

FOR THE LOVE OF ELEPHANTS: MAHOUTSHIP AND ELEPHANT CONSERVATION IN THAILAND

by

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my dog Lily, my mom, my sister Mary Jo, my friend Lucia, my Aunt Betty, the late Gerald Hairston, and Marsha Richmond. Lily is from the Detroit Humane Society, is more wolf than dog and she has taught me respect for wild animals. My mom has trained her well and taught me how to respect an animal for what the animal *is* and to try not to make the animal what it *should* be instead. My sister is a dog-lover who has taught me the importance of the bond between humans and animals. Lucia has put up with my rampant elephant chasing in Thailand over the past few years. My Aunt Betty lived on farmland where I learned much about nature by simply enjoying a beautiful place full of animals. Gerald Hairston gave me a foundation for environmental thought by teaching me that the way really to solve environmental issues is through healthy relationships and the community's common sense mixed with good scientific information. Marsha Richmond believed in me and was an excellent academic guide through the whole process of taking the trip and writing the thesis.

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This study was only possible through the kindness of many people in Thailand. Unfortunately, I cannot credit them openly, as confidentiality in their political climate is paramount. Pseudonyms have been used. I hope that I have represented their thoughts accurately.

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Chapter 1 — Introduction

"I said what I said,

I meant what I meant

An elephant's faithful — 100 percent"

from Horton Hatches the Egg by Dr. Seuss

"Of course we are, but are humans?"

- An Asian Elephant in Thailand, on the verge of extinction

A human being cannot look at an elephant and think nothing. A baby peeking through the fence at a circus elephant feels an instinctive love. As her mother carries her away, her arms reach for the giant grey body and tears fall upon her mother's shoulders. To a little girl in Thailand whose grandfather is a keeper of a male elephant with four-foot long tusks and a reputation as a killer, an elephant is an animal she can taunt. She runs up close to him — but never within real reach — and runs back, yelling at him. She knows he's chained. He takes no notice of her. Who are elephants to humans? What is this relationship that has carried on for millennia? And why is this relationship now in danger?

In anthropology and archaeology, the advancement of societies is often judged through artifacts left behind. For example, war leaves behind weapons. What does *peace* leave behind? A simple absence of artifacts? What happens to things lost that existed solely through human relationship – through communication wavelengths, through the air in speech, in the use of energy to move a body? As in studying fossils to understand evolution, we have only bones to study. There is no evidence of the soft tissue. These are things that leave few material clues. In the same way, our relationship with elephants is something that leaves few artifacts. It is something that only exists where elephants still exist and the traditional ways passed down

through the millennia are getting lost. The Asian elephants are well on their way to extinction. This is a loss to humanity that is beyond the simple loss of a type of the largest land mammal; it is the loss of one of the oldest art forms humans have ever known – the art of cooperation with an animal that could kill us with a simple and effortless kick, *but doesn't*. If this 4,000 year old relationship were an object, it would be surrounded by armed guards behind thick glass in a world famous museum. Instead, it is silently slipping out of our human hands into thin air.

A question one anthropologist, Paul, asks about elephants is: "What do elephants get out of our relationship with them?" One mahout, Sam, answered:

I don't think they are getting anything out of it that wouldn't get just being wild elephants. Elephants don't want attention like a dog. Dog gets shelter, better food and more of it but the elephants needs. . .they would rather be off with the exception of some elephants that are brought up by humans. But by and large I think most of the elephants would be happy to not be around humans anymore, they would be quite happy to take off into the jungle. From people they get medical care — the biggest thing they get— and a chance for survival. My elephant is a perfect example with his broken leg. He probably wouldn't have even gotten up after that, and if he did he probably wouldn't have lasted long in the wild. But here he can live out the rest of his life quite comfortably and happily and do pretty much the same things that he used to. By and large we certainly get a lot more out of it.

One elephant volunteer, in answer to what elephants get out of their relationship with us, said that they know we need to be taken care of. A tour guide added, "How they look at us, such sad creatures. Maybe we are something for them to give love to." The volunteer agreed, stating, "Elephants are givers of love." Chet, a mahout, said that "Elephants stay with us for food (like a dog or cat), and we make elephants scared of us. They have a close relationship with us."

There is a special bond between a human and an elephant. I sat in the tour company van, going to the airport in Chiang Mai, as a volunteer from South Africa told me how "leaving an elephant that was in your care is like breaking your heart." Thai people never liken elephant-love to love for dogs because of religious reasons. In the West, however, the only way for us to

understand the love is to think of how we feel about our favorite dog. Then to imagine if our favorite dog could earn us lots of money, help us travel around, build our house, was the national symbol, was given to us by our father and we were able to give it to the next generation. That would be beyond most dog-lovers' wildest dreams.

A man from the West who became a mahout, Sam, well described his fascination with elephants:

I can't think of one particular instance or anything like that. Always, I think everyone when they are young, little kids love elephants because they are so big and kinda strange looking. I always loved elephants. As I grew older, I loved all animals. I loved watching animal documentaries. I loved being around animals, watching animals. We had pets and things like that. Elephants always held a fascination for me mythical magical animals. So many interesting things about elephants. For one, their size, their gentleness. This is an animal that could crush anything by standing on them but they will walk 20 meters to go around a sleeping dog. Things like that. That is fascinating. They are incredibly intelligent all the time with a sense of humor. The more you spend time with them, the more you see that. I love their family bond, the way they stick together in the family and look after each other. As a kid I thought they were magical, it kinda seemed like they shouldn't be here, something from an age gone past. Like dinosaurs. There is just nothing like them around in them. Maybe like whales in the ocean walking around on land. They look like they are from another time, another era.

Humans have the technology to analyze an elephant's every hormone and to make several kinds of electric fences to avoid elephant-human conflict. We can concoct all kinds of scientific excuses that mask the fact that humans are NOT saving these animals from extinction. Except for a few dedicated people, humans are NOT working with the desperate fervor that is necessary to save one of the oldest interspecies relationships on earth. It is an heirloom willed to humanity from the first upright humans. This is no simple extinction of a wild animal that is important for the sake of its ecosystem. No. Elephants are a part of us.

The elephant is the "canary in the coal mine" for human beings. There is an idea that in ancient history elephants were our guides to existence on this planet. We followed them to find good things to eat and cleared paths to walk on. We made houses from their skeletons

(Scigliano 26). They were like our collective mamas in ancient history. Now they are dying off the face of the earth and we write occasional newspaper articles about them, study their hormones and intelligence, make a nature show now and again, but make no true commitment to their survival.

This is a time in human history when we are moving information quickly. Our technological innovations are advancing more quickly than ever. It is also, unfortunately, a time in which we believe in many scientific solutions that don't actually solve the problems we have created. While zoos and circuses spend thousands of dollars each time they try to breed one elephant, at the same exact moment in time, elephants are being poached from the wild in the East.

Asian elephants are also being denied their right to reproduce in order that owners can get the short term compensation from tourist rides and avoid the two year maternity leave the elephants need. The elephant is a survivor. They can stand very hot weather and the snow, they can swim, climb a mountain, sneak, run, be warriors or be as gentle as babies. Their adaptations are a celebration of the evolution of living things on earth. They have quietly tolerated us on this earth. They have had plenty of time to stomp us into the dirt if they wanted to. The invasive human species is delivering its final blows to the greatest and most magnificent creature that represents all the beauty of our planet. We are in quiet denial that they are not disappearing every day half way across the world, starving to death, being drugged to death, killed for having too many manly hormones and being stolen from their mothers.

Why Thailand?

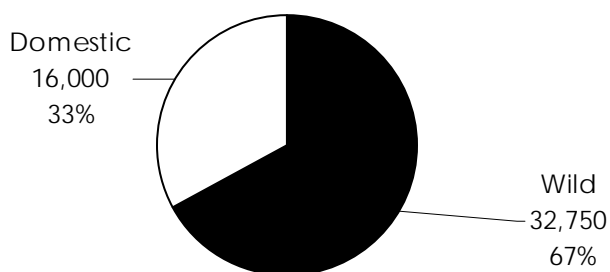
In order to understand and to be able to manage the subject, I chose one place on earth in a particular time: Thailand in 2005. Thailand has been through tumultuous economic changes in the past twenty years. "In 1989, a government logging ban to preserve the existing forestland -

which amounts to only about 25 percent of the country - caused 70 percent of domesticated elephants to become unemployed" (Tippasert). A country that had once provided teak to the world became a country in an environmental crisis. Asian elephants had been paying their way in Thailand by working in logging camps, dragging and lifting logs, along with their mahouts. Mahouts and elephants became unemployed. The tourist economy had just gotten going and absorbed the most well behaved female elephants, a select few males, and any calves that could stand it. They became a tourist attraction, walking steady with tourists on their backs and their mahout on their neck. Mahouts made the change over, many losing the time and resources to care for their own elephants. The price of elephants skyrocketed. The population of elephants plummeted. On a grander scale, the urban migration to cities did not exclude elephants. They, with their rural mahouts on their backs, came to cities to work. These factors made Thailand an appealing study subject. It was chosen not only because it was accessible, but also because the elephants and mahouts are in a precarious economic position in an already topsy-turvy economy. However, make no mistake: this loss is not Thailand specific. Elephant population statistics tell the tale in its simplest terms.

Asian statistics

The Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources as "endangered" (Redlist).

Figure 1: Estimated Number of Asian Elephants (1995)



Source: World Wildlife Fund

“One third of all Asian elephants are held captive, mostly in range states but also in significant numbers in zoos, circuses, safari parks, and other facilities around the world ” (Sukumar 396).

Thailand statistics

According to Lees, in Thailand, “there were up to 100,000 elephants tramping through Thailand's forested land alone at the beginning of the 20th century, just 100 years ago.” A visitor to Thailand in 1881 noted: “[In Lakon] What struck me as much as anything was the numerous number of elephants. Wherever I went they were to be met, and the forests seemed as full as wild elephants as the town was of domesticated ones” (Bock 174). Today the actual number of elephants in Thailand is sketchy at best.

Hard information on the total number of domesticated elephants consists of only two conflicting sets of incomplete data. Anybody willing to write about domesticated elephants only from accurate scientific data and proper academic sources will write very little at all...The most biting irony is that while the most intimate moment of Thailand's domesticated elephant-births' deaths and even mating have been shown on prime time television, very little is known about their actual status: their numbers and origins, their birth and death rates, the work they do, the ethnic composition of their keepers and many other critical questions (Lair, *Gone Astray*).

Of note, it is estimated that the population is decreasing at 3 percent each year (Tipprasert).

Figure 2: Estimated number of elephants in Thailand

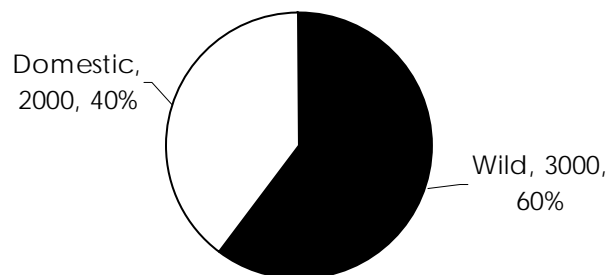


Chart Source: (Lees)

Who is responsible?

Saving Asian elephants is not just the responsibility of South and Southeast Asia. Indeed, saving the human species in those countries is a complex and daunting task in itself. Under no circumstances should these countries be singled out by animal welfare groups and others from richer parts of the world for not doing their part. They should be assisted in culturally sensitive, financially sufficient and accountable ways that can work within the framework given to them. Programs should be implemented that respect the country's needs (whether it's the folks in a village or a king). It is time for humans to care about Asian elephants the *right* way. Elephants are the cash cows of endangered animals. They are a "glamour species" (Lewis). People in the East will throw money at them for a multitude of reasons, from religion to tradition. People in the West will also throw money at them from childhood wishes and storybook memories. However, is this money used in the best way possible for the elephants? How are humans getting in the way of money flowing to the elephants themselves? From public policy to local laws, from toenail care to tourism dollars, there is an effective way to care for elephants. To fully understand how to care for elephants, a variety of perspectives are considered.

Guiding principles and preparation

Why an interdisciplinary approach to Asian elephant conservation in Thailand?

The survival of the Asian elephant in Thailand is in the hands of many people from a diversity of disciplines and perspectives. Daily, veterinarians, biologists, mahouts, tourist camp owners, elephant owners, tourists, and farmers decide their fate. To understand the issue fully, a researcher draws upon the knowledge of biology, anthropology, economics, and labor studies. In the book Experiments in Consilience conservation biologists speak to the importance of interdisciplinarity in conservation, captured by the term consilience:

A number of scholars, chief among them E.O. Wilson, have recently highlighted the need to find integration between social and biological or natural sciences if we are to address the environmental concerns. Wilson terms this rapprochement

“consilience” and argues that sound environmental policy can only be formed at the juncture of ethics, social science, and biology (Westley and Miller 5).

Interdisciplinarity appreciates the importance of specialization, but also of building bridges between disciplines. This can be as simple as having compatible software. My interdisciplinary perspective comes from both formal and informal preparations for this study.

Informal preparations

My informal preparations include my undergraduate education, assisting in a research study, my work at a policy center and for a non-profit. One influence is my previous educational background. My undergraduate degree in labor studies and peace and conflict studies made me very aware of the work going on around me. For example, my curiosity about the profession of mahoutship was not just about that, but also about how work affects people’s lives in a developing country. Negotiation and non-violence classes helped me to dissect the conflicts in the elephant community.

Another influence was when I helped out with a study of the Living Wage’s affect on non-profit organizations in Detroit. My job was to go around to many Detroit agencies, meeting with their executive directors to ask them how the new law was impacting their group. I thought this research design would work well for the elephant group issues because both concerns are very politically charged. These kinds of issues often have truth hidden underneath many groups’ motivations and interests. This truth can only be uncovered with specific and clear questions about the day-to-day affect of the issue.

A further influence was the work I do at the university doing graphic design and conference planning for a center for the urban-based Skillman Center for Children. There I help to translate policy and academic research into plain English. I use my knowledge of community and urban children to make the conferences, publications and electronic resources we present relevant to

youth workers in Detroit. This background helped me to understand how knowledge from research can actually be used by the community and in what ways the information should be conveyed.

For nine years, I have been the president of the Front Porch, a non-profit group for urban kids in the Detroit neighborhood where I live. This organization has been my greatest teacher and greatest preparation for this trip. It taught me what it means to be a crusader for a cause that is in danger. Whether the issue is urban children being killed or the demise of elephants, it takes passion and relentless energy to keep the organization alive. It also helped me to understand the disagreements, relationships gone bad, threats and other negatives that come with fighting for a cause.

In Spring 2004, I took a trip to Thailand and met lots of elephants and elephant trainers (mahouts). I left Thailand with a great love for the profession and the animals, and with more questions than answers about their situation.

Formal preparation

In fall 2004, I enrolled in graduate school in interdisciplinary studies. The topic of this study particularly lends itself to interdisciplinarity. Conservation of an animal so closely in contact with humans cannot be studied solely through biology. Nor could it be studied solely by anthropology either — essentially it requires anthrozoology, “the study of the interactions between human and non-human animals” (International Society for Anthrozoology). Most conservation plans that involve any animal/plant not in isolation from humans should also be included.

My formal preparation included a diverse group of courses and library assistance. Two directed studies courses allowed me to explore fully the most current information about Asian

elephants with a focus on Thailand. A course from the library on bibliographic software and individual consultation with a librarian was invaluable. On a topic so narrow that is also interdisciplinary, the librarian helped me to think creatively about the types of sources I would use. Research methods from anthropology helped prepare me to do interviews and go through the human subjects process for approval. It helped me to understand how I should be looking at mahouts through the eyes of an anthropologist. I learned how to do participant observation. My second directed study was to take the trip to Thailand, write up field notes and transcribe interviews with mahouts and conservationists. The kindness of every person I met was unmatched by anywhere I had ever traveled, and their helpfulness to the project was extraordinary. They were generous with their time and knowledge. (See Appendix 3 for my field journal.) A biology class, mammology, set me in good stead to understand the biology articles I was coming across. It helped me to understand how the elephant's biology guides conservation issues. It also put elephants against the wider backdrop of all mammals and helped me to understand humans as mammals as well.

The purpose of the study

This paper is an experiment. Could I land in the midst of another non-profit world, another impossible world issue, and gain enough understanding to be useful to the people involved in the day-to-day management of the problem? As I spent the semester before going to Thailand compiling a bibliography of at least six-hundred sources of information about Asian elephants and mahouts, it was clear there were some personality clashes dividing the community of people who care about elephants in Thailand. Even from thousands of miles away, just from my time spent in front of the computer library database at 2am, these disagreements became clear. I emailed and called key individuals to make appointments for interviews. I left for Thailand and went from one interview to the next, hoping to find some essential truths that all the warring factions could agree on. I considered carefully the question that if someone was doing this kind

of study about urban issues in Detroit, what would I want from them? I would want solutions. I would want to know how to work for my cause despite having deep disagreements with, and hurt feelings from, the other people who are essential parts of the picture. How could we all come together in a useful way as a united group? Do we all share the same problems in our separate little kingdoms of the non-profit world?

