

# MEME UPDATES



ISSUE 2

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 2011



**Because we can only manage what we measure — working towards an evidence-based conservation of Malaysian elephants.**



## **STUDYING FRUGIVORY**

- Wiwit Juwita, MSc student at University of Amsterdam, is using camera traps to study frugivory by elephants and other large mammals



## **PERCEPTIONS OF HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS**

- Pamela Ooi, MSc student at the University of Nottingham, completed survey on human-tiger conflict



## **WE ARE RECRUITING!! -**

Interested in making a career in wildlife conservation? We are recruiting 2 PhD students (**fully funded!!**) and 2 Research Assistants. Details inside



## BAD TIMES FOR MEGAFAUNA CONSERVATION

Asian elephants are remarkably intelligent, sentient, and — arguably — cute animals. But these are not the reasons why we care for them at MEME. We devote our work to conserve elephants because, as the largest terrestrial animals, they play unique and irreplaceable roles in ecosystems and, as all megafauna, elephants are very vulnerable to human impacts. There are unfortunately too many examples that remind us of this vulnerability.

For example: in just two weeks of August and September 2011, four shipments containing a total of 3,194 African elephant tusks were seized on their way to the Asian ivory markets. Almost 1,600 elephants were poached to fill up these cargos, a number bigger than the estimated elephant population in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Nepal, and Vietnam together. Another example: just about the same time, the IUCN updated the status of Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) to **Critically Endangered** due to the loss of more than 69% of the subspecies potential habitat in less than one generation.

But things look even worse when we look at elephants relatives, the rhinoceros. On November 10<sup>th</sup> 2011, the IUCN officially declared the western subspecies of black rhino (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) extinct. Two weeks earlier, WWF and the International Rhino Foundation had confirmed the extinction of the Vietnamese subspecies of Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus annamiticus*) — reducing the species to a single and small population in Ujung Kulon, west Java. At the same time, unofficial figures suggest a sharp

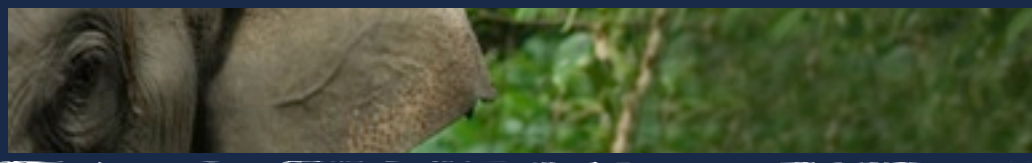
decrease in the numbers of Sumatran rhinos (*Dinocerotrhinus sumatrensis*) in Sumatra, while evidence of the species presence continues to be elusive in Peninsular Malaysia. As Javan and Sumatran rhinos hit all-time-low numbers, the price of their horns hit all-time-high prices at up to USD80,000.

No, things do not look good for megafauna. Many of these trends can still be reversed but this will require a much stronger will to conserve the largest of Earth's terrestrial animals. Better news are badly needed in megafauna conservation.



30 Nov 2011, Kuala Lumpur,  
Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, PhD





## MEME'S FAMILY

Conservation Ecology is a complex enterprise that depends, among others, on the effective sharing of resources and knowledge. As a research project, at MEME we are very keen to partner with other like-minded people. Indeed, we see MEME as part of two larger families: ECG and Rimba.

ECG stands for the **Elephant Conservation Group**, an informal network of Asian elephant research and conservation projects from 8 Asian countries. ECG was established in March 2011 with the objective of standardize methods and objectives in the study and mitigation of human-elephant conflicts (HEC) in different scenarios in Asia. In our initial workshop in Sri Lanka we agreed on conducting a coordinated survey to understand differences and similitudes of people's perceptions and attitudes towards HEC in our study sites. Eight months later we have concluded the data collection in most of the project sites and our analyses are very advanced. We are now looking forward to a second workshop in March 2012 to advance further our common work.



