ASIAN ELEPHANT & BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

SRI LANKA



ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PROGRAM

CONTRIBUTE TO LONG-TERM ELEPHANT RESEARCH WHILE HELPING CONSERVE SRI LANKA'S REMARKABLE BIODIVERSITY.

Sri Lanka is home to the endangered Sri Lankan elephant; a unique subspecies found only on the island. Rapid habitat loss, land-use changes, and increasing human-elephant conflict have become major threats to its long-term survival. As human settlements and agricultural areas expand into elephant habitats, encounters between people and elephants have become more frequent, creating significant challenges for both wildlife conservation and local communities.

Our volunteer program is dedicated to conserving Sri Lanka's elephants and other native wildlife through scientific research, ecological monitoring, community engagement, and sustainable conservation practices. Volunteers contribute to studies of animal behaviour, habitat use, population ecology, biodiversity, and the factors driving human-elephant conflict. Field activities may include wildlife observation, behavioural data collection, biodiversity surveys, camera trap monitoring, GPS mapping, habitat assessments, and environmental monitoring.

A core principle of our program is that successful conservation depends on empowering local communities. We promote a sustainable, community-based approach by providing people with the knowledge, practical skills, and resources needed to protect wildlife while improving their livelihoods. By combining modern scientific research with valuable traditional ecological knowledge that has been passed down through generations, we help develop practical, locally appropriate solutions that reduce human-elephant conflict, restore habitats, and conserve biodiversity.

Our approach encourages people to become active stewards of their natural environment by demonstrating that healthy ecosystems can provide long-term social, environmental, and economic benefits. Through sustainable land management, conservation education, habitat restoration, and wildlife-friendly practices, communities can protect nature while creating resilient and sustainable livelihoods.

Responsible tourism is an important part of this vision. Our volunteer program promotes ethical and environmentally responsible travel that supports local communities, respects wildlife, and contributes directly to conservation efforts. Volunteers not only gain hands-on experience in wildlife research and conservation but also contribute to projects that generate meaningful benefits for both people and nature.

By participating in this program, volunteers work alongside experienced researchers, conservationists, and local communities to collect valuable scientific data and support evidence-based conservation initiatives. Together, we are building a future where people and wildlife can coexist, protecting Sri Lanka's extraordinary biodiversity while creating sustainable opportunities for future generations.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to conserve Sri Lanka's elephants and biodiversity through scientific research, community empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and responsible tourism. By integrating modern conservation science with traditional ecological knowledge, we work to create practical solutions that enable people and wildlife to coexist for generations to come.



THE PROGRAM

Thank you for your interest in joining our Asian Elephant & Biodiversity Conservation. This programme offers international volunteers a unique opportunity to contribute directly to wildlife conservation and scientific research in rural Sri Lanka. Volunteers work alongside local scientists, conservation practitioners, university students, and community members while gaining hands-on experience in elephant conservation, biodiversity monitoring, and community-based conservation initiatives. The programme is conducted entirely in English and welcomes participants from around the world, regardless of previous conservation or research experience.

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

For many participants, this will be their first visit to Sri Lanka. We encourage volunteers to take some time to learn about the country's culture, wildlife, climate, and customs before arrival. No previous research or conservation experience is required. Full training will be provided at the beginning of the programme.

You should arrive with:

- An interest in wildlife and conservation.
- A willingness to learn new skills.
- Respect for local cultures and traditions.
- A readiness to work outdoors in tropical conditions.

Working Language

- All programme activities are conducted in English.
- No knowledge of Sinhala or Tamil is required.

You will work closely with:

- Local scientists and conservationists.
- Local farmers and community members.
- Field assistants and project staffs
- Villages

WHO CAN JOIN

The programme is designed primarily for international participants, including:

- University and college students.
- Gap-year students.
- Wildlife enthusiasts.
- Conservation professionals.
- Nature photographers.
- Retired individuals seeking meaningful travel experiences.
- Anyone interested in wildlife conservation and cultural exchange.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Basic Requirements

- Recommended age: 18 - 70 years
- Participants aged 14 -18 may be accepted with written parental consent or as a group with a chaperone
- Participants over 70 are welcome if they are in good health and comfortable participating in outdoor field activities.
- No scientific qualifications are required.
- Minimum Duration - 1 Week
- Maximum Duration - 12 Weeks