What I bring to the research

Being a leader of a non-profit organization working for a cause that is often overlooked by the majority of people around me, I know that sometimes it is difficult to gain a new perspective. You work for years and years and sometimes feel like there is no hope. You run in circles with government officials and systems that work against you when you are trying to do so much good. There are people who work for the same cause but with bad intentions. You deal with them as best as you can, trying not to let that affect your health or sanity. Sometimes you become embattled in side issues that become larger and larger monsters that pull you away from your objective. I know what it means to be publicly humiliated, let down, lied to and worked to death for nonsense. It is from this experience and knowledge that I approach elephant group's issues.

I also know that working with academic solutions and knowledge can be surprisingly helpful to non-profits trying to do the impossible. I am on both sides of this divide as well. I have been both the researcher and the subject. When students and professors from universities ask questions about the issues I deal with, I often find their interest refreshing. Their questions often help me clarify my solutions. They give me information about how other people in other places are dealing with similar issues. Their fairly objective viewpoint can sometimes help me see what I should have seen all along — maybe I just hadn't had the time to put it all together. Sometimes

it has been the window to another world I was too tired to imagine. I hope this paper can be just such a window for the groups who work so tirelessly for the elephants.

Research Methodology

Introduction

The research approach adopted by this study is multi-faceted. It is because the subject matter is so interdisciplinary, it is studied using a multi-method approach. This is an inductive, interpretivist/ecological approach to a mainly qualitative study. There are many ontological questions the study seeks to answer. How does mahout culture interact with the culture of elephant conservationists in Thailand? How does this interaction affect the elephants themselves? What role do mahouts in Thailand see themselves playing in preventing the extinction of the Asian elephant? There are three interlocking sections within this preliminary study.

Part one: mahout life

The first section explores mahout life in Thailand. After getting Wayne State University's Human Investigation Committee approval (number 017205B3E), six mahouts were interviewed (one was an elephant trainer in the U.S.). A literature search was conducted on mahouts and the ethnic groups they generally come from. Snowball sampling was used to find the key informant mahouts. The researcher also participated in mahout duties at a few of the places studied. Records were kept through a tape recorder, note taking and journaling. Mahouts participated in semi-structured interviews as well as informal interviews. The study "The Asian elephants-driver partnership: The drivers' perspective" by Lynette Hart and "Family traditions for mahouts of Asian elephants" by Lynette Hart and Sundar informed this part of the study.

Research study topic variables used in this section include:

- internal states: the values and beliefs of the mahouts, their perceptions of conservation and their role

- external states: the characteristics of the mahouts: the tribes they come from and their family structure
- behavior: how the work day is structured and what they do
- environment: the background information about where they are a mahout, mahout culture, and social rules
- reported behavior: what the mahouts told me
- observed behavior: what I saw them do

While the interviews tell what the problems are, surveys would expand on the extent to which they are affecting many of the mahouts. Future research would include street intercept (haphazard sampling) surveys orally given to the many mahouts. The most important place for this would be at the Elephant Round-Up Festival in Surin. At this event, mahouts come from all over to meet and to buy, sell and trade elephants. These questions would also be asked to mahouts in Bangkok and at tourism spots that provide elephant trekking. A verbal survey would be done because not all the mahouts can read. The verbal survey would have to be done in three languages: Thai, Karen, and Kuay. This verbal survey could be used to quantify a few, specific things that coincide with the information found in the participant observations and the semi-structured interviews.

Ideally, this project would be a year long ethnographic study where the anthropologist is living as a participant observer in a few different settings. These would include: a village where people are traditionally mahouts, at a camp for tourist elephants, in a neighborhood where the nouveau riche keep their privately owned elephants, where the royal elephants live, and in Bangkok, where the begging elephants live.

Part two: elephant care

The second piece of the research is focused on elephant care. This is important to study because "what little has been written in English concentrates on the human cultural aspect rather than the hands-on keeping of elephants. There is not a single useful book or study treating any single tribe's day-to-day keeping and training methods, which are more mundane, but far

more complex than capture" (Lair, *Gone Astray*). There are questions that need to be asked in order to understand elephant care. How do mahouts care for elephants? What is the elephant-mahout relationship? A literature search was done on elephant care, the elephant-mahout relationship, human-animal interaction. The literature search proved difficult because there is not much academic research on mahoutship. Most research linking humans and elephants covered wild Asian elephant conflict with human settlement. The interviews and observations proved to be much more valuable in light of the small amount of academic material on the subject. Other sources included books, reports, Web sites and newspaper articles. Also, the method of participant observation was used. Tape recording and note-taking was done during volunteering to help care for the elephants. The mahout training course at the National Elephant Institute was the first step toward understanding elephant care. Informal interviewing took place during elephant care because mahouts are always at work. The lack of structure in informal interviewing made it easier to work it around the rigor of elephant care. They were asked to explain their routine and techniques. Using an interview guide, I asked a few select mahouts to participate in a semi-structured interview to clarify any techniques or behaviors I was unclear about. In the interviews, more information was revealed about the mahout-elephant relationship. To find the most knowledgeable mahouts, snowball sampling was used. Mahouts live in small camps that are tightly knit communities in which snowball sampling would be effective. By elimination, this method also found the mahouts who were either not qualified for their job or unhappy with it. The characteristics and needs of unqualified and unhappy mahouts are important to note. Research study topic variables include:

- internal states: how the elephants feel about the mahouts, how the mahouts feel about the elephant, and the beliefs and traditions of elephant care
- behavior: their daily routine
- environment: the physical environment in which the elephants are cared for and the social environment of the elephant camps or other places they inhabit.
- reported behavior: What the mahouts told me.
- observed behavior: What I saw the mahouts and elephants do
- artifacts: tools they use, like the brush to wash elephants, tools they use to care for their feet, or medicines they use



Figure 3: Location of Kuay and Karen People in Thailand

A study that would last for a few months would be appropriate to explore this topic in more depth. The study would take place in Karen villages, Kuay villages and also in Ranong, where many villagers keep elephants. (See Fig.3) This would clarify the differences in elephant care (and training) between ethnic groups and also catch the kinds of care-taking that would only happen in particular situations.

Part three: organizations involved in elephants

The third section searches for the challenges, assets, and solutions relating to elephant conservation for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the government. This section includes a literature search, structured interviews, and participant observation. The literature search is about Thai environmental attitudes and organizational studies of a similar nature to see how the study should be designed. In addition it is about the groups themselves. Structured interviews consisted of face-to-face meetings with the directors of five groups, often captured on a tape recorder. Responses were compared. The researcher also spent time observing or volunteering at some of the organizations. The research study topic variables included:

- internal states: their attitudes toward conservation, mahoutship
- behavior: what they and their organization do to conserve elephants
- environment: the culture of the organizations
- reported behavior: information reported in the interviews by the NGOs and government
- observed behavior: behavior observed during the interviews and witnessed while volunteering

A guide to many of the groups who work with elephants is provided in Appendix 4.

Conclusion – The study as a whole

As a whole, the study used the combined approach of a coordinated sub-study. The links between the three sub-studies should become apparent in the analysis of the data. Data from

all three sections are combined to search for particular themes. Hopefully, the study proves to be a holistic view of elephant conservation in Thailand, taking into account the wealth of knowledge possessed by the people who care for elephants, their needs, land issues, and national and local public policy.

Guide to the thesis

This thesis begins with an introduction to mahoutship. It explores training traditions, communication, specialties, land and food. The second section deals with the status of mahouts and elephants, both symbolically and economically. The fourth chapter looks at government and conservation. The fifth section is the culmination of the information gathered through the interviews and literature review: it puts forth a plan for saving the elephants of Thailand. In the appendixes, there are biographies of the mahouts who speak throughout the text.

Introduction to the thesis

Mahoutship is a profession unique on earth, somewhere between the cowboy and the lion tamer. Many mahouts are highly trained, almost magical bosses of the largest land animal. They are controllers of wild beasts, caregivers of a species on the road to extinction. They are like hospice nurses, caring for the soon not to exist. However, they are often paid the same wages as low level factory employees. Their knowledge is not seen by many as valuable and ancient. The purpose of this paper is to gather information from many different disciplines and sources essential to the domesticated Asian elephant's survival in Thailand and pull them together in a useful, practical way.

This thesis is a holistic view of conservation that doesn't look at just population statistics, food and land. I am not compiling a plan for saving the elephants that is traditional, Western, and purely biology-based. I am arguing that the ways to solve the conservation issues of the Asian

elephant in Thailand already exist. Elephant advocates, owners, mahouts and even elephants themselves (through their biological needs) have these answers, but there is neither an overarching plan nor a forum through which their solutions can be shared and implemented. This thesis ties their ideas together into one simple plan. Hopefully, this thesis will contribute toward the wishes expressed by a second generation Thai mahout, Kama, "I want the elephants to live in Thailand forever and for the mahouts to have a lot of money and a bright future."

Kama

He is the head mahout at a tourist camp. He grew up in the mid-southern part of Thailand, near the border with Burma. He trains the elephants to do tricks. He is in his thirties. His father was a mahout -- it is his only profession. He is the supervisor of Anupap and Chet.

Chapter 2 — Mahoutship

Human-elephant relationship

I began to wonder about the human elephant relationship on my first trip to Thailand. I had never been allowed close to an elephant. At the local zoo, there were never elephant rides and I had never lucked into the right circus for a ride. The elephants at the zoo were always far away, with a ditch and a fence between us. They were big and a little scary – if only because the zoo put forth the illusion of “wild animal that must be caged” from the ditch and the huge bars on their cages. The first time I petted an elephant was in Bangkok on a street corner. I was a tourist buying sugar cane for the elephants, trying to ask hurried mahouts questions about elephants in international hand signals. What was it in me that held my fascination so tightly to this animal? Part of it was that the elephant was so giant and so gentle. Another was the look in their eyes. Who was this giant grey beast to me, and to the other people lining up to buy sugarcane? Why didn't she squish me? The sight of the elephants among the crowds and skyscrapers made me feel more comfortable. Among the buzz of Bangkok, there was still flesh and bone, nature and ancient things. They made me feel immediately comfortable but at the same time the elephants made me certain I was half-way around the world, somewhere exotic, unlike anyplace else on earth. I was in a place where what I knew as wild and rare was commonplace. In Detroit, I didn't have the opportunity of walking past elephants on my way to work. The best reminder of nature in a sea of concrete is a pigeon, or if I'm lucky, a pheasant.

In order to understand the human-elephant relationship, I tried it first-hand at the National Elephant Institute's mahout training classes for tourists. In the past, I had assisted mahouts with their daily chore of washing the elephants at a tourist camp. I thought this course would expand on my knowledge of mahoutship from those observations and help me understand mahoutship a little more. It could not teach me what it takes years for a mahout to master but I thought it

might give me a flavor for the profession. The following is an excerpt from my travel journal – my second day as a mahout.

Our mahout day began at 6:30am when we went to the forest to pick up the elephant where they were chained up and feeding. The mahout unchained her and then I got on her. We walked back from the forest and I was on her back. At first the mahout was on her with me. Once he felt secure, he left me up there alone. I was a little scared, like when I first rode a bike with no training wheels. I had no idea I could have that feeling twice in a lifetime. We took her to the training ground where they did the tourist show. We watched them take a bath and then go up to see the show and the “graduating” tourists in the show to see what we would be doing the next day. Then we practiced a bit. This was fairly traumatic for me. I couldn’t pull myself up without my mahout’s help. What made it worse was that I was so sore from the day before, I could hardly move my legs. I respected the mahout’s physical strength quite a bit after this. They are small but super strong. Then it was time for lunch. After lunch we went back to practice. My elephant was a painter, a musician, and a pig. The other elephants were not nearly as greedy as my girl. This meant that she moved her head quite a bit in search of snacks. The snacks could be high in a tree, down a steep slope, into the bleachers or in another elephant’s mouth. This was a scary thing from the perspective of the back of her neck. Her head would jerk around all the time making me feel like I was on an amusement park ride. She didn’t seem to mind having me on her, as long as she was free to snack. In the afternoon, all the students took a regular elephant back ride on a bench. I found that scarier than being on the neck.

When we walked the elephants back to the forest for the night, my mahout took me in the river, because I kept begging to be in the water with the elephant. To be on an elephant back with her trunk up out the water was so exciting, I wasn’t even paying attention to my own safety. I just knew I was on an elephant submarine! The mahout hung onto my mahout suit’s back quite well. He even poked me by accident with the hook trying to make sure I didn’t fall in the river and get kicked inadvertently! The hook didn’t hurt so bad. He said I had tough skin like an elephant. When we walked the elephants back to the forest for the night, I had to sit on the chains on the elephant’s neck. It was uncomfortable at first, but later was OK. The elephant would even help the mahout pull in the chain or move it around – imagine an elephant assisting in its own captivity! Our class had dinner together and then almost fell asleep as we sat on the dinner mat on the floor. By 8:30 we would all be going to bed. Mahoutship makes you tired.

While sitting on top of my lumbering, snack-crazy partner, observing her interactions with her mahout, I again wondered how the human-elephant relationship began. One theory that explains why such a meek creature as a human would attempt to tame a giant is the “dare theory.” “According to the ‘dare theory’ of the origin of domestication, the control of a fierce or large animal was a challenge to the physical prowess and intelligence of humans in ancient societies. This would have been especially true of the elephant, the largest of land mammals”

(Sukumar 37). This relationship continues today. In the West there are a few elephant trainers and keepers who know the secrets to the elephant-human relationship. The folks who know this with depth and breadth, mahouts, are in South and Southeast Asia. In Thailand they certainly exist. They possess a wealth of knowledge that is undervalued. This thesis we will explore what they know. Understanding this topic is about understanding the situations of mahouts and domesticated elephants in equal measure. To study one without the other is to look at the situation with blinders on. To further understand this relationship, we will start by observing one day of this relationship.

At the camp, Chet silently walks over to her at 6am. She knows the routine by heart. He unchains her and she slowly follows him. When he wants her to move a little to the right, she looks at him and knows. She stands, waiting for her morning drink and bath. She then proceeds over to the station where she will have carpets carefully placed on her back, then a seat held onto her by ropes, not unlike a backpack – only it holds people. She lifts one foot, then the other. No words are spoken. They have known each other for years. Every day they are together, earning a living. He drinks beer, she drinks gallons and gallons of water. He eats spicy food that comes in little clear plastic baggies sealed with rubber bands from the little stall down the street. She eats palms and bananas. His identity is confirmed by his skin, covered in tattoos. She has a microchip implant under her skin that identifies her. Together, they are a silent backdrop for tourists. Neither understand the words the people are speaking, nor do they really care. She is hoping for a special treat of a coconut. He walks her over to the coconut tree. She puts her head against its trunk. He knocks on the tree with the hook he carries to discipline her. A coconut falls. She steps on it gently and picks the sweet, white fruit from the brown husk with her finger at the end of her trunk. He is hoping for a tip from the Western tourists. They pose for a photo. He smiles. She lifts her trunk. They walk the same circle over and over again. Sometimes he is drunk. She understands and takes care of him. She would be drunk too, if only she could

find some fermented fruit. Evening comes. She is chained up. He goes to sit on the porch of his house with his friends. He listens for her from his house. If she is scared by a snake, he will come and calm her down. In front of the tourist camp the incense burns for the statue of the elephants with the elephant capture tools in its hands for the protection of the mahouts. When the sun rises, he will be back and they will live this same way everyday — together.

This is one mahout's life. Chet's grandfather had an elephant. He grew up around elephants. When asked how he feels about elephants, he will tell you, "I have many feelings about [my elephant]. . . I compare an elephant to a friend, a mother — sometimes the elephant works hard and takes care of the business and obeys us. There is no choice about my career, I love elephants, I have a close relationship with elephants. If I could change, I would be an elephant owner because I love elephants. A mahout and an elephant can rely on each other." He would like to own an elephant and live in his village back home. The elephant could do handyman jobs around the village. However, his grandfather's elephant died and now elephants are too expensive to replace. Food for elephants is not so easily found. Open foraging land is disappearing. Maybe he would have to pay a farm to deliver the food for his elephant. Things have changed so much in the past few years.

Chet

Chet's family had an elephant. He grew up in the mid-southern part of Thailand, near the border with Burma. When he finished high school at eighteen, he became a professional mahout. He is currently the mahout of a female elephant at a tourist camp.

Some mahouts, unfortunately, are not as dedicated as this. Ironically, as elephants in Thailand are increasingly rare, their caretakers are increasingly less trained. According to one conservationist, "Few mahouts grow up with elephants now. They used to be playmates. They played in the water. It was a special bond. This bond has changed. There are few real mahouts left. Many have no heart for it" (Sunee). More and more often, men just fall into the profession

because it's simply an available job. One camp estimated that about 50 percent of their mahouts were of this type -- not trained. Many traditionally trained mahouts often don't even know this is happening in their own profession. The less tradition there is, the less training, and the greater the possibility of cruelty. This is not just a one-way street. The cruelty is eventually returned by elephants. Killer domesticated elephants are not just wild beasts committing random violence. It is premeditated action by a creature with a great tolerance for cruelty and is finally fed up. Newspaper articles tell the story of abused elephants' revenge (Provoked). A quantitative study of the killer elephants' veterinarian records and owner histories could be conducted to find if the anecdotal evidence shows the truth. Dr. Niran, a veterinarian, noted that cows kill more often than bulls because they are more attached to their mahout and feel any cruelty more deeply. Chet the mahout noted that they kill when they are too hot or when they are very hungry. These are both mahout neglect issues. There are other reasons elephants kill -- bulls (male elephants) kill when their hormones make them lose control (See Berzerk; Elephant Tramples; Enraged; Mahout Killed) -- but often it is a reason that could have been prevented with proper training and screening of mahouts.

