

## Reformed illegal loggers become forest guardians

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**Former illegal loggers of Indonesia's tropical rainforests are learning how to work with trained elephants and their 'mahouts' (keepers), with benefits for both local communities and the environment.**

Since 2002, the Sumatran Elephant Conservation Program at the Tangkahan Nature Reserve in northern Sumatra, has been helping local communities develop practical ways to conserve protected forest areas and wildlife, while improving their livelihoods.

The program, run by Flora and Fauna International with support from Zoos Victoria and other international organisations, involves training former loggers to become elephant trekking guides for eco-tourists. The seven elephants and their mahouts at Tangkahan also work with government and community rangers to patrol the forest and keep illegal loggers and poachers out.

According to Zoos Victoria, habitat loss and fragmentation in Indonesia has led to the separation of elephant populations and an increase in human-elephant conflict when elephants raid agricultural areas for food.

The Indonesian Government recently announced a crack-down on illegal logging, which is estimated to account for 40–55 per cent of Indonesia's timber harvest.

Zoos Victoria's Manager of Conservation Partnerships, Chris Banks, says eco-tourism is a good alternative to destructive forest activities and also provides captured wild elephants with a better quality of life than they would otherwise have in elephant camps.

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Credit: Chris Banks

More information

Zoos Victoria: [www.zoo.org.au/Conservation/Programs/International/sumatra/program](http://www.zoo.org.au/Conservation/Programs/International/sumatra/program)

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