



# "My Elephant Neighbour" Programme

*Education towards our harmonious coexistence with elephants*

September 2010

## Context

Long-term solutions for elephant conservation require that we collectively choose to preserve enough space and natural resources for elephants in their homerange. During the past centuries, the number of elephants has decreased tremendously due to habitat destruction and ivory trade. As the human population continues to grow, we must ask ourselves will we be able to share the land with elephants and other wildlife? Will we be able to make the right decisions to coexist harmoniously with our pachyderm neighbours?

These decisions cannot be made by a few. By 2050, it is very likely that there will be over 9 billion people on Earth. These decisions have to be made in a democratic way by a vast majority. Elephant conservation cannot be seen as the responsibility only of elephant specialists—it is the responsibility of each one of us. Every one needs to know the issues at stake and understand the challenges that lie ahead for elephant conservation.

To conserve elephants, we must protect their natural habitats. Conserving their habitats benefits the elephants and the biologically diverse community that shares those ecosystems. However, it also benefits us by preserving our global environment and the numerous services that natural ecosystems provide freely every day. Essentially, protecting elephants is in our own best interest because these conservation measures provide long-term environmental protection necessary for our wellbeing.

We protect what we appreciate, and we appreciate what we know. Elephants are among the largest and most iconic animals on Earth. But we have learned through our Children & Elephants Programme ([www.enfantsetelephants.net](http://www.enfantsetelephants.net)) that a large majority of the children living in elephant-range countries have not been exposed to elephants. Without this exposure, it is very unlikely this younger generation will choose to conserve elephants in the future. In 2050, the children aged 10 today will be 50 and will hold decision-making roles. In order to make decisions that will promote elephant conservation, these children need to learn about the important role elephants play within their ecosystems and their importance to us.

In every region where elephants still occur naturally, they are part of the local natural and cultural heritage, and, therefore, need to be preserved. But elephants are also part of the natural and cultural heritage of all of Humanity. Globally, we must all be involved in the elephant conservation challenge. We collectively need to find ways to coexist with our elephants neighbours by reducing human-elephant conflict, which means helping the people who are suffering from elephant depredation and protecting as much elephant habitat as possible. Education is the first step to achieving a long-term harmonious coexistence with our elephant neighbours.

The mission of the "My Elephant Neighbour" programme is to address this issue through education and sensitisation, especially among the children living in elephant-range countries.

## Three main Objectives

1. **Raising awareness through our website about the challenge of Human-Elephant coexistence.** The website is a tool for the general public that presents elephant populations around the world and shows how each is unique (i.e. cultural importance, biological and ecological characteristics, etc.). The website provides a list of sites where these magnificent animals can be observed along with a map showing their location. Specialists and others interested in elephants are invited to contribute by sending us pictures and information about their elephant neighbours. The website presents both wild elephants and elephants under human care. With the input from a variety of individuals, we hope to quickly complete a virtual world elephant tour.
2. **Conducting a multigenerational survey on human-elephant coexistence.** For each elephant population, we hope to contribute to the study of human-elephant relationships by investigating the communities living in proximity to the pachyderms. Individuals representing a range of ages will be interviewed to understand their perceptions of elephants. The interview will also provide an educational component to encourage harmonious long-term coexistence. Given the dire threats to elephant populations in West Africa, our initial focus will be on this region.
3. **Creating educational kits for primary schools in elephant-range countries.** While investigating human perceptions of elephants, we will visit primary schools. We will provide a booklet titled "My Elephant Neighbour" which is designed for teachers and pupils. This booklet will introduce the closest elephant population and will encourage teachers to organize a field class to expose the pupils to elephants in their natural habitat. When we present the booklet, the children will be invited to express their ideas for facilitating harmonious, long-term coexistence with elephants and wildlife. These suggestions will be collected and published on the website.

## Implementation

- A first version of the website is already online, and we have started to collect pictures of elephants worldwide. Everyone is invited to contribute to the programme on the website [www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org/english/index.html](http://www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org/english/index.html). A second, more developed, version of the website will be built once we have secured sufficient funding for the programme.
- We will start investigating human-elephant coexistence and distributing the "My Elephant Neighbour" booklet in the primary schools of the Mouhoun region in Burkina Faso, where we have been running the educational programme "Children and Elephants" ([www.enfantsetelephants.net](http://www.enfantsetelephants.net)) since 2007.

## Please be part of it !

We need your support for this programme. Any individuals or organisations with the capacity to provide financial support for the development of this programme could be of critical assistance—we can be contacted at [contact@deselephantsetdeshommes.org](mailto:contact@deselephantsetdeshommes.org)

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