Mahout training crisis – loosing the human-elephant relationship

This training crisis is a problem across Asia. The top-notch mahouts are those who have been trained for years in the tradition of elephant love. Many informants, including Dr. Niran, Kama, a boss of a group of mahouts, all the staff at a park for elephants and many mahouts said a person must love their elephant for their elephant to love them and to listen to them. There is a t-shirt in the shops in Bangkok that reads, "No money, no honey." For elephant training, it would be the other way around, "No honey, no money." In other words, the elephant is not going to do a good job if there is no love. In elephant related professions, love sustains the best professionals. Elephants are different from many animals. ". . . The elephant itself chooses whether to accept that mahout. You can't play mix-and-match with these animals . . . Their

nature will not accept it" (Rosenthal). Another example of this bond is when "six animals and their mahouts from Surin were sent to Indonesia. . . to round up wild elephants under a 10-year contract. . . One elephant died of unclear causes while the remainder are suffering stress without their mahouts. Indonesia returned the mahouts, citing the poor shape of its economy, and reversed its decision to return the animals" (Accord).

Negative changes in mahoutship

Mahoutship has undergone serious changes in the last 100 years. As Lair notes:

Around 1900, perhaps one man in 25 was working as a mahout in Thailand. Not so long ago in the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia in particular, there must have been many dominant-culture mahouts, many of who quit riding and keeping elephants 40 or 50 years ago with the coming of railroads and development to the lowlands. But just as farmers and cavalymen in Europe did not write about the daily lives of their horses and stable hands, the way of life of dominant culture keepers has passed away unrecorded. . . In an informal poll in Thailand, among 200 civil servant mahouts (sons of mahouts) said they didn't want their sons to be mahouts (Lair, *Gone Astray*).

The crisis in inadequate mahoutship is a problem in Thailand and is also noted as a problem in India. "In some countries, notably Thailand, elephant-keeping systems are rapidly becoming degraded and mongrelized" (Lair, *Gone Astray*) "Assam, [India] has a proud tradition of taming elephants for work, being the home of the finest 'mahouts'. But that tradition is dying out today with tragic consequences" (*Distress*). "It is hard to find a good mahout. Few mahouts love elephants. 60 years ago mahouts loved elephants. There was no TV, no entertainment for show, no extra needs. But now they know the elephant can make money" (Dr. Niran).

Training used to be in the hands of senior mahouts and monks. Teaching the Khotchasatra – a treatise in the form of palm leaf texts – was reserved for people who monks thought were at an appropriate level of mediation development. "Not everybody can master this knowledge . . . I learned the Khotchasatra from my grandparents, who learned it from my great grand-parents. My ancestors were skilled elephant trainers" (Tiyavanich 141).

Solutions to issues

There are solutions that are being applied to this issue. There is a mahout training school in Lampang, Thailand under the auspices of the Royal Forestry Department (Lair, Asian Elephants). India has a mahout code of ethics (Thiruvananthapuram, Code). They have started a mahout training center (Thiruvananthapuram, Training). They have also published a mahout handbook (Namboodiri). In Thailand, Richard Lair, Advisor and International Relations Officer at the National Elephant Institute of Thailand, has published an elephant health handbook (Thai Government). (See page 101 for future research recommendations.)

Mahout training strategies

There are a few requirements for being a mahout. First, one must be a man. Mahouts are almost always male. There is one female mahout in India (Women Speak). Some Western elephant keepers are female. Dr. Niran had noticed in the past few years, most people who are interested in mahoutship are Western women. There are basically two paths to mahoutship. One is a lengthy apprenticeship and the other is a learn-as-you-go, hope-and-pray drop-in job. Apprenticeship can begin in childhood or in adulthood.

Childhood mahout training

Mahouts choose their profession for a variety of reasons. They may choose it because it is their father's profession or they grew up around elephants. One mahout, Anupap, chose it because his family sold bananas to the camp and he latched onto the mahouts and learned the trade. Three of the mahouts interviewed had elephants in their families and took up the profession. One mahout, Aran, had to quit school to take care of his family's elephant because no one else in the family was able to.

Training in childhood begins around ten years old. Mahouts describe their apprenticeship usually within their family circle or at a camp they are living in. Their father will begin to teach them by taking them down the river to wash the elephant. Gradually, the boy learns commands and the do's and don'ts of commanding an elephant. According to Mandy, a guide and mahout at one elephant camp, "A mahout spends more time with his elephant than with his wife. When he is with his elephant, the wife and kids clean up after the elephant too. When the mahout comes home with his elephant at night, quite often the kids get up on the elephant with their father to go to a river to learn about taking care of the elephant. When the kids get older, they will just take the elephant." The highest education level of the mahouts interviewed was high school and the lowest was middle school. At one elephant camp, the owner, Pravat, noted, "Mahouts are poor. I let them stay here. I protect everything and can learn about elephant. Now here [at this camp] is there a time for a place to learn about elephant training. There is no money or time for training [outside the camp] because mahouts have to make money to buy bananas [to feed their elephants]. They can't teach elephant 'don't go'. They can't teach elephants [tricks] for war. They can't because all the time they must make money. The money they make is not much. This business does not make money."

Adult training – apprenticeship

Learning to command an elephant as an adult can be gained through apprenticeship at a camp with other mahouts. "The mahouts have so much knowledge," Pravat says. The apprentice mahout will begin as a groom. He will clean up the poo, move on to helping to wash the elephants, and eventually get an elephant to himself. To advance his career, he would learn to train elephants for tricks, shows or other events. He could also become a boss of the other mahouts. At a logging camp he may move up to truck driver, thereby taking his excellent skills with him out of the profession itself (Dr. Niran). One second generation mahout, Kama, is the

boss and guide of a small group of tourist-ride elephants. He has one hope for mahouts: he wants “all mahouts to love elephants from their hearts, not for tips from the tourists.”

Adult training – crash course

Drop-in training is in many ways much less effective and much more dangerous for mahouts, elephants and the people around them. One traditionally trained Karen mahout, Aran who has worked with elephants since he was a child, said that they usually teach a new mahout his job in two days. One mahout, Sam, who had undergone this crash course, described the process:

I woke up the next morning not knowing what I was going to be doing or how I was going to do it. I just came down as early as I could and waited for the other mahouts to come up. Obviously I had someone stay with me for the day and show me the ropes. For that day and for days afterward they stayed with me. They showed me commands and stayed by my side. For the first couple days he was basically [the elephant’s] mahout and I just came and watched him. I didn’t have someone to write down the commands and this is what it means and what to do. It was kinda like you are going to be a mahout, off you go. We’ll check in on you later. I just listened to what [the head mahout] was saying and watched what the elephant did, and I would just figure that this must mean this and that must mean that. I would just kind of mimic and see what the elephant did. I just learned like that. Trial by fire. It was really tough for the first few months. I really had no idea what I was doing. It all kinda worked out I guess.

Sam

Sam is a Western mahout who began his apprenticeship with baby elephants. He went back to visit and took a job as a mahout. He is in his thirties and previously worked in a record store in the West. He is currently the mahout of a male elephant.

Even for Thai mahouts who do not speak Kuay or Karen, the languages of many of the traditional mahouts, their experience may be similar. Mahouts who just fall into the profession are at more risk than they know. For example, for male elephants in musth, their mahouts are usually the first targets of their rage. Without having this awareness, a mahout can be at risk of being hurt, if not killed.

Another Western mahout, Mandy, began work with a really aggressive elephant. The camp owner, Pravat, describes her introduction to mahoutship:

She can control the elephant, now the elephant is her friend. If I let her know the history of the elephant, maybe she doesn't want her. But now if I say 'This elephant is very dangerous', she can say 'OK, don't worry because she is my friend'. In the beginning I give her this elephant for three days. If the elephant hurt her, how we can do? But she works with this elephant because she doesn't know about this problem. They are very close, she can understand her. Now she can bring this elephant outside and go anywhere. When Mandy left this elephant yesterday, the elephant cried.

Mandy

She is a Western zookeeper who came to Thailand for professional development. She wants to become an elephant keeper in the West. In Thailand, she works with elephants at a tourist camp. She is the mahout of an elderly female elephant.

Every day in Thailand, there is a mahout being trained hastily. What used to be a process that took a decade, is now condensed into a few days. The tradition of mahout training is only one part of a host of traditions that surround the elephant and mahout relationship.

Mahout - elephant traditions

A part of all training should include the many traditions surrounding elephants. Pravat keeps old Thai books on elephant keeping. He says: "A Royal rides a male elephant. I am sad to see a girl on a bull elephant during her time of the month. She should not ride on the neck. A bad man can not ride a bull elephant." At one camp, all mahouts have a knife and an ankus (elephant hook). There is a shrine and a prayer house where all ankuses and knives are blessed.

In Thailand, education was the responsibility of the temples. Monks knew the traditions of elephant keeping and would pass the information down. There is a book, the Khotchasatra, about elephant care. At another elephant place, Sunne points to a small house. "There is a spirit house at the hospital. We must ask spirits for the elephants to go or come. The Karen people have respect for the tree. Most Karen people cross the border to Burma to log. They ask permission from forest spirits to cut the tree or to log." Paul, the anthropologist, notes that "often, old taboos were made for practical reasons. All have their purposes. For example: On the road, they would let the elephants take a break in order to pray to the forest spirits. This means they

took a break while transporting them. Recently, one that did not take a break when transporting one in a truck got in an accident. Many cultural secrets are quite ordinary — set in a riddle to remember.” For example, as Lewis notes,

The Phonong in Cambodia believe it is bad luck if they have an elephant calf born in captivity. That is causing problems in Cambodia as you might imagine. That is a reflection of any tribe throughout the region. People have always preferred wild caught animals. There are two reasons. On a psychological or emotional level, people believe that if you get a wild elephant, it has never been around people, and you break it and break it hard, it will always fear and respect human beings etc. But domesticated elephants who grow up with people will always be very tricky, dangerous, whatever. There is a high degree of truth in that.

Very few traditions of mahouts, however, have been recorded in English. These traditions are a part of what conservationists term “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” or TEK. To put it in a scientific context, TEK emphasizes the importance of “traditional knowledge protocol and consultation among practitioners,” and compares it to “scientific methods with peer review. . . . In a context of oral traditions, knowledge and its transmission are guided by the rigor of strict rules of learned protocol that are generally replicable and consistent within language areas” (Westley and Miller 284). This knowledge is an essential part of saving the elephants in Thailand.

The importance of the knowledge of elephant individuality to mahoutship

Each elephant has a different personality. In every interview, this was repeated. It is only possible for mahouts to control an elephant when they know the elephant’s personality. Two of the mahouts, when asked if they had a favorite elephant, replied that they love all elephants. While all elephants have the same basic needs, they each have their own preferences. Some prefer pineapple to corn. Some bulls don’t like men (except for their mahout). Some cows like bulls a little too much. Some prefer to drink through their trunk, others in their mouths. Pravat says “[some] female elephants are like proper ladies. There are many kinds of elephants. I have male-female elephant, some elephants like to protect other elephants and some are like rotweilers.” An American elephant trainer says, “You can’t just put any two elephants together. Elephants

travel in herds. You have to know which elephants can be together or there will be a war you can't fight." These are all things that can only be learned over time. One camp likes to use senior elephants – 'senior elephants are good for training volunteers. Volunteers are good for them.' At an elephant hospital, Sunee warns, "You have to change the mahout if the elephant doesn't like the mahout they got at the hospital." In addition, different elephants are suited for different kinds of work. "Illegal logging is for the more aggressive elephants. They choose the good ones for tourism. They choose the ones that can calm down. There should be a retirement home project for logging elephants who are too aggressive to work in tourism" (Sunee). In addition, there is also a concern with breeding. One camp is working on breeding elephants specifically for tourism – elephants who are the most aesthetically pleasing, with a calm demeanor (Pravat). Another tourism spot is trying to find specifically kind elephants who will allow anyone on their backs, not just their mahouts (Lewis).

For mahouts, elephant intelligence makes his job more challenging. Many mahouts noted elephant sneakiness as an issue in their worklife. One elephant would sneak into the part of the field he wasn't supposed to, looking out of the corner of his eye at his mahout before commencing to feast until his mahout caught on. I observed a circus elephant who waited for the groom to be out of sight before sneaking water from a closed tub. As soon as he turned the corner, she stretched her trunk to its limit, pulled the top off and drank. Just before the groom returned, she looked over to where he was coming from and moved away from the area. Elephants also use tools. They use sticks to itch, lay grass on their backs to keep the biting flies away and pull up fence posts with their trunks. For a chart of all the ways they have been observed using tools, see Chevalier-Skolnikoff and Liska's "Tool use by wild and captive elephants". It is important to understand the elephant's brain to understand why they are so challenging.

On a physiological level, mahouts are dealing with an animal with a very complex brain.

Relative to brain size, the temporal lobe in proboscideans appears to be larger than that of humans. It is also more convoluted and denser (i.e. more convolutions per unit area). In humans, functions attributed to the temporal lobe include recognition, storing and retrieving of information related to sight, touch, smell and hearing, which are functions associated with short- and long-term memory. If we assume that similar functions of the temporal lobe in humans can be attributed to elephants, we can apply a new interpretation to the saying, 'elephants never forget'.

The proboscidean brain is unusually large compared with its body size. Jerison discussed the importance of relative brain size in mammals and its possible relationships to intelligence. Encephalization quotient (EQ) is the observed size of the brain relative to body size divided by the expected relative brain size. Combined measurements of ten elephants and other data indicate that the elephant's EQ of about 1.7 is dwarfed by that of a human (EQ_{human} 7.5). It is comparable to the EQ of most other primates, and it exceeds that of most other terrestrial mammals (Shoshani).

In addition to the challenges that arise for mahouts from an elephant's complex brain, they also put their new mahouts through a trial period.

Regardless of the amount or length of training, when a mahout meets a new elephant, the elephant puts the mahout through a trial period. Dr. Niran, a longtime elephant veterinarian, noted that to really know an elephant, a mahout would have to work with the same elephant for ten years. Sam, a Western mahout who has been with his elephant two years, describes his experience meeting his elephant:

I don't know how you tell if the elephant accepts you because we know these elephants have been trained from the time they are 2, 3, 4 years old. Since that time they have been under human control. They have been under so many owners, had X amount of mahouts in their lives and they are used to having someone tell them what to do. When I started with [my elephant], I mean yeah he did do what I asked him to do for the most part and I kind of managed to move him around and do whatever I had to do with him, but I don't think it is because he had chosen to accept me. It was because they were words that he knew and he was responding to those words. That was kinda it, just because he had already been trained to do that. No elephant handler or anything like that. He accepted me pretty well. He never attacked me. He never did anything like that.

An American elephant trainer, Bob, describes his favorite elephant.

For 12 years one elephant has been my favorite. Her personality and character make her my favorite. She is 50 years old, street smart, a brilliant elephant. She's

much smarter than the other elephants. If she could talk, she would. She speaks in grunts. She learned every trick when she was a baby, but now she tells me what she wants through grunts. If she does something bad, she whimpers. She communicates with me. I'm a friend. . . Elephants have the intelligence of an 8 year old. They are smarter than some adults I know.

Bob

He is an American elephant trainer in the U.S. He has been a trainer for 15 years in the circus.

Their personality also plays a role in their reintroduction in the wild. Some elephants are suited to go back to the wild. Elephants who already live near the forest or who are too rough from logging to work in tourism may be better off in the wild. "Elephants need to be in the jungle. It is less important that the national park be rebuilt. Immigrate [send] domestic elephants there. Make an elephant province. Select the worst elephants [most aggressive] to go first" (Kiet). Others are not well suited for returning to the wild. There is a continuum onto which domesticated elephants fall in regard to returning to the wild. In general, reintroduction has been mildly successful at best. Western concepts of just setting them free in the forest do not take this into account. This belief is illustrated by the World Wildlife Fund in its announcement of a project including reintroduction: "This project was established to offer an alternative future for domestic elephants, one in which they will live out their remaining life in the forest, away from humans, *as nature intended*" (WWF). This philosophy is deadly for some elephants who cannot cope. In the World Wildlife Fund's reintroduction Project, "in total, 7 of the 24 released elephants have died in almost 6 years since the project started" (WWF), or almost 35 percent. In addition to knowing each elephant's personality, communication is another key to good mahoutship and conservation.

