultimate Causes:** This leads to habitat fragmentation, degradation and loss, forcing elephants into smaller areas and increasing conflict.



Forging A Path: Proactive Strategy of Odisha

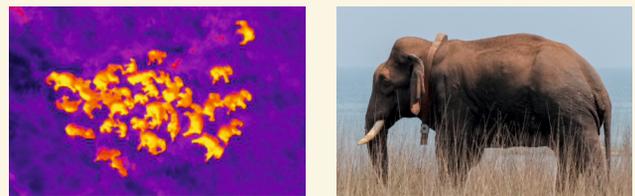
Innovation and Intervention: Odisha's 360° Approach

Odisha is at the forefront of tackling HEC with a multi-pronged, technology-driven, and community-focused strategy. This is not just about defense; it's about intelligent management.

Data furnished for the last 03 years,
2022-23 to 2024-25

01 | TECHNOLOGICAL SHIELD: Real-Time Intelligence

- **AI-Powered Monitoring**
4 AI cameras (e-Eye AI/ML systems) at Rourkela Division near Railway Track, 5 Cameras at Similipal TR for forest fire, 161 AI Trail Guards
- **Early Warning Systems**
568 Nos installed
- **App & Web Monitoring**
 - Wildlife Odisha App for Elephant reporting
 - iWLMS Web Portal for Elephant Monitoring
 - ANUKAMPA App and Web Portal for Compassionate Payment.
 - OFMS (Odisha Forest Monitoring System) App & Web Portal for Forest Patrolling
- **Drone Surveillance**
96 Thermal & 44 Non-Thermal Drone Cameras deployed
- **GPS Radio-Collars**
06 For real-time tracking of Elephants



02 | HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Corridor & Habitat Restoration
14 Nos. Identified Elephant corridors, **482** water bodies created, **1293.22** Ha meadow developed, restoring degraded patches, fire prevention, and alternative livelihoods.

Budget Allocation
Mandatory **30-40%** of the total budget is dedicated to habitat management. Specific central and state govt. schemes for the conservation of Elephants and their habitat.



03 | ON-GROUND OPERATIONS

Response & Patrol

19 Nos RRTs, 530 Nos. Anti-poaching squads. 455 Elephant Protection Squad members are being deployed each year. 110 Nos watchtower and staff barracks constructed

Strategic Deterrents

469.04 KM Solar fencing, 156.21 KM Elephant-Proof Trenches (EPTs), 5372 Nos solar street lights. 3.997 KM Stone wall

Community & Support

236.74KM solar fencing done in the year 2022-24 under 'Jana Surakhya, Gaja Rakhya' scheme, 24x7 Control Rooms at Division, Circle and HQ level, 2128 Nos. villages are being covered under Gajasathi scheme

Specialized Units

6 Mobile Veterinary Units, 02 Elephant Translocation Vehicles-Airavats



04 | PROACTIVE CELLS FOR ELEPHANT CONSERVATION

Crime Cell

Constituted at the office of the ADGP, Crime Branch, Odisha.

Elephant Cell

Established at the CWLW office.

Joint Task Force (JTF)

A collaboration of forest officials, police, and elephant experts.

The Power of Community & CAP: Guardians of The Herd and Mitigation Strategies

Gaja Saathi: The Village Champions of Coexistence



Long-term solutions must be built on trust, partnership, and local empowerment. The cornerstone of Odisha's strategy is the Gaja Saathi (Friend of the Elephant) program, are volunteers from conflict-prone villages who are trained and equipped by the Forest Department.

Furthermore, the state's policy of providing timely and fair ex-gratia compensation for crop, property, and human loss is a critical step in building trust and ensuring that local communities see the government as an ally, reducing the impulse for retaliation.

The rise of HEC in Odisha has attracted the attention of the honourable Court leading to the subsequent formation of the Joint Task Force (JTF). Following the directions of Court, a Comprehensive Action Plan (CAP) was prepared.



A Comprehensive Action Plan (CAP): strategic blueprint to mitigate HEC

- Human-elephant conflict mitigation (19 Action Points)
- Inter-Departmental Coordination (35 Action Points)
- Protection, Enforcement & Prosecution (42 Action Points)
- Elephant Habitat & Corridors (20 Action Points)
- People's Participation & Awareness (17 Action Points)
- Habitat Management (18 Action Points)
- Human Resource & Capacity Building (21 Action Points)
- Wildlife Health Management (8 Action Points)
- Research & Technology (19 Action Points)
- Monitoring (5 Action Points)





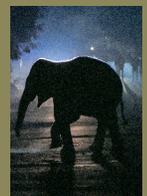
On November 23rd, 2023, a two to three-month-old elephant calf was separated from its herd in the Belda Reserve Forest, Keonjhar. It was translocated to Nandankanan Zoological Park without sedation, arriving at 2:00 AM on November 24th, 2023. The calf had suffered a severe incised wound on its right forelimb at the carpal joint, which nearly severed the limb and caused phalangeal dislocation. To help the elephant bear weight on the affected limb, a custom iron splint was created. This splint was designed as a shoe, constructed from one-inch-wide iron flat bars. The top end was secured around the radius bone, while the bottom end acted as a sole, providing support and preventing the limb from dragging. Initially, the splint was changed twice a week, and later, at weekly intervals. The wound took approximately five months to heal completely. Later, the Elephant Calf was named 'Asha', which means 'hope'. In recognition of its resilience and as a symbol of compassion and Odisha's commitment to wildlife conservation, the Odisha Police designated her as the official mascot for the 73rd All India Police Hockey Championship in 2025.

Asha: The Ray of Hope



The Government of Odisha is taking a landmark initiative in global wildlife conservation. In a strategic partnership with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Odisha will establish the world's first Center for Species Survival (CSS) exclusively dedicated to the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*).

The Asian elephant, National Heritage Animal of India, is an integral part of the state's rich cultural history and a keystone species of the forest ecosystem. However, its global population has declined by nearly 50% in recent decades due to habitat loss, human-elephant conflict (HEC), poaching, and infrastructure expansion. The species is now listed as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. As a testament to its persistent commitment to conservation, the Government of Odisha will construct this facility within the Chandaka Wildlife Division. By hosting this Center, Odisha is poised to become the nerve center for science-based Asian elephant conservation in the region.



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