Physical Requirements

The programme involves moderate physical activity. Participants should be comfortable:

- Walking on uneven ground.
- Spending several hours outdoors.
- Working in warm and humid conditions.
- Travelling on rural roads.
- Occasionally starting early in the morning.
- Activities can often be adapted to different fitness levels.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

The programme provides:

- Accommodation during the program
- Three meals per day
- Drinking water
- Transportation for all project activities
- Research equipment required for surveys
- Training and supervision
- Access to scientific and educational resources
- Completion certificate

ASIAN ELEPHANT & BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Morning Research & Conservation Activities (9:00 AM – 12:30 PM)

A. Elephant Conservation & Human-Elephant Coexistence

1. A Day with a Farming Family

Spend time with a local farming family experiencing the challenges of living alongside wild elephants. Volunteers assist with daily farm activities, learn about traditional farming practices, and gain first-hand insight into human-elephant conflict and community-based conservation.

Volunteer activities

- Assist with seasonal farming activities
- Learn about crop protection methods
- Discuss local experiences of living with elephants
- Record observations on farming practices and conservation challenges

2. Electric Fence Monitoring

Visit different types of electric fence systems used to reduce human-elephant conflict and evaluate their effectiveness.

Volunteer activities

- Inspect fence condition
- Record maintenance issues
- Document elephant crossing points
- Learn about different mitigation strategies

3. Mapping Crop Fields and Mitigation Measures

Map agricultural lands using GPS and document crop types, land use, and elephant mitigation measures to better understand farming practices in conflict-prone landscapes.

Volunteer activities

- GPS mapping
- Record crop types
- Identify mitigation methods
- Collect habitat information

4. Human-Elephant Conflict Surveys

Conduct household surveys to understand the impacts of elephants on rural communities.

Volunteer activities

- Interview local residents
- Record crop damage
- Document property damage
- Collect information on conflict history and local attitudes toward elephants

5. Elephant Dung Surveys

Search for elephant dung in the field to study elephant distribution and feeding ecology.



Volunteer activities

- Locate dung samples
- Estimate dung age
- Examine diet composition from dung contents
- Record GPS locations and habitat characteristics

6. Promoting Elephant-Friendly Farming

Work alongside farmers to establish and maintain crops that are less attractive to elephants as part of sustainable conflict mitigation.

Volunteer activities

- Assist with planting
- Learn about elephant-resistant crops
- Help maintain demonstration plots
- Discuss sustainable farming approaches

B. Bird Research & Conservation

1. Bird Nest Monitoring

Monitor active bird nests to study breeding success and nesting behaviour.

Volunteer activities

- Locate and monitor nests
- Record breeding stages
- Identify nesting species
- Collect behavioural observations

2. Wetland Bird Surveys

Survey birds using rice paddies and wetlands to understand bird diversity and crop interactions.

Volunteer activities

- Identify wetland birds
- Conduct systematic counts
- Record feeding behaviour
- Monitor potential crop pest species

3. Bird–Fruit Tree Interaction Studies

Observe interactions between birds and fruiting trees to understand seed dispersal and feeding ecology.

Volunteer activities

- Observe feeding birds
- Record fruit preferences
- Document seed dispersal behaviour
- Identify visiting bird species

4. Peacock Population Surveys

Survey wild peafowl populations in agricultural and natural habitats.

Volunteer activities

- Count individuals
- Record sex and age classes
- Map distribution
- Record habitat use

5. House Sparrow Monitoring

Monitor local House Sparrow populations to better understand their status in rural landscapes.

Volunteer activities

- Conduct population counts
- Record nesting sites
- Document habitat characteristics

6. Community Surveys on Bird Conservation

Interview community members about their perceptions of birds and their roles in agriculture.

Volunteer activities

- Conduct questionnaires
- Record local knowledge
- Assess attitudes toward birds
- Discuss conservation awareness

C. Butterfly Conservation

1. Establishing Butterfly Gardens

Create and maintain butterfly gardens using native nectar and host plants.