Mahout - elephant and elephant - elephant communication

The communication between elephants and humans and between elephants themselves is as complex as it is ancient. Here is an overview of the interactions that go on between the

species and within the elephant group. Being well versed in this knowledge can make the difference between a mahout whose monosyllabic attempt at communication includes only the hook and a mahout who accurately understands his elephant. In the past, many forms of communication were taught to mahouts by senior mahouts. With the loss of traditional mahout apprenticeships, these forms of communication are being lost. There have also been many scientific advances in understanding the many forms of elephant-to-elephant communication. This is not being taught to mahouts. One can only imagine what a tiny human looks like to an elephant, who can communicate in more ways than a human.

There are many accounts of why elephants cannot talk, two of which are as follows:

How the elephant came to be and why they cannot talk: A Karen Tale

A man just got married to a woman. They were happy. He went to make Thai spicy sausage. He put the meat, sticky rice and spices into a tube. He didn't see that flies went in the tube. The wife wanted to know what was in the tube. He wouldn't tell. She ate it and her nose grew longer and longer. Then she had to get on all fours to support her long snout. The man ran out of meat to feed her and, then ran out of fruit. All that was left was grass. He had no more money. She just kept nagging and nagging him. "I am your wife". So he cut out her tongue and that's why the elephant can't speak. (As told by Sirikit, camp manager who works with the Karen people)

"[The tip of the elephant's tongue] is turned inward . . . The ancient, still venerated Arab zoologist, Ibn Quatayba, who has a section on Fil (Arabic for "elephant") after discussing the unique form of the elephant's tongue, pauses to remind his readers of the belief firmly held throughout India and all of Asia that "if the [elephant's] tongue were not inverted, it would be able to speak." (Alexander 66)

Even though elephants cannot speak in the same ways humans do, they communicate in many ways with other elephants and humans. Elephants communicate with other elephants through making sounds acoustically at our frequency of hearing and below our frequency – infrasound. They communicate through exchanging chemical signals with each other. They also communicate seismically – through their feet (O'Connell). Humans are also capable of communicating with them in different ways. The following section explores the many ways elephants communicate.

Elephant - elephant communication

It is important for mahouts and others dealing with elephants to understand the different ways they communicate in dealing with human-elephant issues. For example, it would be important to know how they communicate both at low frequency level, by using their feet, and through hormones. This affects how people would understand and deal with a situation where they are telling each other about a delicious buffet available at a pineapple plantation. For mahouts, understanding that two elephants are beginning to disagree with each other could help prevent a disaster.

Elephants are adept communicators. They use sight, sound (both at our frequency and infrasound), seismic waves by stomping on the ground, chemical signals, and smell. Eyesight is their worst feature. "Elephants can't see well—they see in shades of grey. In bright light, they see limited color" (Sukumar 140). They see in a way similar to color-blind humans (Yokoyama). They can speak in our frequency, in infrasound, through their feet. In our frequency, they can chirp trumpet and make other sounds. They also speak at a low frequency (frequency is the number of times an object or the sound wave it produces vibrates in a second. The higher the frequency, the higher the pitch – example: cardboard and a bike wheel—each vibration per second is a Hertz), which can pass through vegetation easily. Their "infrasound can be heard for 50km square" (Sukumar 146). The best time for elephants to communicate this way is at sunset and sunrise. They also send chemical signals to each other (through the air or through body fluids). Inside their mouth is a vomeronasal organ. It detects chemical signals in urine and other fluids. An elephant's sense of smell is believed to be 5x a bloodhound's" (Living Elephant, 149). While it is important to understand how elephants communicate with each other, for mahouts it is even more important to know how to communicate with them themselves.

Mahout-Elephant Communication

Mahouts communicate with elephants through speech, body language and physical interaction. Mahouts can also communicate with elephants using a secret spoken language.

One mahout, Chet, described communicating with elephants:

Humans can communicate with animals and you show to it visitors. Not many people can communicate with an elephant. . . They know many commands. Sometimes the mahout has to hit the elephant to make the elephant remember. They have to repeat the commands every day until the elephant can remember. Mahouts have very short words for elephant. They are like magic words. Many many years ago they believed these words make the elephants fear. It is like a language of the elephants. Example word: "how" = stop. A short, short magic word. If a mahout has an elephant when it was small, every day the elephant remembers the face of the owner. The elephant can only remember him. He uses the same word every day to train the elephant. The elephant can remember what the mahout says. I speak everyday. Sometimes I use magic words to make the elephant understand clearly. Sometimes [there is] no need to use it. For example sometimes elephant will not obey human language, so you use the elephant language. "MA MA MA MA" come on, and we use the magic word to make the elephant come. If someone who is not a mahout uses the magic words, it won't work. But if you are a mahout and you can say it in the right tone, they can obey. You can use the words with domestic elephant but wild elephants may understand. You meet elephant in the forest, if you are a mahout, every elephant can understand who is trained. Many elephants cry if mahout is angry. Elephant can make a little purr noise if elephant knows mahout is angry. If elephant is unhappy, the mahout knows.

Another way of communicating, according to an old tradition, is through meditation.

Most elephants have divine ears. Using kasina meditation (a meditation method that consists of focusing one's full and undivided attention on one object related to earth, water, wind or fire or on a disk of blue, red, yellow or white color.) You will find out is the elephant has a devata (deity) who guards him. Then you will know that the elephant has divine ears. To subdue an elephant that is on a rampage, you must first visualize the deity who is guarding the wild elephant. Then you radiate metta [universal love] to the deity. Once the deity receives the metta radiated by you, the deity will convey this to the elephant and then guide the animal away from you so that it will not harm you." (Tiyavanich 151)

This could be a time of the renaissance of mahoutship. Mahouts, through a few translators and simple technology, could be sharing their expertise and knowledge of elephant keeping with each other. In addition, as a group, they could be enlarging human's ability to communicate with elephants through their collective knowledge of this ancient art. Researchers could be writing this down and preserving the knowledge for future generations.

Mahouts use particular words to guide their elephants. The following are three lists that explain the commands. Further research would include the origins of the words, how mahout commands vary with the different ethnic groups that use them and the issues this causes for elephants moving from one culture to the next.

Commands from the article: "How to ride an elephant" (Burke 27):

- GO FORWARD: nudge behind both ears and say "pai"
- STOP: squeeze knees together and say "how"
- TURN: nudge behind opposite ear to direction you wish to go. Say "baen"
- WALK BACKWARDS: rock and kick legs backwards and say "sock"
- SIT DOWN: tap the back and say "map lung"
- LOWER HEAD: put feet over the head and say "tak lung"
- LIFT LEG TO GET ON: say "song soong"
- LIFT LEG TO GET OFF: say "hab soong"

Commands from a National Elephant Institute of Thailand handout:

- Song soon = Get on from the side. (Elephant lifts leg up.)
- Hup soong = Get off from the side.
- Tak long = Get off from the front. (Elephant bow head)
- Loog khien = Stand up.
- Bai = Go. (Moving both your feet behind the elephant ears)
- Phe = Come.
- Goy = Slow down.
- Hou!! = Stop. (Squeeze your knees.)
- Nung long = Sit down.
- Non long = Lie down.
- Map long = Sit on belly.
- Benn = Turn. (Moving opposite foot side)
- Sok = Walk backwards.
- Geb bon = Pick thing up.

Commands from Chet, the mahout:

- Muek = Come
- How = Stop
- Pei (in Surin = Bin) = Turn
- Som Reart = lay down
- Don = stand up, get up

Methods of communicating control to the elephant

Different mahouts have different philosophies about controlling an elephant. Dr. Niran says, "A good mahout works through trust. An elephant can love a mahout. A bad mahout works through hitting the elephant."

Two of the many kinds of elephant training philosophies come from the Kuay (from the southeastern part of Thailand) and the Karen (from Burma and the northwestern part of Thailand). One estimate is that 60 percent of mahouts in Thailand are Burmese (from the Karen tribe) (Dr. Niran). The Karen are sometimes considered to be rougher with the elephants, while the Kuay are characterized as being more gentle. The origins of each group's elephant keeping techniques and reasons behind these techniques could answer the question as to why that is. The Kuay people have been keeping elephants traditionally for perhaps thousands of years. In the early 1800's, Karen people started working with elephants as dedicated loggers. The British came because they had logged out their own oak trees and needed more wood that had fine qualities for ship building. The Karen mahouts and elephants helped to build the British Empire by logging the teak trees that built the British ships that defeated Napoleon (Scigliano 165).

It is important to understand that there is not one way for humans to communicate with an elephant. Different issues would arise from each method, both positive and negative. In any policy about mahouts or re-training, these differences would have to be considered, respected and applicable knowledge shared from each tradition. From a mahout's observations, those mahouts who formally worked in logging (which is a big industry in the North) tend to want to control every move of the elephant more than a young mahout in the tourist industry. Making sure the elephant walks on the correct path with the tourists on her back is much less stressful and has less potential danger than an elephant moving a 100 year old tree under a deadline.

Some basic differences between Karen and Kuay elephant keeping methods were provided by the anthropologist, Paul:

Kuay:

- Don't use the tailpiece loop that holds the saddle going uphill.
- Have equipment and sometimes padding different from Karen.
- Have to cut grass and bring it to the elephant.
- Have a strong elephant hunter and capture tradition
- Act more like Bronco busters, but often keep one elephant near themselves as their own.
- Are usually only bad mahouts when they are in debt for or do not own the elephant they keep.
- The Kuay idea is that an elephant doesn't need the wild — it has us. Environmental issues in most parts of the world are questions like what fuel to use, wood or dung? Not whether to exclusively eat organic food, etc. In the idea of modernity, they ask who's ahead or who's behind?
- Kuay take the elephants somewhere for wages. And they supplement their income. Kuay try to have a diversified source of income and elephant hunting was a seasonal custom. Maybe they did iron work for the other job. People who stayed on the land were not well fed but not hungry.
- Senior mahouts were the social workers for mahouts. They want to be in good with the forest spirits, so they try to keep a good order among the men.

Karen

- Have more hospitable environment for elephants to forage for their own food.
- Have more collective mahoutship, swapping elephants. There is not such a strong hunter system in Karen.
- Addict more elephants to amphetamines because of the demands of logging.
- According to one group, "each Karen village raised elephant as a traditional animal for labor and transportation. They earned income from their neighbors who asked for the elephant to drag logs to build houses, schools, fences, etc." (Heifer).
- "The living conditions [for Karen elephant owners] changed [in the late 1990's – early 2000's] – there was then good transportation, good roads, more vehicles. The elephant had less jobs to do. Also, more population caused the villages to be expanded. There were less places (forests) to raise the elephants – no natural feed for them anymore. The elephant owners decided to take the elephants to work in elephant camps. After sending the elephants to the elephant camp, some mahouts (mostly husbands) could not stay in the camp to take care of the elephants for many month. If they come to the stay in the camp, it means their family members have to come out of the village and live in the camp with the head of their family. Then they have to neglect their farming field (such as a paddy field, crop plantation etc.) in the village. As a result, some of them hired another person to care for their elephant" (Heifer).

Sam, a young Western mahout who works in the tourist industry, says:

I don't like telling the elephant what to do. (That is the job and it is also the worst part of the job.) I don't like putting a chain around his leg every night. Every night when I put the chain on his leg, I apologize to him. I know it's part of the job.

However, they are necessary parts of the job...I love being responsible for [my elephant's] welfare, I love making him happy and comfortable and things like that, but I don't like stopping him from doing what he wants to do. I kind of feel silly telling an elephant who is 15 years older than me and twice my size, "You shouldn't be doing that" or "come over here."

Another method of controlling elephants is breaking them when they are still calves. Western animal rights activists have a lot to say about the Thai elephants and this issue. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is one group that is involved in this, with a campaign against phajan, a method through which baby elephants are "broken" so they can be "domesticated" (Abusive). This is also a traditional practice in Thailand. This conflict between indigenous practice and Western ideas of animal cruelty exemplifies the nature of East/West differences. The method of embarrassment that PETA is using may work in the Western world. However, this sort of embarrassment campaign is incredibly offensive to Thai people. Thailand has always been an independent country and proud of this fact. Outside ideas and people are taken in carefully. While there are many issues that need to be addressed in Thailand for the good of the elephants, the manner in which these are approached is paramount. Unfortunately, PETA is not doing the cultural research necessary to be effective. One interviewee noted that "it is important to understand the elephant without putting your own culture into it. . . . They should not shame Thailand's culture. Stay home if you don't want to understand" (Pravat).

At the same time, there is a strong cultural pull rooted in Buddhism not to be cruel to animals: "Thai belief is not to euthanize animals, including elephants . . . People call the police all the time about the mistreatment of elephants" (Lair, Gone Astray). However, the fine for cruelty to elephants or for killing them is only 500 to 3500 baht (\$13 to \$92 U.S. dollars) or 1 month in jail.

Mahoutship specialties

There are several different paths to take in being a mahout. Often the path is set by the kind of elephant you are given. Being the mahout of a bull, cow or calf are different experiences and require certain kinds of patience and skills. While female elephants are known to be more temperamental with their mahouts, male elephants in musth are extremely difficult to handle. Calves are extremely busy. They are very much like humans, learning through play when they are young. They are just like giant toddlers. Mahouts acquire these special skills through experience or, if he is lucky, through the knowledge of a more experienced mahout. The traditional training that mahouts used to receive through apprenticeship is disappearing. These specialties are all suffering because of this lack of knowledge.

Mahoutship of male elephants (bulls)

To be the mahout of a bull is a job worthy of much admiration. Bulls are quite different in their behavior from cows. They are a little rougher than females. When I was washing one up, he would try to kick me. The females would not. The same male did not allow a particular tour guide to be near the female he shared a pen with daily. Every time the guide walked by he got smacked by a young trunk.

Their behavior is radically different from cows when they go through the difficult period called "musth", when they want to mate. Musth comes from the Urdu for "intoxication" (Sukumar 101). This is like a violent case of PMS in women. Bulls reach puberty between 8 and 15. In 2 to 3 years, they are mature (Sukumar 100). They start musth at about 15 to 25 (Sukumar 104). The number of elephants in musth peaks just after the rainy season, the same time females are in estrus. However, they can be in musth anytime (Sukumar 105). It's not pretty. Bulls drip pee constantly (maybe, they think, like a trail of breadcrumbs for females to find them). After they have been dripping pee down their hind leg for a long time, the end of their penis turns green. They drip

fluid out of their temporal glands on the sides of their heads and it gets worse as musth goes on. This might be a way for them to mark things with their scent (Sukumar 101). They become aggressive and don't listen to their mahouts. Mahouts chain them up and gingerly place food near the dangerous bulls.

Traditionally, monks had knowledge of how to subdue elephants in musth. Ajan Doem Buddhasaro could subdue a rampaging elephant without poison arrows. He would use meditation techniques (Tiyavanich 150).

The period of musth is when many of the human-elephant conflicts happen and the conflict with agriculture arises. Often, the males just roam around looking for females, finding four or five they like, trying to mate and moving on. They do not listen to their keepers, and they often try to hurt their mahout at this time. They are usually chained if they live at a camp (Chet). Also, if the oldest bull is taken away from a bull group of elephants, the younger male elephants cause more trouble for the females in the area because they don't have any guides to teach them about the birds and the bees and decorum of elephant mating (Mekloy).

An example of one behavior when in musth was recorded:

Golap (Rose), a 21-year-old, five-tonne male went into "musth", an aggressive phase that affects adult males every year or two. Earlier a mahout would spot the onset of musth, and medicate or confine the animal. But Golap's musth was not spotted, and it turned into uncontrollable aggression. Golap killed four people including a woman and a seven-year-old girl in less than three weeks. So Dinesh Choudhury, one of India's last elephant "hunters" was called. He tracked the elephant till the musth period got over, preventing any more harm till the animal was pliant enough to go back to its owner. (Distress)

Caring for elephants in this state is a specialty within the mahout profession. Since the mahout is usually first on the "hit list" of the crazed elephant, he has to take special care not to be hurt. He is also the one who has to spot the oncoming period and restrain his elephant. Sam, the new

mahout, felt a certain amount of rejection from the elephant. He felt that he was in danger and couldn't understand. He was not trained in identifying the situation. This unknowingly put him in grave danger. When I told him he was the first one the elephant would hurt, he hid his surprise as much as possible, but I could tell he was shocked.

Ironically, bulls are less dangerous to mahouts in general than cows (Dr. Niran). Bulls can take abuse from their keeper. Cows can't. Cows are more attached to their keepers and are more dangerous when they are abused.

In the wild, a bull would be kicked out of his maternal family when he was sexually mature and only occasionally see the family. He would go find a few bulls out in the wild to guide him and greet once in while. Mainly, though, he would be eating and finding a mate.

Males form a bull group. This grouping is "a loose temporary aggregation of often unrelated males. Within a herd, the females reach sexual maturity between nine years and 12 years old, while the males become sexually active slightly later, between 12 years and 15 years. As the young males reach sexual maturity, they are gradually forced out of the natal herd in order to prevent inbreeding.