Elephant Conservation Group, Sri Lanka, Mar 2011



Rimba and MEME members, Kuala Basung, Sep 2011

**Rimba** is the other family we are happy to be part of. Rimba was also conceived in early 2011 as a network of research projects. But whereas ECG is composed by people doing very similar work (HEC) in different countries, Rimba is composed by people working on different questions, species, and ecosystems in the same country, Malaysia. We like to call Rimba a 'virtual lab' where young researchers conducting Conservation Research in Malaysia can get together and share our ideas, experience, and practical resources. Rimba was co-founded by Sheema Aziz and Reuben Clements, and we could not like more the work they are doing facilitating things for MEME and other projects. If you are in Malaysia and think that 'we need a forest out there', you will like to know more about Rimba at [www.myrimba.org](http://www.myrimba.org).



## GUESS WHAT, WE ARE RECRUITING!

MEME is steadily growing as a research project and now we need more people to achieve our objectives. In early 2012 we will offer **2 fully-funded PhD Scholarships** at The University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus and **2 Research Assistant Positions**. The available positions are:

1. PhD Scholarship to study determinants of stress levels, parasitic loads, and nutritional condition of wild Asian elephants living in different landscapes and under different management conditions in Peninsular Malaysia
2. PhD scholarship to study social and ecological determinants of human-elephant conflict in Peninsular Malaysia and development of effective mitigation strategies
3. Office-based Research Assistant position as GIS and remote sensing officer
4. Field-based Research Assistant position to track wild Asian elephant activities, monitor human-elephant conflict incidents, and other field research activities

Requirements: candidates should be Malaysian citizens, fluent in Bahasa Melayu, and with a strong interest in research and conservation. Only exceptionally good foreign candidates will be considered.

If you are interested in joining MEME either as PhD Scholar or as Research Assistant, please send your CV, a cover letter, and 2 referrals before 10 Jan 2012 to:

[ahimsa@camposarceiz.com](mailto:ahimsa@camposarceiz.com)

attn: Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, PhD; Assistant Professor; School of Geography; University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus







## ONGOING RESEARCH NOTES

### USING CAMERA TRAPS TO STUDY ELEPHANT FRUGIVORY IN MALAYSIAN RAINFORESTS

**Seed dispersal** — the movement of seeds away from parent plants — is a very important ecological process with huge influence on the regeneration and conservation of Malaysian rainforests. Many trees rely on frugivorous animals to disperse their seeds in a mutualistic relationship (i.e. animals transport seeds in exchange of fruit as food reward). At MEME, we are particularly interested in the special relationship between large fruits and large mouths. The fruits and seeds of plants like durians, chempedaks, and mangos are too big to be eaten and dispersed by most birds and small mammals but are just perfect to attract elephants and other large mammals like rhinos and tapirs. Indeed, these large mammals do a great job dispersing seeds over long distances and ‘planting’ them in a large pile of nutrient-rich poo, where seeds can germinate and establish. Unfortunately, the current decline of Asian megafauna jeopardizes these mutualistic relationships, with long-term consequences that are still poorly known.



Wiwit Juwita Sastramidjaja is an MSc candidate at the University of Amsterdam and our first foreign intern at MEME. Wiwit has spent the last few months studying frugivory by mammals in the selectively logged forests of Terengganu. She uses camera traps baited with mango and durian fruits (see photos below) to record the animals that (a) are attracted by these fruits, (b) consume them, and (c) can actually disperse their seeds. The study is still ongoing but has already provided some very interesting and unexpected insights into the ecological interactions between mammals and large fruits in Malaysian forests.







**Nasharuddin Bin Othman, Director of the Malaysian National Elephant Conservation Centre.**



**How big are elephant GPS-collars?  
This big!**



**A critically Endangered Sumatran tiger captured in one of our camera traps**



**Vanitha Ponnusamy presented at the University of Nottingham our study on farmers' perceptions and attitudes towards human-elephant conflict**



**Pamela Ooi, MSc student at University of Nottingham, conducting her survey on human-tiger conflict in Kelantan and Terengganu**





**Carl Traeholt, Nay Myo Shwe, Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, and Boyd Sympson at the 5th International Symposium on Tapir Conservation**



**Reuben Clements presenting at the 5th International Tapir Symposium**

### Our partners



### Our supporters