Volunteer activities

- Plant native vegetation
- Prepare garden plots
- Maintain butterfly habitats
- Learn about butterfly ecology

2. Butterfly Diversity Surveys

Survey butterflies across a range of habitats to monitor species diversity and abundance.

Volunteer activities

- Identify butterfly species
- Conduct transects surveys
- Record habitat information
- Photograph species

3. Vegetation Surveys

Assess plant communities that support butterflies and other wildlife.

Volunteer activities

- Identify plant species
- Record vegetation structure
- Map habitat characteristics

D. Mammal Research

1. Sand Tracking Surveys

Use prepared sand plots to detect mammals visiting home gardens and surrounding habitats.

Volunteer activities

- Prepare tracking stations
- Identify footprints
- Record species presence
- Photograph tracks

2. Camera Trap Monitoring

Deploy and maintain camera traps used to monitor wildlife.

Volunteer activities

- Install camera traps
- Retrieve images
- Identify wildlife species
- Assist with data management

3. Small Wild Cat Surveys

Survey small wild cats using track searches and night observations.

Volunteer activities

- Search for footprints and signs
- Conduct spotlight surveys
- Record habitat use
- Learn species identification

E. Sustainable Livelihood & Community Activities

1. Organic Compost Production

Work with local farmers to produce organic compost using locally available materials.

Volunteer activities

- Prepare compost piles
- Learn composting techniques
- Understand sustainable agriculture

2. Traditional Weaving Experience

Learn traditional weaving techniques from local community members while supporting community livelihoods and cultural heritage.

Volunteer activities

- Learn basic weaving techniques
- Assist local artisans
- Understand traditional sustainable practices

Afternoon Activities (3:30 PM – 6:00 PM)

1. Elephant Research in National Parks

Visit nearby national parks to assist with long-term elephant monitoring.

Volunteer activities

- Identify individual elephants
- Estimate age and sex
- Record family groups
- Observe social behaviour
- Assess body condition
- Record GPS locations
- Collect demographic data

2. Bird Point Count Surveys

Conduct standardized bird surveys using internationally recognised point count methods.

Volunteer activities

- Identify birds by sight and sound
- Record abundance
- Estimate distances
- Collect habitat information

3. Environmental Education

Participate in conservation education programmes for local school children.

Volunteer activities

- Assist with conservation lessons
- Nature games
- Educational presentations
- Inspire future conservationists

Evening Activities

Community Crop Protection (Optional)

Volunteers have the unique opportunity to spend an evening with farming families helping guard crop fields from elephants using traditional, non-lethal methods.

This optional activity provides valuable insight into the realities of human-elephant coexistence while supporting local communities. Volunteers observe traditional crop protection techniques and learn about the challenges faced by farmers living alongside elephants.

ONE-WEEK ELEPHANT & BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Program Itinerary

Monday – Orientation & Training

Morning (9:00 AM – 12:30 PM)

- Welcome and programme orientation
- Introduction to Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka
- Safety briefing
- Field ethics and responsible wildlife observation
- Introduction to ongoing research projects

Afternoon (3:30 PM – 6:00 PM)

- Field methods training
- GPS use
- Data sheets and data recording
- Species identification
- Behavioural observation methods
- Camera trap demonstration
- Preparing equipment for fieldwork

Evening (7.00 PM onwards)

- Welcome dinner
- Meet the research team
- Discussion on the week's activities

Tuesday – Community Elephant Conservation

Morning

- Human-Elephant Conflict Survey
- Visit farming communities
- Interview farmers
- Record crop and property damage

Afternoon

- National Park Elephant Monitoring
- Elephant identification
- Family group composition
- Behaviour observations

Evening

- Data entry
- Elephant identification practice

Wednesday – Bird Conservation

Morning

- Bird Nest Monitoring
- OR Wetland Bird Survey (season dependent)

Afternoon

National Park Elephant Monitoring

Evening

- Species identification workshop

Thursday – Elephant Research

Morning

- Elephant Dung Survey
- Diet analysis
- Habitat assessment

Afternoon

- Environmental Education with Local School Children

Evening

- Overnight crop guarding with local farmers

Friday – Biodiversity Conservation

Morning

- Choose one:
  - Butterfly Survey
  - Camera Trap Monitoring
  - Small Mammal Survey