It is these displaced bulls that go on to form the bull groups. Even though a bull is technically sexually mature when it is between 12 years and 15 years of age, and yet to successfully mate with a female, it has to attain the so-called "social maturity" which may take another five or eight years. It is the size, more than the age of the bull that matters when it comes to breeding. One way to increase body size is to feed on highly nutritious plants. An adult bull elephant needs to consume about 150 kg of food per day. In order to accumulate so much food, it spends between 17 and 19 hours every day foraging. (Santiapillai)

Mahoutship of female elephants (cows)

A cow's life is distinctly different. In the wild and often in domestication, she is surrounded by females. "The herd is a cohesive group consisting usually of a matriarch (the oldest female and the leader), her daughters and their offspring. Within this family all the members are related to each other and therefore the social bonds between them are very strong. Larger families with more female caretakers (allomothers) have a higher calf survival rate than do smaller families.

(Santiapillai). In the wild, she will grow up with other calves, close to her mother. She will spend a lot of time walking next to other females (Sukumar 132). A longtime elephant veterinarian reported that mahouts never let two cows be together because they become best friends and they do not care about the mahout anymore. They become social and just want to be together (Dr. Niran). When she will be sexually mature males will visit the herd and she will choose whether she wants to mate with them (Sukumar 112).

Mahoutship and breeding

There was one mating of captive elephants witnessed during the course of this study. The cow did not like the bull. The female elephants of her group stayed with her while the male was making his advances. They moved away from her, and the bull was left with a female crossing her legs. Elephants are picky about their mates. Knowing an individual elephant's preferences comes into play in mating. As one author noted, ". . . a pair of captive elephants must actually 'like' each other. If they don't, breeding them is impossible" (Alexander 197). According to Dr. Bets Rasmussen, "All [a female elephant] has to do is cross her legs and he can't get her. He can kill her, but he can't get her" (Alexander 197). It is a special art to breed elephants. Not everyone agrees however. As Lewis stated, "if conditions are right elephants will breed quite well in domesticity. You'll read in books that they're very tricky breeders, but that is nonsense. They breed quite well."

Domestic female elephants mate when humans bring in a stud elephant. Hopefully, one of the female elephants will like the stud. During the mating I observed, I saw the female elephant conferring with her little herd about the male elephant. In the West, mating is very controlled, with the male being inside a crushing cage. This way the elephants meet, but the male cannot lose control of himself. However, this only allows one female into the area. She cannot confer with her herd. Of course this requires more research, but it seemed to be a part of the reason

elephants don't successfully mate in the West. Since in the U.S. it costs about \$15,000 each time a bull is brought in to mate, this is a topic that perhaps should be further explored.

A cow will probably prefer older bulls, perhaps because they can guard better against other bulls (Sukumar 113). She might also prefer a bull with longer tusks. There is evidence that longer tusks are a sign of having fewer parasites (Sukumar 124). This is an example of where science could help mahouts breed domestic elephants. The oldest elephant in a study group to birth a calf was 62 (Sukumar 261).

One mahout described the difficulty of elephant mating as follows: "In my hometown they could give the elephant time to have a baby. Now there is no time for elephants to have babies. In nature is a better place for elephants to have children. It is difficult because the female has to be ready to have sex" (Anupap). The elephant gestation period is about 22 months. Many camp owners do not want to lose the income that an elephant can make in that period of time. Plus there should be a maternity leave after pregnancy. Who will pay for this? "From birth to three years, the mother should be with the baby. When they are pregnant for six-months they have the right to not work. There was the elephant who was pregnant and the baby could not turn because the taxi seat was on the elephant's back. The water breaks and they still work, the elephants still have to work. In Bangkok a group did a documentary while an elephant was giving birth, but the elephant couldn't give birth with the lights on her and she died" (Ratana).

If mating is successful, as is often the case when domesticated cows are allowed to mate, she will have a calf. Calves must not be more than 5m away from their mother or they rumble for mama (Sukumar 132). "Since elephant gestation takes nearly two years, and females do not come into estrus until their young have completed nursing, and elephants very rarely have twins,

this works out to one calf per adult female every four or five years, or an average of six calves per lifetime" (Alexander 56). Knowing how to pair elephants is a special art for mahouts. This is extremely important for the future of the species.

Mahoutship and baby elephants (calves)

Baby elephants are often given to the least experienced mahouts for day-to-day care. They are trained by the most experienced mahouts. Sam's first experience with elephant care was with baby elephants:

Baby elephants are hyperactive the whole day for 2 or 3 hours, crash and wake up and crash and up. They wear you out. They don't stop. An adult elephant has different needs. They're attention is really food all day, get some water, maybe have a shower, more food, and go and hang out. That's their day most of the time. Babies are full of energy looking for trouble during the day. They are thinking, "what can we do, what can we knock around, push over" - stuff like that.

Baby elephants are often taken from the wild to be sold, as elephant reproduction is lengthy and rare in domesticated elephants. This is very unpleasant for the elephants. "In the wild, elephant calves stay with their mothers until they are teenagers, just like humans; separating them and making them wander the streets is as cruel as taking a child from his mother and making him beg on the streets for a syndicate" (Tangwisutihit) . Baby elephants are often taken from the wild in Burma and smuggled through Thailand. In one batch that was confiscated, "301 were aged 1-5 years, and had been smuggled out of the jungle after being separated from their mothers. However . . . the government did not have any measures to determine whether or not these animals had in fact come from the jungle; so did not have any legal redress against the people trading them" (Concern).

The biggest concern of mahouts and elephants: food

When a mahout is asked about conservation, he first speaks to the issue of elephant food security. "Yes, we need to conserve elephants for elephants to live with us for a long time. It is

difficult to feed the elephants if you do not have time. It is better to work at a tourist camp to find food for the elephant. Better than walking around with elephant begging for food. Without a camp the mahout must stay with the elephant all the time and there is no time to go get food while you are watching the elephant" (Chet). He brings up many important issues surrounding food for elephants: land on which the food grows, how much they eat, where the food comes from, labor and time to get the food, and the importance of being able to have an elephant "babysitter" while going after food. Essentially food that used to be freely available is now too far from where the elephants live or costs money. There are also additional concerns: pesticides on food, elephants taking food from farms, and humans using land for purposes that do not include food for elephants.

What elephants eat and how much

Elephants are generally a wasteful species at a time when food is scarce. They haven't quite adapted to the modern environment, where the forest that once was their buffet line is now a small plate of food, delivered on a regular basis. They poop out half of what they eat and they play with the water they are given to drink. Food and land are the same subject for elephants. An elephant needs an enormous amount of food that can take up an enormous amount of land. "Elephants are nonruminants. They get a higher throughput rate of forage than ruminants. They can tolerate a diet of lower quality, but must eat faster or spend more time feeding (Sukumar 208). Per day, females eat "5.6% of body weight. Males eat 4.8%. For example: a male weighing 6,000kg consumes 240kg. A lactating female weighs 2,700kg would eat 162kg" (Sukumar 196). Elephants spend anywhere from 40 to 70 percent of their time eating (Sukumar 198). "For eighteen hours out of every twenty-four, elephants are on the move, feeding and foraging for food and water"(Alexander 44). An elephant is a mega herbivore and a mixed feeder-both browsing and grazing. Elephants increase in body weight until they are 50 years old. The elephant's diet consists of "short and tall grasses, forbs, aquatic plants, leaves and twigs of

several shrubs, trees and lianas, fruits, bark, roots, and the pith of baobabs and bananas” (Sukumar 193). Domesticated elephants often chow down on landscaping or banana trees that are not in their own backyard, which causes problems between mahouts/owners and their neighbors.

Quantity of food is seen in a different light from a mahout’s perspective. “If the elephant is too fat – crazy and lazy and hard to control. If the elephant eats much it will become lazy. It can run too fast and be hard to control. It wants to sleep and be left alone” (Chet).

Elephants also enjoy fermented foods and beverages that alter their perceptions. (Perhaps this is why they can endure drunken mahouts.) “Elephants may spend long periods of time at a particular tree or cluster of trees, literally gorging themselves with ripe fruit. They may even get drunk if these happen to be fruits from certain palms that ferment” (Sukumar 196). In Thailand, they enjoy eating fermented pineapples (Elephants Prefer). Elephants can become sugar addicts in the same way children can. They like sweet things because that signals the brain and the synapses to feel good from it. Elephants can like to feel good too and may eat to feel good regardless of the poor nutritional value (Sukumar 318). Mahouts also like to give treats to their elephants, such as an extra bag of bananas, pineapples or coconuts.

How much the food costs

Elephants cost a lot to keep. “Mature bulls can weigh as much as 11,000 pounds. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water everyday. And, each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles (United States, Asian Elephant). Another estimate of how much food an elephant needs to consume is “500 pounds of food daily” (Holtcamp, Beasts).

With the changing ecological situation, providing food is a growing problem. "Keeping an elephant costs at least 100 baht a day for grass and sometimes keepers had to pay extra for bananas, sugarcane and pineapples. . . ." (Hutasingh). "In the old days when you could feed them right around the house, it was so much easier. It's not like now. Let's not forget. At the turn of the century Thailand was 90% canopy forest – sort of like savannah, but with tree tops touching one another. Just full of grass. Everywhere" (Lewis). Now, for some mahouts in the north, providing this quantity of food for their elephants means that everyday begins with a long drive to search out an unspoiled patch of grass to cut for the day. For other mahouts, some workmen are paid to go get the food while they watch over their charges. Others get a regular delivery. For others in the north, they are lucky enough to live near a patch of grass, so they can take the elephant there to feed. Fortunately for the mahouts, they are not feeding picky eaters. For elephants, the forest is a buffet. "In the variety of plant types and parts consumed, the elephant does not seem to have any equal among terrestrial herbivorous mammals" (Sukumar 196).

Land

Land issues in Thailand interplay with mahoutship and elephants in many ways. However, a thorough treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper. This section will give a brief overview and some examples of land issues. The land issue for domestic elephants is quite different from wild elephants. The situation of land conservation in Thailand is complex and leaves one feeling that the future is bleak for the elephants in Thailand, not to mention for sustainable agriculture, indigenous people and small farmers. This is the most difficult part of the elephant's situation. It is a web that includes overeducated Western-thinking foresters, indigenous people, academics, government corruption, conservation groups, major wood corporations, corporate farmers, starving subsistence farmers, middle-class conservationists and elephants.

For domestic elephants, there are problems everywhere. If they are in the North, forest is disappearing. In the Northeast, the forest is now just small patches spaced out. Villagers who could once just walk their elephants a few minutes from their homes to eat are now having to walk them for miles to find forest. Rice plantations fill the landscape, and forest patches appear like islands.

“In 1900 Thailand was still 90% forest” (Lair, *Gone Astray*). Now only 10 to 15 percent of Thailand is forested (Holtcamp, *Beasts*). The shortage of good land for the wild elephants to roam, including corridors to ensure a large gene pool, is detrimental to the elephants. This land shortage also leads to elephant-agriculture conflict for both wild and domestic elephants. Domestic elephants find there are more and more boundaries. Elephant owners are in constant conflict with neighbors for the “damage” that elephants do. In the wild, there are bulls who just roam around alone, eat through cash crops and drink liquor from houses, or herds of cows who chew through plantations (Santiapillai). This conflict often ends with the elephant being killed, blinded or becoming categorically despondent to the threats of humans. It is even worse because “unfortunately, many wild plants are very poor in nutritional value compared to cultivated plants such as rice, sugar cane, maize and finger millet etc. Not surprisingly then, bull elephants travel long distances in search of nutrition-rich plants cultivated by farmers. As a consequence of their social organization, adult bull elephants are inherently more predisposed to raiding crops than adult cows” (Santiapillai).

There are many trial solutions for this problem from India, countries in Africa and Thailand (Thouless; Datye; Barua; Madhava Menon; *Reducing Human*). Sukumar calls the conflict between agriculture and elephants an “arms race” (Sukumar 368). This is a very succinct way to describe the on-going battle of farmer and elephant. The electric fence has proven to be a

good deterrent (Sukumar 367), but some elephants have even figured out how to get by the fence between the waves of current. The fence is very expensive costing about \$5,000 a kilometer and requiring to be kept in prime condition. Also, the elephants learn to outsmart it as well. Maybe the highest hopes for humans are to weed out the less ingenious elephants and reduce damage.

Land in Thailand is becoming more and more scarce. "Land is being taken not just for large-scale corporate farming and for planting fast growing trees such as eucalyptus for the craft, furniture and export industry" (Laungaramsri and Rajesh). Land that used to be useful for feeding a productive elephant is now used for other, more profitable resources. Another conflict is between the foresters and the indigenous people. After much struggle, the indigenous people have convinced the government that there is an area to be marked off as community forest, which is usually next to a protected area, but people are allowed to live there. This causes a more subtle elephant-human conflict (Laungaramsri and Rajesh). Often land is stolen from the elephants in a regional way. This is evident in one of Thailand's neighbors. "The World Bank is planning for a dam on the Nakai Plateau which is home to Laos' largest concentration of elephants" (Macan-Markar).

Logging was the traditional employment for mahouts and elephants in Thailand for a century since about 1880 (Laungaramsri). Logging was banned in 1989, putting the elephants out of work (Capdevila). This happened to make "the elephant be even more valuable under the condition of illegal logging than legal logging. The logging ban of 1989 had a stimulating effect on illegal logging in the south, particularly because it coincided with safer access to forests after the final defeat of a communist insurgency" (Lair, *Gone Astray*). Elephants and mahouts are still illegally logging the little bits of wood that remain. Elephants and mahouts also cross the border

into Burma to log there. In addition, elephants are used to smuggle drugs through difficult terrain over the border (Elephants Situation).

One solution to the land issue for elephants comes from the Integrated Conservation and Development Projects. "Rural residents are induced to surrender access to, or to curtail illegal off take of, native species and their habitats in exchange for alternative sources of income and sustenance, or for the provision of direct compensation, infrastructure, or social services associated with an improved standard of living" (Westley and Miller 230). Land does not just mean food, but also some freedom for the elephants. Ratana, an elephant conservationist, opined: "My goal is to have big land for the elephants to roam free. Twenty dozen acres with rescued elephants roaming free. No people to hurt them. They could forage. They would have a neutral home. They would be trumpeting freely, playing at home, safe to sleep at night, social with each other".

Chapter 3: The worth of the elephants and mahouts

Elephants as Symbols

In order to understand the changes in the social position of mahouts and the worth of elephants to the public, it is necessary to understand the historic cultural symbolism of elephants. The significance of the human-elephant relationship cannot be underestimated for the whole history of Asia. "For at least 2,000 years the elephant has been a key element in the cultures, religions and economies of Asia. The giant mammal's territory stretched from Iraq to the Yellow River in China. Hundreds of thousands of the noble creatures roamed the continent" (Capdevila). Elephants are a living symbol of the beginning of the life of Buddha.

. . . The 'enlightened one', entered the body of his mother in an Immaculate Conception. His mother Queen Maya had yearned for a child for the twenty years she had been married to King Suddhodana (ruler of a country at the foot of the Himalayas). One night Queen Maya dreamt that a white elephant came from heaven and touched her side with a white lotus blossom, which he held in his trunk. She became pregnant. While resting in a grove of trees she stretched out her hand to pluck a flowering twig and then a little prince sprang from her right hip. The Queen died seven days after the birth. The king was told that his son would either be a great king to lead over many lands or a great religious leader and the savior of the entire world. The king tried to protect his son from seeing the problems of the world but he turned to the life of savior. (Elephants and Buddhism)

Elephants have been important in the history of Thailand. The kings of old Siam elevated rare white elephants to virtual princely status. There is one king, King Narai, who spent all his time with the elephants (Lair, Gone Astray). The Royal Elephant's importance can trace its roots back to India in Hindu mythology.

Elephants are sacred to Hindus and Buddhists. They are kept adjacent to temples — particularly in India and Sri Lanka. In the Hindu religion they represent the physical manifestation of the elephant-headed deity Ganesh, the Lord of Beginnings and the God of Protection. Devotees flock to temples to receive his blessings. Ganesh is the most popular of the Hindu gods and it is partly due to this continuing widely-spread devotion that the elephant has survived in India. (Temple Elephants)

In Thailand the symbolic importance of elephants has not subsided. For centuries, the kings of Siam coveted owning white elephants, an albino oddity. " Symbolically, at least among Thai Buddhists, elephants represent angels and Thai people feel a close relationship with them. Thai people are aware that elephants helped a former king to secure the country's independence. . . . Moreover, elephants are one of the ten animals in the Buddhist scriptures that humans are not allowed to eat" (Pimmanrojngool and Wanghonga). From 1884, a visiting Westerner notes,

"H.R.H. Chow Fa Maha very kindly gave me the history of the capture of the animal. . . . Let me say here that his Royal Highness is the authority in Siam on elephants, both white and ordinary ones. One day when I paid him a visit, he showed me quite a voluminous literature of elephants, with illustrations of them in all sorts of colors, which he has assiduously collected from many different sources. Being a devout Buddhist, he has the profoundest belief in the sanctity of the white elephant, and is full of 'elephant lore,' and his salon is decorated with several excellent models of elephants made of clay by a native artist . . ." (Bock 27)

Even today, King Bhumibol owns 10 and the Order of the White Elephant is one of the highest honors bestowed by him (Lees). The royal elephants are kept in the guarded Royal Elephant House at the National Elephant Institute. In Bangkok, at a mall in the center of the city, a giant Ganesh statue is never without flowers and incense. The importance of the elephant to Thailand is clear in the fact that their flag used to include an elephant (Ng). Some people still keep the traditional beliefs about elephants alive. According to Sunee, elephants that roam Patpong, the tourist/sex area in Bangkok, are often supported by prostitutes who believe that by giving the elephant money, they will have a better life when they are reincarnated.

