

# AMAZING ASIAN ELEPHANTS!

We find out about the problems facing Asia's gentle giants, and meet a woman who is helping them...

**ELEPHANTS IN DANGER!** Over the last 100 years, Asian elephant numbers have **plummeted by 90%**. Once, these magnificent creatures roamed across most of Asia, but today they survive in just 15% of their original range.

These amazing animals need our help!



Mention elephants and most people usually think of the gigantic grey creatures roaming the African plains. But a smaller species of elephant lives in the forests of Asia. We spoke to expert Belinda Stewart-Cox about Asian elephants, and to learn why they're endangered...



**NGK** Hi Belinda. Why do you think Asian elephants are not as well-known as African elephants?

**Belinda** Unlike African elephants, which live in open savannas, most Asian elephants live in forests. This means they're **harder to spot**. Africa also has a more established **nature-tourism** industry than Asia.

**NGK** Why are Asian elephants so important?

**Belinda** They're the gardeners of the forest! They **create change** in their habitat by pushing over trees and pulling down branches to feed on bark, and this helps a lot of other animals. For example, when elephants tear down leaves and branches, they often cause **fruit to fall on the ground**, which smaller animals can then eat. In the dry season, when elephants dig for water, they **create holes** in the ground. These form puddles which frogs use to lay their eggs in!

**NGK** What do you think is the biggest threat to Asian elephants?

**Belinda** **Humans**. Elephants are large animals and they need large landscapes, but their habitat keeps being broken up by **human settlements**. Sadly, when people and elephants share the same space, there is **conflict** between them. Humans don't want elephants **trampling over their land and houses**. But elephants can't change the **pathways** they have used for generations.

**NGK** How can we help people and Asian elephants live together peacefully?

**Belinda** The main thing is to allow elephants to have plenty of habitat that's **not broken up** by development or human settlements. **Education** is also important as it teaches people how to react when they come face to face with a wild elephant. In India, people often throw firecrackers at wild elephants, or form large noisy crowds – this only make things worse. Giving elephants enough **space** will help

ensure that no human or elephant gets hurt.

**NGK** You work for a charity called **Elephant Family** which is on a mission to protect Asian Elephants. Can you tell us about a project you've worked on?

**Belinda** We recently helped **move a whole village** in Assam, North East India. The villagers were living in **dangerous elephant pathways** and were keen to move to a new, safer village. Their new homes are now **nearer to markets**, and for the first time they have **brick houses, electricity and safe drinking water**. They also have farmland where they can grow their crops **without worrying** that elephants will trample over them. The elephants are also better-off as their pathways are now **protected** and they can move freely and safely to other parts of the wider forest without encountering any humans. It's a win-win situation!

**NGK** That's great news! Good luck, Belinda and all of **Elephant Family** – keep on saving the Asian elephant!

Asian elephants have much smaller and more rounded ears than their African cousins.

Only adult male Asian elephants grow big tusks, although some remain tuskless for life. Female Asian elephants have small tusks called tushes!

Over half of the Asian elephant population lives in India.



Elephants are an important cultural and religious icon in Asia. One of the most popular Hindu gods is **Lord Ganesha**, who has an elephant head on a human body!

To find out more about **Elephant Family** and how you can help save the Asian elephant, visit [elephant-family.org](http://elephant-family.org)

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