Afternoon

- National Park Elephant Monitoring

Evening

- Programme review
- Conservation discussion
- Certificate presentation

Saturday & Sunday

Free time for independent travel

TWO-WEEK ELEPHANT & BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Program Itinerary

WEEK 1

(Same as above)

WEEK 2

Monday – Sustainable Farming & Community Conservation

Morning
- Elephant-Friendly Farming
- Planting crops less attractive to elephants

Afternoon
- National Park Elephant Monitoring

Evening
- Data management workshop

Tuesday – Human-Elephant Conflict Mitigation

Morning
- Electric Fence Monitoring

Afternoon
- Bird Point Count Survey

Evening
- Wildlife photo identification

Wednesday – Landscape Ecology

Morning
- Mapping Crop Fields
- GPS surveys
- Land-use mapping

Afternoon
- National Park Elephant Monitoring

Evening
- Research presentation by project staff

Thursday – Mammal Conservation

Morning

- Choose one:
  - Camera Trap Monitoring
  - Sand Tracking Survey
  - Small Wild Cat Survey

Afternoon

- Teaching conservation to local children

Evening

- Overnight crop guarding with local farmers

Friday – Biodiversity & Community

Morning

- Choose one:
  - Butterfly Garden Establishment
  - Vegetation Survey
  - Organic Compost Production
  - Traditional Weaving Experience

Afternoon

- National Park Elephant Monitoring

Evening

- Final discussion
- Volunteer feedback
- Certificate presentation
- Farewell dinner



WHAT TO PACK

About the attire

Much of the programme's morning fieldwork takes place in rural villages where volunteers will work closely with local farmers, community members, and school children. As a sign of respect for local customs and culture, participants are required to wear long trousers or other clothing that appropriately covers the legs during village-based activities.

Clothing should be practical, comfortable, and suitable for working outdoors while maintaining a respectful appearance.

For afternoon activities, particularly National Park visits and wildlife observation sessions, shorts are acceptable. However, lightweight long trousers are still recommended as they provide additional protection from sun exposure, insects, and vegetation. Project staff will advise participants if any specific clothing requirements apply to particular activities.

Personal Equipment

- Day backpack.
- Reusable water bottle.
- Torch or headlamp.
- Power bank.
- Sunglasses.
- Camera (optional).
- Binoculars.
- Journal

Personal Items

- Sunscreen.
- Insect repellent.
- Personal toiletries.
- Personal medications.
- Small personal first-aid kit.

Travel Documents

- Passport.
- Visa documentation.
- Travel insurance information.
- Emergency contact details.

Volunteers are welcome to bring their own binoculars, cameras, field guides, and notebooks if they wish.

ARRIVAL INFORMATION

To ensure a smooth start to the programme, please read the following arrival instructions carefully.

Arrival Day

- The programme officially begins on Monday morning with an orientation and training session at the field station.
- Volunteers should plan to arrive at the field location no later than Sunday morning.
- If you are already travelling within the country, we will provide detailed instructions on how to reach the agreed meeting point.
- Project staff can assist with planning your journey and help arranging transportation where necessary.
- Once you arrive at the agreed meeting location, project staff will transfer you to the field station.

Transfer to the Field Station

- All volunteers, regardless of their arrival arrangements, will be received and assisted by project staff.
- Project staff will accompany volunteers during the transfer to the field station.
- Transportation from the designated meeting point to the field station is included as part of the programme.
- If you require additional transportation arrangements before or after the programme, our staff will be happy to assist.

Before You Travel

Please ensure that you:

- Book flights well in advance.
- Share your travel itinerary and flight details with project staff.
- Inform us of any travel delays or changes to your arrival plans.
- Keep a copy of our emergency contact information with you while travelling.

Our team will do everything possible to ensure your arrival and transfer to the project site are safe, smooth, and stress-free.

DEPARTURE INFORMATION

The programme's scheduled activities conclude on Friday afternoon. However, volunteers are welcome to remain at the field station over the weekend if they wish to relax, enjoy the surrounding area, or continue their travels at a later date.