However, mahouts are no longer necessarily seen as the guardians of the national symbol. Since elephants no longer play a large part in the politics and conflicts of Thailand, the social position of mahouts has declined. The elephant-led squirmishes with Burma have today become conflicts built on landmines and immigration raids. Kiet, an elephant owner, notes that "Thai people scorn mahouts. People get mad at mahouts – they treat them badly. They love the elephants, not the keeper." At another camp, Sam, a mahout, noted that the camp owner was trying to restore pride in mahoutship. "What has made the Thai people more aware of elephants

is that you have an urban middle class that watches National Geographic specials, and the not so well produced but Thai equivalents. So these days what is important is not the Thai elephant in Buddhism, it's the elephant as perceived by a burgeoning urban middle class" (Lewis).

The image of elephants in Thailand today is simply that of the biggest animal of all the livestock in the backyard, a vehicle for tourism dollars, or a commodity to be sold in the international marketplace. Of course, there are exceptions. Some elephants are lucky enough to be held in high esteem by top-notch mahouts, the Thai Royal Family, Thai people who haven't forgotten elephants' religious or historical importance, and conservationists.

Links between the worth of an elephant and a mahout in Thailand

Mahouts used to be held in high esteem. The beginning of the profession of mahoutship was about 4,000 years ago. "There arose a new relationship between elephants and humans, a relationship that was to influence the sociopolitical and cultural life of peoples and the eventual fate of the elephant itself in a profound manner. Such a relationship between beast and human never existed before nor is it likely to evolve in future generations" (Sukumar 56).

The role of elephants in human society has determined the status of mahouts. Elephants played a key role in shaping Thailand, becoming a unified country, in part, because of elephants. "Thais respect the elephant as a symbol and should treat the elephant well. Thai people don't understand. They want the mahout arrested to separate the mahout from the elephant" (Kiet). What is overlooked is that it was not elephants that made Thailand. It was the partnership between humans and elephants that made an impact on Asia. Overlooking the skills of mahoutship is common today. When a little girl was saved by an elephant in the Tsunami, it was the mahout who commanded the elephant to run, but the elephant became the star.

The Kuay tribe

The Kuay (also known as the "Gui" and the "Kui") people migrated to Thailand from across the Himalayas and brought their elephant training skills with them to eastern Thailand. The king wanted the power of the elephants for his Kingdom and so invited the Kuay people into the Kingdom. The elephants patrolled the borders of Thailand during wartime for years. One tourism Web site gives an overview of the Kuay people's relationship to elephants: "Ban Ta Klang . . . an ancient Kui village has raised elephants for hundreds of years. In the old days, Pachi, the head of mahouts, led a number of fellow mahouts to catch wild elephants on the border of Thai - Cambodia. . . .The Kui raised elephants like a friend, like the member of their family. . ." (Surin). They became the trainers of the Royal elephants (Lees).

Kuay mahouts used to know the secret of the elephant capture. They would ride in pairs on domesticated chaser elephants and use a special spirit language to communicate while on the hunt (Cuasay 26). They are also the center of the "Elephant Round-Up" in Surin. This began in 1955, when a helicopter landed in Krapho. About 300 elephants and mahouts came to see the helicopter. This impressed officials and eventually it became the Elephant Round Up (Cuasay 45).

In the well-staffed Royal Elephant Museum on the palace grounds in Bangkok, there is a photo of a group of Kuay men --the best elephant-capturing mahouts in Thailand. The same photo is in the Ban Ta Klang Elephant Museum, a village of the minority Kuay people. The Kuay people trained many of the King's elephants to fight in the battles that strengthened Thailand. The museum is in a city studied by academics the world over because it is a unique spot on earth. It is the place where the men who could capture elephants come from. The contrast between the two museums is stark. The photo was on the pristine palace grounds in Bangkok, a palace paid for, in part, by the efforts of elephants and their Kuay mahouts. In the village of Ban

Ta Klang, the dust accumulates on the elephant capture ropes in the museum. Young men leave the village to earn money with their elephants at tourist camps across Thailand, at zoos and circuses abroad, or begging in Bangkok with their elephants, trying to get out of debt from loan sharks who have loaned them money using the elephant as collateral. When will the Kuay people be credited for the contribution they have made in helping to create Thailand?

Many of the far-flung Kuay mahouts later return to Ban Ta Klang for the annual Elephant Round Up. This is when Kuay buy and sell elephants – like a state fair in the U.S. It costs the mahouts more to transport their elephants to the festival than they are paid for bringing their elephants to this tourist attraction of hundreds of elephants in one place. “For the elephant round up, there is a payment of 1200 baht per elephant for all five days of the festival. It costs 7000 baht to transport the elephant to Surin” (Sunee). Many mahouts who attend simply want to go home. Mahouts are forced to go where they can make enough money to feed their elephant. That place is not their hometown, although arguably, it should be. Ideally, the village should be a thriving place, not just during festival time, but all year round. It should be filled with the elephants the families own, with a forest big enough and near enough to support their feeding and, if they like, tourist activities that both preserve the way of life and teach the world about a great and precious sub-culture that exists within dominant Thai culture.

At the Joe Louis Royal Puppet Theater in Bangkok, they tell the story of the Thai version of the Ramaken, which is a story that circles around the royal family. The puppet show takes place in a theater that is clearly well funded, judging from the gilding and displays. In Ban Ta Klang, center for a culture and a people who have given so much to their country, there is no fancy, staffed museum despite their importance to Thai history.

Once a year, thousands of people descend upon this tiny village (in a half hour you can walk the perimeter of the whole place) for the Elephant Round Up. CNN is on the roof of the headman's house. It is as if a giant portal opens up and the entire world sees this village and the hundreds of elephants that come to the village and the surrounding area. Then CNN is gone. A sleepy town remains with no internet connection. There are TVs and cell phones. Scooters replace elephants for getting around the town. The older villagers worry about the loss of their culture and the cost of feeding the elephants. Whereas fifty years ago, there was abundant food for elephants, now the patches of food are too far away for the elephants to get to each day. The forest has been replaced by rice fields. One patch of forest that remains is a part of a temple. The monks of that temple are environmental and sleep in the forest in tents and in buildings shaped like elephants. An elephant lives in the front yard. His food still has to be delivered. So, while the world peeks in once a year, the elephants' and villagers' issues are not addressed. Even though the headman of the village has visitors from around the world each year and travels throughout Asia, he has still been unable to make positive, permanent changes in his own village because of politics. No amount of global attention or communication could change this. Only concentrated, on-target efforts by the people of the village (and their guests) could make the difference. The plan for this is not provided by any technology, just by individual creativity and communication.

Because the Kuay mahouts are a minority in Thailand, they live in a certain fear about the situation of their elephants.

It is scary to register the elephants if they are the owner. As a minority, they are scared about the (bureaucratic) process of getting the papers, scared they will miss something like a shot one year, or they will find out something is wrong with a certificate. They take the elephant to Bangkok in a truck. The truck has a sticker that shows what it can carry and if they paid proper taxes or fees. The police still want something (payoff money) if the elephant is in the back because they know that the people are in a vulnerable position. The truck driver already paid the tax but because he is hauling some minority people as well, people who used to show deference to Thai kingdom by paying "suay" or "tribute," he pays again.

There is a play on words, he transports "Suay" people but has to pay "suay," meaning tax (tribute). (Paul)

For the registration process to be fully utilized for the benefit of the elephants, this issue would have to be addressed. This is one example where ethnic identity, economics, and elephants collide. "It seems that the more "development" that is introduced into ethnic communities in Thailand, the less the people are able to control their own way of life, manage their own resources, and maintain their ethnic identities, and the less their communities can cope with external changes" (Lowe 76).

The Karen Tribe

The Karen (also known as "Karenni") people in the North of Thailand used elephants to log for the East India Company who wanted the teak for their ships. Their economic status in Thai society depended largely upon elephants. The following historical account explains the intersection of elephants, ethnic minorities, colonial power and economics:

Historically, the relationship between Karen and Tai has been one of the elements characterizing the livelihood of the north and western border areas. In the political realm, Karen entered into a tributary relationship with the Tai lords in return for protection. In the socio-economic realm, Karen participated in the lowland economy as early as the logging period of the nineteenth century. In the 1880's, Hallet (1890:40-41) noted that most of the elephants working in the teak forests were owned by Karens, who hired them out to foresters at the rate of 50-70 rupees per month. Teak extraction was so significant that many Karen shifted their settlements and agricultural sites from primary forests to secondary forests where teak concessions were operating. (Grandstaff 1980). Thus, trade in forest products linked upland Karen and lowland Tai together (Laungaramsri 73-74). . . .In the early colonial influence of forest commercialization, ethnic hill people were, more or less, seen as constituting a seasonal labor force for the timber company. In particular, the labor power of Karen and local northern Tai, as well as their elephants, was really needed (Laungaramsri 247).

Now, over 100 years later, what is the status of the Karen mahouts and their elephants? Some traditions hold fast, while other harsher realities grip them.

In the Karen tribe, an elephant may be owned by an extended family. The responsibility for and profit from the elephant will be passed around family members. Care for an elephant in the village is quite different from life in the tourist camp, where many live now. In the evening, elephants could roam the forest freely. One Karen mahout, Aran, described this system:

When I had my elephant in my village I would release the elephant in the jungle. Every two days I would check where the elephant was. How the villagers keep the elephants: The elephant would move around away from their poo. Every two or three days they will check on the elephant. Sometimes they have to listen for the bell on their neck if the elephant goes far away. All have different sounding bells. Without the bell, it is difficult to find them because the elephants walk so softly — they are so smart that they just stop moving and hide. Elephants prefer to be free. Elephants eat and go and eat and go. Maybe they would be in trouble in the property of villagers.

Aran

He is Karen. His family kept elephants in the north. At ten years old, he learned to ride elephants. There was no one else able to care for the elephants, so he quit school at 19 and took the job. Now in his twenties, he works at the camp to earn a living. He is currently the mahout of a female elephant.

While Karen mahouts comprise an estimated 60 percent of mahouts, most have no identification card and cannot speak Thai. They get 1500 baht per month, which is equivalent to about \$39 (Dr. Niran). This amount is considerably less than what the other mahouts receive. At one tourist camp in the south, the mahouts get 3500 baht per month. Estimates for other camps are up to 7000 baht per month (Sunee).

Mahout working conditions – borders

The borders of Thailand are dangerous places for elephants and mahouts. Borders in the North were historically places where tribes controlled areas that were in agreements with the Tai kingdom, not official parts of Thailand. There was a loose connection with the laws and ways on the Kingdom. "This lends itself still today to a lack of consistent regulation and little hazard for the elephants. Elephants are forced to smuggle drugs and guns across otherwise impassible terrain, often drugged themselves" (Elephant Situation). Adding to the danger is the existence of land

mines in the region where elephants are smuggled across these borders. CITES is “the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora - an international agreement between Governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.” (What is CITES) According to international law, Asian elephants are listed in Appendix I by CITES. This means they are a “species that are the most endangered among CITES - listed animals and plants of the Convention. They are threatened with extinction and CITES generally prohibits commercial international trade in specimens of these species.” (CITES Appendices) Despite this classification, “the illegal trade in live elephants, ivory and hides across the Thai-Myanmar border has become a serious conservation problem” (Asian Elephants).



Figure 4: Area where elephants may be traded

There are already trans-border areas in Thailand where goods flow freely. In some of the border regions, there is an abyss into which elephants may disappear and then show up in a zoo with a different name or as an exotic dish on a menu (See Fig. 4). Elephants may be caught up in this area where there are “small border chiefs maneuvering for control over people, resources, and territorialization projects, especially on forest lands” (Sturgeon

481). The ports of Yunnan, China are located about 100 miles up the Mekong River. While it does not directly border Thailand, it is a place where wildlife from Thailand is traded (Wang et. al). The elephants can first go to Burma or Laos then up to Yunnan by land, or just go up the river. One interviewee suggested that this is a place where elephants are often traded. Another interviewee, Dr. Niran notes, “the younger the elephant the higher the price. Some are too young and do not survive. It is difficult to transport them. At seven or eight months old they kill the mother and put the baby in a box and send it out from Burma.” In the elephant trade, the

line between wild and domestic elephant fades. Their fates are joined, intertwined with the mahouts and financiers who participate in capturing and training them.

Mahout working conditions

Mahout working conditions vary, depending on what the elephant is doing. One problem any mahout has is when an elephant is being stubborn. Pravat, an elephant owner, says "In zoos in the West, they have the luxury of protected contact. They start work at 9 o'clock and finish at 5pm. If the elephant is in a bad mood, they don't have to work that elephant, but here the mahout still has to work the elephant. Some days it could be a fight for survival. That is why the old way is so important." Sunee, a conservationist, noted that "Illegal loggers work elephants until they die." Bob, an American elephant trainer, commented "I love what I do. It's a 24-hr job – a labor of love." Illegal logging is the harshest life for both mahout and elephant. It is a job with long, backbreaking hours.

So, what do the keepers of the elephants get? As mentioned in the earlier section about Karen mahouts, mahouts earn about the equivalent of \$39 to \$184 per month plus a free hut and some food. Maybe they get a week's vacation. Their job comes with a jumbo responsibility: they have an elephant in their care, like a baby. Their elephant has to be babysat by another mahout while they are gone. As Dr. Niran says, "mahouts have no vacation time. A truck you can turn off for the night but an elephant is always there waiting for you." Pravat notes that the mahouts that work for him get two days off per month. Sam described his compensation: "We've been here 2 years now. We get a wage. It buys us cigarettes and phone calls back home. We are more than happy, thrilled to have this opportunity and to be able to do this work. We aren't looking for a career or setting up a retirement fund for ourselves or anything like that. We are happy to get by and have our cigarettes and make our phone calls home."

One of the biggest factors of job quality for mahouts is which elephant they have to command. There are many factors that make an elephant good to a mahout. The neck of the elephant is important. It is the ergonomic piece of the job. If the neck is too skinny, it is uncomfortable to sit on. If an elephant is too fat, it may be lazy and not listen to commands. If an elephant is stubborn, this will make every day of the mahout's life very unhappy. Aran notes "A mahout needs to control the elephant — you are like a teacher who needs to control students."

Another part of a mahout's job is picking up poo. This is a daily task that is very important. Elephants will not eat near their own poo. If mahouts were to chain the elephant up for the night at a dirty spot, the elephants would not eat. At camps, it is often difficult to find shovels. At one camp, mahouts would hide the shovels so they could find them easily the next day.

Mahouts seem to prefer tourism to logging as an occupation. This is another question for further study. When asked if they would prefer a different job, they usually laugh and make a joke — Chet wanted to be a district official.

How can mahouts improve their condition? Mahouts wait patiently for owners to change their ways and for conservation groups to represent their plight. Mahouts are not an organized group. Only briefly in Surin were mahouts organized in a group. One interviewee suggested that the mahouts form a sort of union. Indeed, the temple mahouts in Kerala, India, are organized in a union. However, culturally this may not cross over so easily to Thailand.

The worth of the elephant

Elephants are on the front lines of having to suffer from human mistakes, much more than other animals. Elephants are worth quite a bit of money just standing still. An old, crippled

elephant can cost about \$1,000. In the West, maybe this isn't so much, but \$1,000 goes a long way in Thailand. And from there, the price only goes up. Elephants are value-added animals because they can work. They can do some small work in the village, (illegally) log, work in a tourism camp, go to other countries for shows, etc. What Thailand exports that is more important than an elephant is the mahout that goes with the elephant. The knowledge that mahouts bring to the zoos or shows they go to is golden information. Whether this is accepted or acknowledged by those places is something for further research.

How the domesticated elephant and mahouts pay their way in the global economy: Jobs for elephants and mahouts

Humans have found many ways for elephants to "sing for their supper." Here is a list of the various occupations elephants are forced into. See chapter 5 for further research recommendations.

