



# ELEPHANT Creator of the Jungle

A Youth4Water Plus Factsheet

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## 1 Introduction to Elephants: Earth's Largest Land Mammals

Elephants are **Mega Herbivores** that consume a plant diet of more than 150kg/day as per body mass. They eat grasses, small plants, bushes, fruit, twigs, tree bark, and roots. Because of the huge and varied quantities of food they need, the presence of elephants implies a **habitat with good carrying capacity**. It indicates a healthy ecosystem with availability of diverse plant species over a widespread area - a suitable habitat for this pachyderm.

The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), is the only living species of the genus *Elephas* and is distributed throughout the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. It is the largest living land animal in Asia.

India is home to about 29,964 elephants, according to the most recent elephant census, which was done in 2017. According to government statistics, India houses more than 60 percent of the world's wild Asiatic elephant population.







Elephants, **the majestic giants of the jungle**, are also the **Road Makers** of their natural habitats. These incredible creatures, known for their intelligence, social structure, and immense strength, shape the landscape in ways that benefit not only their own survival but also the diverse ecosystems they inhabit. They **create pathways through dense vegetation, essentially acting as natural road builders**. Elephants use their powerful trunks and tusks to clear away obstacles, creating trails that other animals in the jungle can utilize. These paths, often referred to as elephant trails or corridors, serve as essential conduits for the movement of various species, facilitating the flow of life through the heart of the jungle.

## 2 Diet and Eating Habits: Herbivores with Voracious Appetites

As these gentle giants traverse the landscape, they inadvertently disperse seeds from the plants they consume along their journey. Fresh dung piles with undigested food remains such as seed, pericarp, made it easy to identify the species ingested. Fruits, bark and foliage of plants like *Dalbergia sisso* (Shisham), *Aegle marmelos* (bael), *Petrocarpus marsupium* (Vijayasar), peeled off bark of few plant species *Shorea robusta* (Sal), *Terminalia arjuna* (Arjuna) and *Ficus bengalensis* (banyan), many grass species including bamboo along with their roots and shrubs. This unintentional seed dispersal is a critical ecological service provided by elephants. Seeds that pass through their digestive system often germinate more successfully, and new vegetation sprouts along the trails they forge. In this way, elephants are the **Creators of the Forest**. They contribute significantly to the regeneration and diversity of plant life in their habitats, further enriching the intricate tapestry of the jungle.



## 3 Communication and Intelligence: Understanding Elephant Language

Beyond their role as **Botanical Architects**, elephants are vital to shaping the physical environment of their surroundings. Their penchant for digging and bathing in water sources creates wallows and mud holes that serve as watering spots for a myriad of other species. As **Watering Holes Creators**, elephants create essential gathering points for various animals in the ecosystem, fostering a dynamic and interconnected web of life.





Elephants also influence vegetation patterns through their feeding habits. While foraging for food, they selectively consume certain plant species, promoting the growth of others. This creates a mosaic of vegetation types and thus elephants become the **Biodiversity Creators** of the ecosystem. Additionally, they are also **Habitat Creators** as the fallen trees and branches resulting from their feeding activities become habitats for numerous insects and smaller creatures, contributing to the intricate balance of the jungle's food chain.

The social structure of elephant herds is a lesson for nature lovers in the interconnectedness across time and space of the jungle ecosystem. Led by matriarchs, these family units are tightly-knit communities that share knowledge about migration routes, water sources, and other critical information. The collaborative nature of elephant herds contributes to the resilience and adaptability of the entire ecosystem, as knowledge is passed down through generations.

#### 4 Threats and Human-Elephant Conflict: Balancing Coexistence

Since 1986, the Asian elephant has been listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, as the population has declined by at least 50 per cent over the last three elephant generations, which is about 60–75 years. Despite their significant positive impact on their habitats, elephants face numerous threats, primarily from human activities such as habitat destruction, degradation, fragmentation, poaching, and conflicts with local communities. Conservation efforts are crucial to ensuring the survival of these magnificent creatures and, by extension, the preservation of the intricate ecosystems they help shape.

In conclusion, elephants are creators of the jungle, leaving a lasting imprint on the landscapes they inhabit. Their role extends beyond the physical pathways they create, encompassing seed dispersal, habitat modification, and the intricate social dynamics of their herds. As stewards of biodiversity, it is imperative that we recognize and appreciate the invaluable contributions of elephants to the delicate balance of our planet's ecosystems, and work tirelessly to protect these gentle giants for generations to come.

##### Fun facts about Elephant:

- THESE GREY GIANTS LOVE WATER AND ALWAYS WEAR "TRUNKS"!
- ELEPHANTS USE MUD AS SUNSCREEN
- THESE GREY GIANTS LOVE WATER AND ALWAYS WEAR "TRUNKS"!
- ELEPHANTS' TEETH REGROW
- THESE ELEPHANT FEET ARE MADE FOR WALKING
- ELEPHANTS TAILS ARE HANDY FLY SWATS
- THEY ARE CARING AND SOCIABLE



#### 5 Conservation Efforts: Initiatives to Safeguard Elephant Populations



- ▶ Prevent illegal killing.
- ▶ Protect elephant habitat.
- ▶ Monitor elephant numbers, poaching rates, and threats to elephant habitat at key sites in Africa and Asia.
- ▶ Reduce ivory trafficking.
- ▶ Reduce the demand for ivory.

Ivory trading laws were created in 1985. All tusks exported from Africa are granted a serial number. The serial number is then registered on the export authorization, allowing for global tracking of the ivory. The Elephant trafficking Information System, founded in 1989, examines the volumes and trends in the unlawful trafficking of ivory and other elephant products. It is administered by TRAFFIC (a wildlife trade monitoring network run by the World Wildlife Fund and the IUCN on behalf of the CITES parties).

The Asian Elephant Conservation Act was passed in 1997. This law supports and provides financial resources to conservation initiatives within Asian elephants' geographic distribution.

## 6 Conclusion: Advocating for the Conservation of Elephants

Last but not the least, elephants are creators of the jungle, leaving a lasting imprint on the landscapes they inhabit. Their role extends beyond the physical pathways they create, encompassing seed dispersal, habitat modification, and the intricate social dynamics of their herds. In the 2017 census, elephants (344 males, 1,092 females, 38 undetermined sex, and 502 young) were detected in at least 38 of the state's 50 forest and wildlife divisions. According to the census, the Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR) core region has the largest population of 330 elephants, followed by the Dhenkanal forest division with 169 elephants. Satkosia 147 elephants, Athagarh 115, Balasore 97, Bamra 94, and Mahanadi 93 respectively. The report showed a major source of concern: more than half of the elephants that died from electrocution were killed by "deliberate acts" of poaching. Of the 61 elephants electrocuted, 35 were murdered by poachers.



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## Youth4Water Plus

An initiative by Youth Leaders Council Member

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