Following the programme, volunteers may choose to:

- Stay at the field station during the weekend.
- Explore nearby attractions independently.
- Continue travelling elsewhere in Sri Lanka.
- Return home immediately after the programme.

Transportation After the Programme

Please note that transportation costs after the programme are not included in the programme fee. Project staff can assist volunteers with arranging onward travel before or after the programme. Transportation can be organised to a range of destinations for an additional cost.

Assistance can be provided for:

- Airport transfers.
- Travel to other destinations within Sri Lanka.
- Private vehicle hire.
- Local transport arrangements.

Public Transport

The project site is connected to major cities by public transportation. Regular private and public bus services operate between the project area and: Colombo & Kandy. Project staff will be happy to provide information on bus schedules, transport options, and recommended travel routes. We encourage volunteers to discuss their travel plans with project staff in advance so that appropriate transportation arrangements can be made.

ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

Volunteers stay in comfortable shared accommodation near the project site.

Facilities may include:

- Shared bedrooms.
- Shared bathrooms.
- Dining and common areas.
- Electricity and charging facilities.
- Internet access where available.

Meals and Facilities

Three meals are provided each day during the programme. Meals typically include:

- Traditional Sri Lankan cuisine.
- Rice and curry dishes.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Vegetarian options.
- Tea and coffee.

Please inform project staff of any dietary requirements, food allergies, or special dietary preferences before arrival so that we can accommodate your needs whenever possible.

Snacks and Personal Food Items

A refrigerator is available for volunteers at the field station. Volunteers are welcome to purchase snacks, drinks, and other personal food items during their stay and store them in the refrigerator. We kindly ask participants to label their items and be considerate of shared space.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Participant welfare is our top priority. Please review the following guidance on vaccinations, insurance, safety training, and Sri Lanka's climate before you travel.

Vaccinations

- We recommend consulting your doctor or travel clinic before travelling. Commonly recommended vaccinations include: Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Typhoid.
- Requirements vary depending on your country of residence - please confirm with your doctor or travel clinic.

Insurance

All participants must have comprehensive travel insurance covering:

- Medical treatment
- Emergency evacuation
- Personal belongings
- Travel disruption

Safety Training

On arrival, volunteers receive training in:

- Wildlife safety
- Fieldwork safety
- Community engagement
- Emergency procedures

Participants are expected to follow project staff instructions at all times.

Weather

Sri Lanka has a tropical climate year-round, with typical temperatures between 26°C and 34°C. Participants should expect:

- Warm temperatures
- High humidity
- Strong sunlight
- Seasonal rainfall

Lightweight, breathable clothing is strongly recommended.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATION

Sri Lanka is known for its hospitality and cultural diversity. Volunteers are expected to:

- Dress respectfully in villages and community settings.
- Respect local customs and traditions.
- Ask permission before photographing people.
- Be considerate of cultural and religious practices.

Working alongside local communities is a key component of the programme and one of the most rewarding aspects of the volunteer experience.

Programme Expectations

Participants are expected to:

- Attend scheduled activities.
- Follow safety instructions.
- Respect wildlife and natural habitats.
- Treat local communities, staff, and fellow volunteers respectfully.
- Avoid feeding wildlife.
- Help care for shared equipment and accommodation.
- Contribute positively to the team environment.

Above all, volunteers should arrive ready to learn, contribute, and enjoy a unique conservation experience in one of Asia's most biodiverse countries.

Program Benefits for Volunteers

At the end of the program, volunteers will gain practical experience in wildlife conservation, elephant ecology, human-elephant conflict research, community-based conservation, and sustainable tourism while contributing to meaningful efforts to protect Sri Lanka's unique biodiversity.

Volunteers will gain:

- Practical experience in elephant ecology and wildlife research
- Knowledge of human-elephant conflict challenges and solutions
- Understanding of community-based conservation approaches
- Experience combining scientific research with traditional ecological knowledge
- Awareness of sustainable tourism and conservation-based livelihoods
- A deeper understanding of how people and wildlife can coexist

Conservation Impact

Through this program, volunteers contribute to ongoing efforts to protect Sri Lanka's elephants, conserve wildlife habitats, support local communities, and promote sustainable solutions that benefit both people and nature. A certificate will be issued upon the successful completion of the program.