- Ceremonial elephants for the Thai royal family
- Legal logging in Thailand
- Illegal logging in Thailand (Elephant Situation)
- Legal logging in Burma (Elephants Forced)
- Carrying drugs/guns across hard to access borders (Elephant Situation)
- Begging (or in Eastern thinking, by giving to the elephant, people are making merit for their next life) on a Bangkok streets or other tourist destination in Thailand (Elephant Situation)
- Patrolling a National Park in Thailand (Bangkok Elephants)
- Getting sent to a zoo abroad (Sunee)
- Working in a circus in Thailand or abroad (MacDonald)
- Working at festivals (Rally)
- Working at a tourism camp, carrying tourists around, performing (Lees)
- Playing soccer or polo (Round-up)
- Living with a rich guy (who just got rich) as his pet (Lair, Gone Astray)
- Living with a family as their pet/worker (Cuasay)
- Playing music (Holtcamp, Paint)
- Painting (Holtcamp, Paint)

Elephant Ownership and Profit

The idea of owning an endangered animal is very strange to Westerners. About 2,000 elephants in Thailand have private owners. In the past they were more often owned by their

mahout. More and more often, they are owned by the nouveau riche. The Forestry Department is encouraging people to register elephants. "Elephants are classified as transport animals under Thai law; owning one is like owning a truck" (Lair, Gone Astray). Lair further classifies and describes these owners as follows:

There are different types of elephant ownership: There are about eighty elephants owned by the government. Most of the elephants are privately owned. Private ownership comes in three forms: 1. Owner-mahouts, generally well treated elephants 2. Hired Mahouts who may overwork the elephant because of the piece work system 3. Non-mahout owners: traditional (usually take good care of them for traditional reasons and have plenty of resources for them) vs. Nouveau riche (don't know how to supervise the mahouts, are more and more common in Thailand). Deforestation in Thailand took away food sources for elephants and jobs for the owners. Less financial incentive to owners, less prestige to owning an elephant. (Lair, Gone Astray)

Of the 2,000 - 3,000 domesticated elephants that are estimated to live in Thailand, according to one conservationist's estimates, "1500 are in the illegal logging. 700 or more are in tourism. 500 are roaming Bangkok and some are in zoos or private ownership" (Sunee). Among these, there are four big elephant owners in Thailand, owning around 100 elephants each. This makes 400 elephants all together for a total of about 16 percent of all the country's elephants. Another conservationist noted that "the Kuay mahouts in Bangkok and Surin rent the elephants. Only a small percent own the elephants. The elephant is not born to them" (Ratana). Elephants may suffer more if they are not owned by the mahout. Sunee, also a conservationist, noted that "some mahouts hit the elephant to get back at the boss."

In the past, it cost 50,000 baht (about \$1,300) for a calf. Now the price is 300,000 baht (\$7,800) to 500,000 baht (\$13,100) (Sunee). (The conversion is approximately 38 baht / \$1.) Elephants themselves are worth a lot of money. "A calf can be sold for 300,000 to 500,000 baht and jump 10 to 20 fold when exported. Punishment for selling one is 40,000 baht (\$1052) or a 4-year jail term" (Tangwisutijit). It costs around 200,000 to 300,000 baht to buy an elephant imported from Burma.

The investment often pays off extremely well. "A fully trained elephant is an investment for a lifetime. A 20-year old trained elephant in Thailand costs about \$10,000 and its working life after purchase may continue for another 30 years. Compare this with the \$100,000 to \$140,000 price for a crawler tractor, which has a working life of only six years and requires a continuous supply of diesel fuel" (Santiapllai).

The amount of money an elephant can bring a mahout varies. "An elephant can earn 8000 baht at a tourist camp. 6000 baht goes to the owner. 2000 goes to the mahout" (Dr. Niran). "An elephant can make 30 to 40,000 baht [begging] in Bangkok. This is the same as the salary of the governor of Lampang. With a bachelor's degree, you earn 7,000 baht in a month" (Dr. Niran). "Mahouts can earn up to 10,000 baht (approximately \$240) per month by merely roaming around Bangkok" (Elephant Situation). Others note that mahouts can "earn 1,000 baht a day each by asking donors to buy food to feed the animals. The promise of such earnings has lured many elephant owners to Bangkok. . .even though they had been offered wages of 10,500 baht a month to patrol national forests under a scheme to curb the roaming beasts" (Traffic Nuisance). Sunee explained the economics of elephant investment. If an elephant goes to China, the owner can make 40,000 baht per month. It is a better investment for the return. They make 10 percent of the price of the elephant each month, or 120 percent each year, which is better than any bank investment.

Today there are mahouts who grew up with their family elephant who take that knowledge and leave the village to go work in a tourist camp. People who grow up with an elephant usually want to own an elephant. However few have this opportunity. Even if they earned the money, they could not go back home to live. What would they do for work? How would they feed the elephant? For the ones from Surin, there is no forest left. For the ones in Chiang Mai, it is

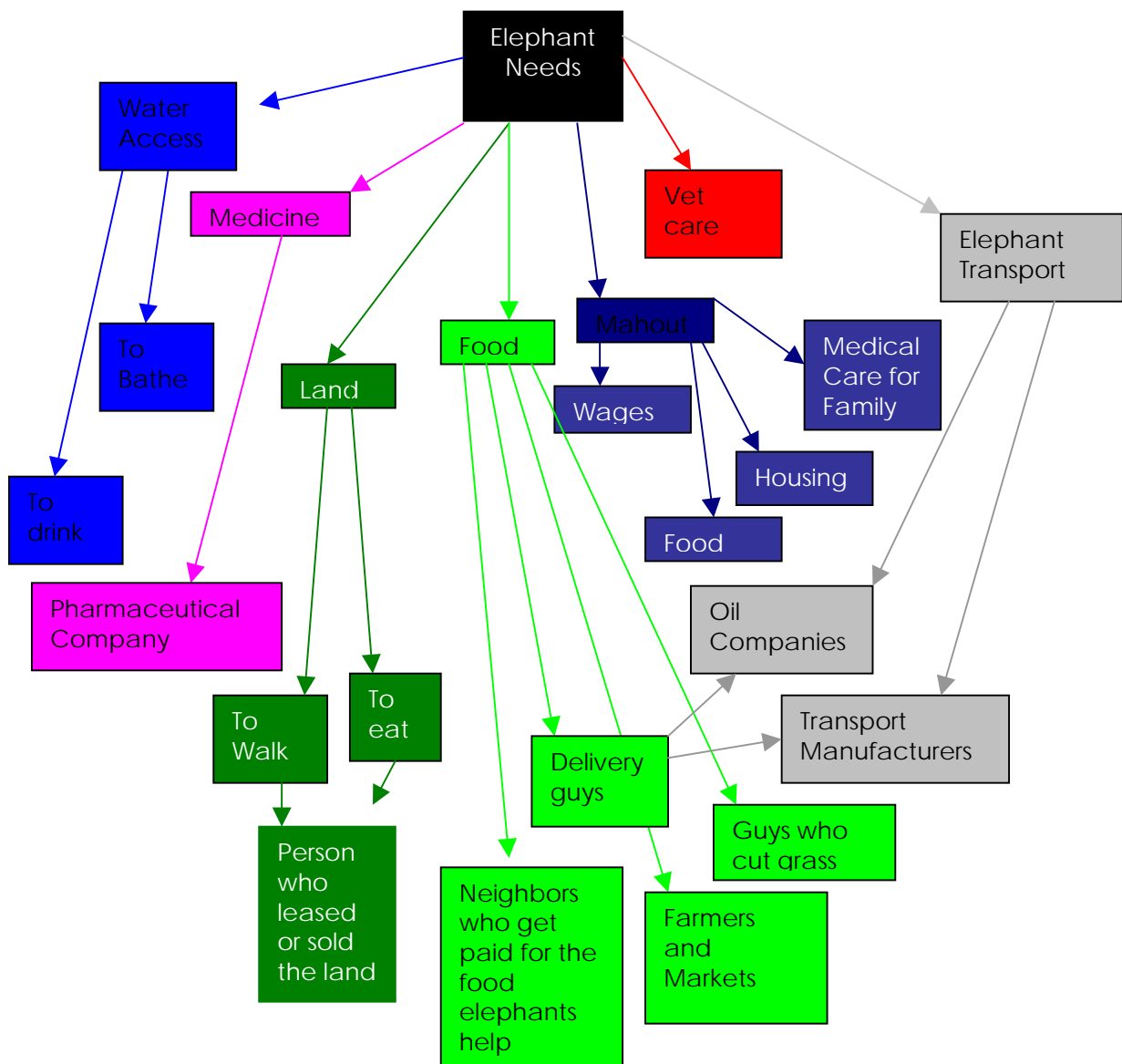
harder and harder to find food. If you were to ask traditional mahouts – the ones who grew up in mahout families – they will tell you they would like to own their own elephant. At one camp, Aran, a mahout, explained that if he wanted to bring his family's elephant with him to the camp he worked at, he would have had to pay rent for the elephant to live there with him (mostly for food). The amount he would have had to pay was three times his monthly salary.

Could a mahout afford the 300,000 baht baby elephant? Per month, a mahout — assuming they spent money on nothing else, lived in camp housing, ate only the food available at the camp etc. – would have to work for 7 years to earn enough money to purchase a calf. An old or crippled elephant can cost about 38,000 baht. This would be 10 months' salary just for the cost of buying the elephant, not including 300 kg of food it requires every day. It would also be impossible for the mahout to keep the paying job because he would have to spend the morning looking for food for the elephant (assuming there was someone else to keep an eye on the elephant while he went away) or he would have to pay someone else to cut grass for him. It is impossible from every aspect in the current situation.

Elephants even return the investment when they die. A dead elephant was worth about 60 baht per kilogram in 2001. An elephant butcher will pay 8,000 baht for an elephant carcass. The butcher will sell it for a total of about 12,000 baht (Sukkasem).

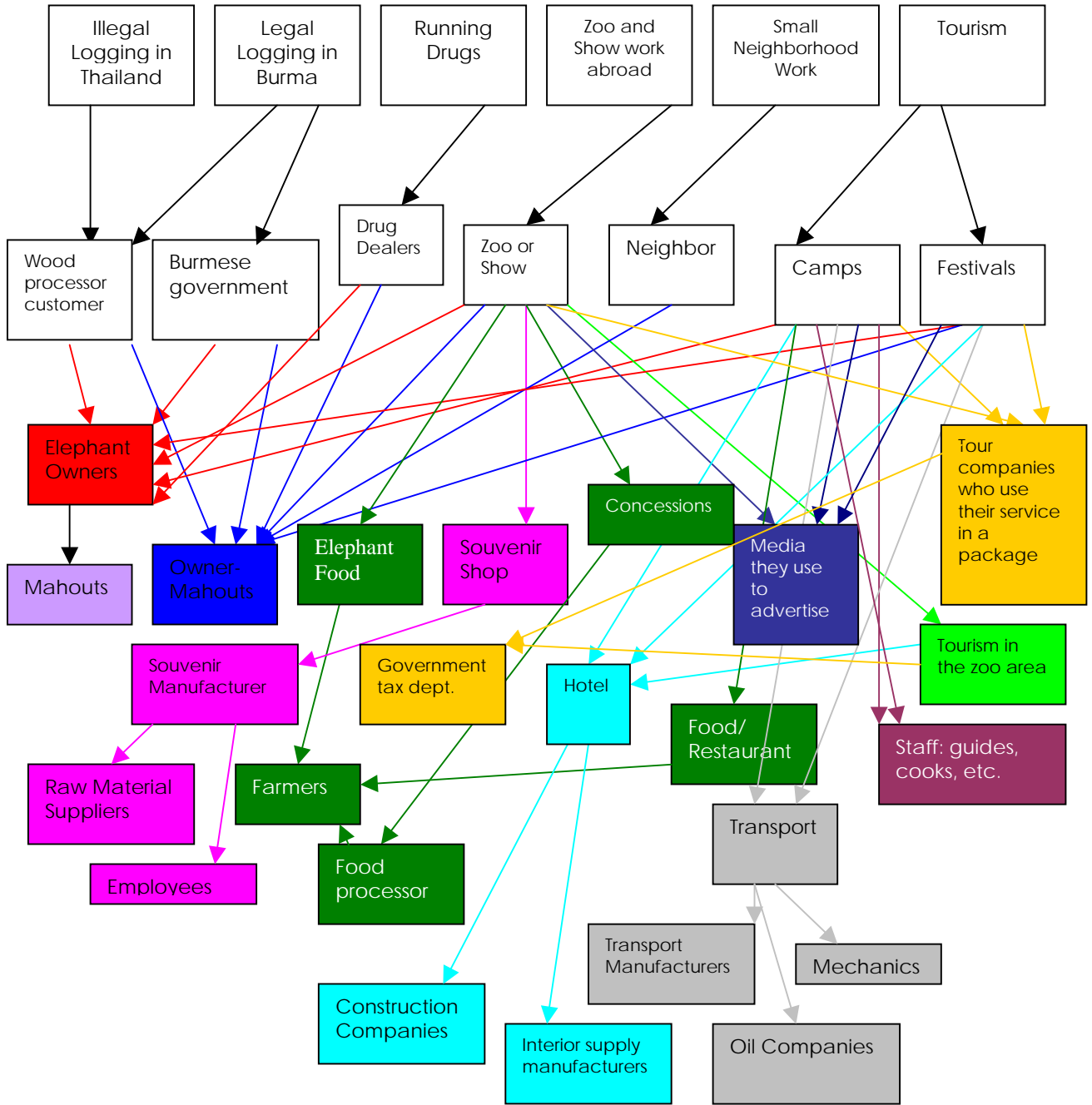
An elephant is not only of economic value itself. There are many beneficiaries from elephants. They are both producers of goods and services and consumers. The following chart explores the economic system that elephants create simply by their needs in captivity. Elephants create employment for mahouts and farmers, profit for land-owners, pharmaceutical companies, transportation companies, and the oil companies who fuel the transport.

Figure 5: Elephants as Consumers - Who benefits from their needs?



Elephants are also the hinge for a host of economic benefits through their labor. Everyone from drug dealers to tourist camps benefit from their labor. This then trickles down into many industries. While coming up with an actual value in baht would be difficult, it would prove interesting for further study.

Figure 6: Elephants as Producers - Who benefits economically from their work?



The killing blow to traditional mahoutship: dispossession

Traditional mahouts are thus now dispossessed of their elephants. If a mahout comes from an elephant family, the chances are that he is a traditionally trained mahout. But what if a mahout's family can no longer afford to feed the elephant? The mahout goes off to a tourist

camp to make money and so that they (and their family) can survive. Even if the family manages to keep the elephant, the mahout cannot bring their elephant with them to the tourist camp. In some cases, the family's elephant dies or is killed and, because the price of elephants is so high, it cannot be replaced. Elephants are sometimes killed for their tusks (some indirectly through the infection caused by removing tusks) or killed from eating pesticides. The passing of mahout knowledge is broken, unless a mahout's son could grow up at the tourist camp learning the way to care for the elephant. But if the mahout becomes a truck driver at the camp, which pays more, his son would not learn (Dr. Niran). The tradition ends there.

Elephants, debt and mahouts

This devilish combination of economic realities is one of the darkest sides of elephant life. When a mahout is in debt to an owner for his elephant, there may be many consequences. The mahout may, for example, be asked to vote for certain people or his debt will be called out. He may be forced to beg in a large city to repay the loan to an owner who possesses a very large number of elephants. Owning an elephant then having a debt connected to the elephant can also get a mahout and his elephant in a lot of trouble. This should be a serious concern for conservationists because this easily leads to overwork, elephant drug abuse and physical abuse of the elephant. The elephant bears the burden of these debts. "Some owners may register his elephants in other people's names, but effectively he is the owner. You put it in somebody else's name and you get an IOU or a land deed. Even though it is not in his name, he can call it in anytime" (Lewis). While this certainly isn't so easy to attack from a Western conservationist standpoint, it is an issue that is of great importance if groups are truly trying to save the elephants of Thailand. To find the men who do this is not difficult — their names came up in every conversation on this issue. It is a well known fact that is not being addressed. Mahout life is desperate if one has a loan for the elephant. There are "several kinds of people who wander about the country with their elephants: the mahout is unemployed and has no other means of

earning an income; he may have borrowed to buy his elephant and now needs urgently to repay the money. . . " (Rosenthal) .

At the same time, many interviewees said it is hard for a person to own just one elephant. Once you have one elephant you want two, then once you have two elephants, you want three. Economically, this is logical. The money you make from one elephant can help buy the next one. Eventually, a person can own elephants and rent them out to other people. One elephant owner told a story of how he helped a mahout buy one elephant. And once the mahout got one elephant, then he got two, and now he has three or four and he is renting them out to other people. Talk about a successful micro-enterprise!

Another example of micro-enterprise is a program from a non-governmental organization, Heifer International Thailand. A group of farmers requested they start a program to encourage elephant ownership in the Karen area of the country. Heifer bought elephants (which cost 170,000 baht in 1998). The three-year program involved three villages and five families within each village. They shared responsibility for the elephant (as is the traditional way of elephant keeping for Karen people). Each family kept the elephant for a pre-determined amount of time and got the income the elephant earned from that time period. "All elephants are working at Elephants Camps in order to serve the Tourists, both Thais and Foreigners. The elephant camp is located at a tourist spot with enough natural food and good ecology for maintaining the animals in good health. The services offered are about one hour riding through natural scenarios around the camp. Each customer brings the elephant's owner about 250-300 baht, 3-4 times daily for a monthly income of 8,000-10,000 baht (U.S. \$200). The elephants work 9-10 months only, the rest a few months. Most elephants are returned to their home villages during this time (Mae sa Tap). One village returned 60,000 baht to Heifer from their elephant project (Elephant Project). While it did generate income, it is questionable whether the Karen farmers would want

to do the project again. The reasons for this are: it was an expensive program to run and the process of buying elephants is more complicated. In each village, there are only one or two families interested in keeping elephants. There is not enough room to raise the elephants because the villages have expanded (Heifer International).

One mahout in the tourist industry sums up the situation as follows:

A mahout has skills to look after all the elephants, not the owner. . . . I would get one elephant if I had money. I would get one female elephant. I would just feed her and we could stay together. If I had a male elephant, he would work. For a small (young) elephant, you must have lots of time to train her. I would like an older one who already knows me, what the mahout wants, one who already has been trained, one who already knows the commands. . . . Every mahout loves every elephant, especially a male elephant with long tusks. For a mahout who stays with an elephant a long time, no need to have a beautiful elephant. Just one elephant so they can live together for a long time. I would have a lot of elephants if I could. You always want more elephants if you have one. More, more elephants. If you have one elephant, you want two elephants. . . . Most mahouts want to keep and feed the long tailed male elephants. A white elephant is the best one. . . . Most people want the white elephant. I love a beautiful girl with a long tail" (Chet).

Extinction one elephant at a time

Extinction is sometimes played out on a small scale for elephant owners. One Northern mahout's family history tells the tale of issues owners face and areas in which they need assistance. "We had seven elephants. Four died. The first elephant died as its tusks were stolen it got a brain infection. It was a huge elephant and it died. Second elephant was poisoned at the trekking camp. Third elephant died after traditional ceremony of tetanus. Fourth elephant died from eating pesticides. There are three more for the family: two females and one is pregnant" (Aran).

Pravat described one family's struggle. "Last week I bought small bull because family must stop elephant life. Like if you are born with elephant and one day you must sell the elephant. This means stop life. The family has no way out but to sell elephant. Elephant is the only hope for a

family as well. Like if you are on a farm you stay with a horse all your life, your grandmother, grandfather, your parents and you, you can protect your farm and you lost your farm like that. We take care of elephants – not kill them. We take care of the elephant like a good horse. It's not for sale."

Owning old elephants – is Bangkok the place to prostitute grandma elephant?

Old elephants have become an issue that many elephant groups have noticed. Old elephants are no longer valued.

A long time ago people did not consume so much. The standard of life has changed. Needs changed. They do not just need food anymore. They use the elephant for illegal logging and for begging. Kids need a motorbike to go to school. The cost of a motorbike is the same as the cost of an old elephant. An old elephant cannot work. Old elephants used to be respected like old men in the house for what the elephant did for them when he was young. Now old men are not respected. Young people do not want to care for the elephant. They use it to roam the big city (Dr. Niran).

"Old elephants," as the conservationist Ratana noted, "have a right to retirement. Burma has a place like this. I just bought an elephant who was 90 years old and still working". Another problem arises from the demise of mahoutship. "When mahouts "are too old to take care, their sons and grandsons do not want old elephants" (Sirikit).

In the illegal logging and at tourist camps some are too old or crippled so they use the crippled old elephants for begging. In Bangkok mahout will write on the side of the elephant that it is pregnant. They write this in Thai and English and that the elephant is more than 100 years old. People give money to the elephants for the next generation to have good luck. Prostitutes - especially in Patpong. They pity themselves. If they do this good thing then the next generation will have good luck. This is the same as when they give food to monks for good luck. They gave the elephant shower at a gas station. They bring them to any market to the boiled rice stall anywhere in Thailand. These mahouts are acting like kidnappers (Dr. Niran).

Elephants in Bangkok

Since the mid-1990s, elephants in Bangkok have become a hot topic for discussion in Thailand, judging from the newspaper [The Bangkok Post](#). Elephants in Bangkok usually come from Surin, a province in the Northeast. They come for two reasons. First, there is a lot of money

to be made from tourists. This money repays debts or makes money for owners who are politically-connected large-scale elephant owners. Both are using the mahouts as pawns. Second, some places in the North no longer have food for the elephants (Ng). One advocate for mahouts says that what is needed is “money for mahouts — not a donation. Donation doesn't work — it turns them to beggars” (Kiet).

The city has tried to stop this by sending the elephants in Bangkok home (Assavanonoda), threatening to kill the elephants, and trying to find jobs for the mahouts in the National Parks. As a result of this program, “88 elephants and their mahouts have been hired as part of the first phase of the program, although the figure is still under target. To encourage more mahouts to join up, the government will relax the rules to include elderly elephants and elephants under 15 years of age” (Concern). Considering that many elephants in Bangkok are elderly or crippled, it was wise to include them in the park strategy. Another source was not optimistic about this initiative. “The government has come up with various schemes to get the elephants off the streets and into more salubrious natural surroundings, but legal loopholes have made them non-starters” (Ghosh). Yet, between crackdowns, there are still elephants begging in Bangkok and the problem has not been solved.

The issue of begging elephants in Bangkok is logistically complicated.

I don't think the police get many calls for mistreated elephants except in Bangkok or urban areas. Basically the only place where there really is a problem is in Bangkok because Chiang Mai, Phuket have really strict rules, and the elephant gets fined and it's not really worth the elephant keeper's effort to try to work in those cities. The problem in Bangkok is that it is broken up into so many districts that if somebody complains about an elephant in Bangkok usually what happens is you get a municipal policeman (Bangkok Municipal Authority) and a regular policeman, and you get chased from district to district. I am sympathetic to their plight, I mean, how the hell are you going to confiscate an elephant? (Lewis)

The elephants in Bangkok are so problematic because they are giant reminders of the poverty and development gone wrong in the North. The elephants are in the same situation as

the rural people who come to large cities to look for jobs because their land has been taken by large-scale farming or they are in debt. Only they do not melt as quietly as humans do into the world of cell phones and tuk-tuks and street stalls. They are not just another member of our species who is a maid cleaning an apartment, another escort in Patpong, another man in a sweat shop sewing gloves for people who have cold hands and more money half way around the world. They are undeniable, giant reminders that Thailand has some problems in the way it is developing. The elephant's issues are just a mirror of the issues of poor people in Thailand, similar to many other places around the world.

Chapter — 4 Conservation Groups and Government

Introduction to Domestic Elephant Conservation in Thailand

Saving the elephants is only partly in the hands of mahouts. They are often pawns in elephant trading and tourism. These activities could not be as successful without them. However, because of their economic position and their increasingly being dispossessed of elephants, the only contribution they can make to conservation is to do their job well with the resources provided to them. The focus, then, has to be on elephant owners. Conservation groups and government regulators are the groups that can implement this change. These are the entities that have the power to change the Asian elephant's future in Thailand.

There is a poem that sums up the conservation issues of elephants in Thailand:

The Blind Men and the Elephant by John Godfrey Saxe

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a WALL!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho, what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a SPEAR!"

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant

Is very like a SNAKE!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
 And felt about the knee
 "What most this wondrous beast is like
 Is mighty plain," quoth he:
 "'Tis clear enough the Elephant
 Is very like a TREE!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
 Said: "E'en the blindest man
 Can tell what this resembles most;
 Deny the fact who can,
 This marvel of an Elephant
 Is very like a FAN!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
 About the beast to grope,
 Than seizing on the swinging tail
 That fell within his scope,
 "I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
 Is very like a ROPE!"

And so these men of Indostan
 Disputed loud and long,
 Each in his own opinion
 Exceeding stiff and strong,
 Though each was partly in the right,
 And all were in the wrong!

While this poem's real intention is to make a point about spirituality, it resonates with the real situation elephants are in today. Eastern conservationists, Western conservationists, mahouts, elephant owners, government officials, biologists, tourists, and farmers all see elephants differently. They are involved with elephants for different reasons, fulfilling and creating different needs. Sometimes these needs conflict. This aggravates an already fragile situation for an endangered animal. A Western conservationist may see an animal that is endangered and rare. It should be off by itself, in the wild. An Eastern conservationist may see an animal that is endangered and rare. It is an animal that needs help right now, among the people it lives around. A mahout will see his own family history, his country's history, his way of making a living, and his skills. A biologist will see a unique conglomeration of parts – a unique lung structure, incisor teeth that have protruded, a living relative to the mammoths and mastodons, a gene

pool, an animal whose reproductive organs and hormones should be studied intently. A farmer will see an elephant as a giant pest to his crops. A few farmers who profit from elephant food will see them as a source of income. A big elephant owner (a tour company owner or circus owner) will see an elephant as a marketing tool and an economic investment. A wise owner will see the mahout as a protector of his investment. The owner of a few elephants will see the elephant as a way to make money and another mouth to feed. A police officer will see a challenge to his job, an animal too large to confiscate. Tourists see an exotic animal that need to be photographed with. In order for elephants to be saved, each group needs to understand the other and come to some compromise to see the elephants' needs at the center. The locus where this understanding needs to begin is between conservation groups themselves.

For one short period of time, many of the people working with elephants were together, if only in this thesis. There are many people who work with elephants and yet do not get along with each other. For thousands of years, humans have taken care of elephants and elephants have taken care of us. But now is a particularly critical time. "No single human or generation of humans can be responsible for preventing a species from going extinct, only for preventing them from going extinct 'on our watch' " (Westley and Miller 39). In Thailand, each conservationist, elephant owner, government official, mahout, and farmer who has land nearby or provides the food for elephants, is making this decision each and every day through their actions. Each elephant death is not simply the death of an individual beloved animal, but rather one step closer to the death of a species and to the demise of an essential, unique relationship humans have built with another species.

How can key individuals get along? Running a non-profit organization requires that people work with people they do not get along with, people whom they know are doing terrible things, but the relationship must continue because something greater is at stake. Maybe one group

suspects something about another group. Many people who work with elephants do not tell the truth about others in the same field. One can observe things were not true by visiting the other places and people they each speak about. All the groups are focused on taking care of the same group of animals. As Ratana said, "Stay in your corner, do what you think is right." The groups are often unable to work together on a common issue.

There are issues that most groups can agree on and bring to the attention of government or the public as a united effort. These are issues that affect all elephants right now, not in the long term. It seems that elephant issues are not the first priority for the government. A powerful group would have to make the issues come to the administrative forefront. Some issues noted by the conservationists as important were registration, providing basic veterinary care for elephants, and coming up with a creative and practical way for all elephants in Thailand to have adequate food. Groups should understand that being in a coalition to register all elephants does not mean that each group who advocates for this idea believes in every single practice that the other groups do.

Non-profit groups like to talk about each other's finances. Who is not using the money correctly? Who gets more? Who is taking the money and doing nothing or doing nothing good? Who got that big grant from the government? There is a lot of money to be made in the "save the elephant" world. It seems there is enough for everyone. There is a good chance that more people, businesses and foundations would be interested in donating money if there were not so much politics and rancor involved.

At the same time, there should be compassion for the bitter battles some of the groups wage. Imagine being an elephant activist in Thailand. You are screaming at the top of your lungs that these animals are dying out, but this message seems to go unheard. You are featured on TV now

and again. Some famous people give money to your organization. You work tirelessly, failing to see change on a scale that can really save the elephants. Elephants die in your care. You are witness to elephant killings (maybe even the elephants in your care) and still the numbers decline because the only way for the elephants to be saved is by a collective effort that is organized and effective.

Many of the interviewees were interested in reading the finished product — my collection of recommendations from each other, from mahouts, and from other sources. It may be because communication between the groups is so poor that this thesis may be one place where their ideas can be linked together.

Donations

Whether one is a superstar or a tourist spending money for an elephant experience hoping the money you spend goes to an elephant, you can never know the ramifications of your actions in the elephant world. When a superstar dumps a load of money or publicity on an organization, the other groups get jealous. This sets off an angry chain reaction throughout the community. There is no solution: it is just something to be aware of. But since so many celebrities hedge their bets with the Thai elephant, they should take a little more time to make sure that giving money to just one organization is the right thing to do. It seems people find one group and attach themselves to it, whether they are a volunteer or a donor. This is regular behavior for charitable causes, but for elephants, it is detrimental. Which of these donors have the time to visit each camp and decide which to support? Since there is no coalition to save the elephants that disperses funds among the groups, it is difficult for an outsider to donate to many different groups at one time. This is a big problem and dissuades some people who know about these political problems from donating. A possible solution to this would be requiring collaboration in order for the groups to obtain funding.

Another issue connected with donations is what amount actually gets to the elephants and to the mahouts. This is definitely a question in Thailand. Many people who run conservation programs told me that it was hard to get the money to the mahouts, and then to get the mahouts to give the money to the elephant. Only one interviewee said the mahouts would really give the money they received to aid their elephant.

The conservation cultural gap

One Thai man from Lampang, an area full of elephants, summed up the situation well when he said, "to people in the West, elephants are special. To me, they are everywhere." For people from countries where elephants are only in zoos or circuses, elephants hold a special place in our hearts.

In contrast to Western ideals of elephants, in one village full of elephants, a person can see the elephants chained up in the backyard, just past the cows and the chickens. They are clearly a livestock animal. While some Thai people, particularly older Buddhists, may feel a special respect for them, by and large elephants are just the biggest animal in the barnyard.

That is just one small piece of understanding who elephants are to Thai people. The tradition of keeping elephants goes back far and deep in their history. Richard Lair noted that 1 in 25 men were mahouts at the turn of the century (Lair, *Gone Astray*). An interviewee lamented that the Thai people involved in elephant conservation were educated in the West. He said they had forgotten that in Thailand an elephant's place is with his mahout, not in the wild. For 4,000 years, people have lived with elephants. To make the separation that most Westerners think is easy and the right thing to do is breaking an over 4,000-year-old human tradition. This isn't going to happen over night. Even if it could, should it?

This may seem shocking to die-hard conservationists, who may well be aware that the Asian elephant in Thailand is not faring well population-wise. This is the point at which it is necessary to look through the looking glass at another perspective. In two interviews, people noted cases in which well-meaning but culturally inappropriate moves by international organizations proved disastrous – both times for the elephants. One incident was told to me in confidence and the other is the World Wildlife Fund’s previously mentioned elephant release. (See page 36.) It is necessary for conservation groups to spend some time in the country they are targeting to realize that their plans may not work for the local people or for the elephants. What they think an animal may need to survive along with this particular group of human beings may be entirely different than what the animal really needs. There should definitely be more cultural sensitivity when speaking of animal rights or animals being reintroduced into the wild in reference to elephants.

As mentioned in the section on elephant individuality, people often think that elephants need to be released into the wild. In Thailand, there is very little “wild” left, and certainly not enough to absorb 2,000 domesticated elephants. One elephant owner and activist noted that in the wild there would be problems with the elephants conflicting with farmers and hunters. Either way there are problems that cannot be solved simply by releasing into the wild some animals that have never lived without humans. One elephant owner, Pravat, compared this to letting a child run free in the world. They wouldn’t know what was poison, what was good. Elephants are just like humans – they have to be taught by their family what is good and bad for them to do. Their heads are filled with memories of being trained, getting snacks, different mahouts, and different elephants – not of wilderness survival. As Pravat said, “[conservationists] think about conservation like that, let them free in the forest. I say, ‘Why?’ Like a toy in the forest. Thai elephant is like a dog or chicken, cannot survive in the wild. Thai elephants stay with people for

four thousand years. Why you want to put them back in the forest? They don't know about tree, king cobra, or tigers. When they are old, who will take care [of them]?"

The concept of returning elephants to the wild is for some Thai activists contrary to their culture. Elephants have been a part of their families for generations. It is the same as if people from another country came to the U.S. and told us to release all our horses or dogs back into the wild. Not only would we lose the animals but also the relationship that we have formed with them over thousands of years. Thailand is still highly agrarian. "Our country is an agricultural society," Chet the mahout noted. "We have a close relationship with animals-especially with elephants. More examples are cows, water buffalos, pigs, etc. It's different from you and your society." At the suggestion of elephants being returned to nature, Pravat, an elephant owner, commented: "If elephants go to the forest, my culture will die."

Animal rights is a very touchy subject in Thailand. There are some mahouts who are more true to their elephant than they are to their girlfriends. Sometimes they say it is necessary to hit the elephant. Pravat said that a Western woman was crying because she saw the mahout hitting the elephant. He then gave her an elephant to care for a few days, and as the elephant was starting to eat a 2,000 baht banana tree, she hit the elephant. Of course, most animal rights activists would say that hitting an animal is never necessary. However, elephants are huge animals and many have a stubborn streak. They grew up around people and are probably not good candidates for release. If they are going to eat a banana tree that will cost as much as a week's food to replace and you have the option to clock them on a part of their head that is strong enough to push an old tree over, are you going to? Animal rights activists need to spend time at elephant camps. They first need to quietly observe and learn. Then they can offer practical solutions such as free mahout re-training and funds for agriculture replacement costs for elephant damage.

There are, however, kinder methods to use in training elephants. It seems not many people are using these methods for a couple of reasons. First, they don't really believe they will work. Mahouts who come from traditional elephant families may have lost the knowledge of kinder training methods in the past few generations. Older mahouts used to be the social workers of the villages, helping mahouts be kinder (Paul). Since that structure is very weak today, lots of kinder traditional ways are gone. Another issue is that groups don't readily share information with each other. Groups that do use kinder methods are not getting the information to the places where mahouts use the harsher methods.

The intersection of wild and domestic elephants is no more apparent than in the eastern part of the country. According to one elephant conservationist, there were 60 elephants in Surin when he was young 30 years ago. Now there are 500 to 600 elephants there. There are a few possible explanations for this. The elephants could be taken from the wild. Elephant owners could be buying them from other parts of the country and bringing them to Surin for training by skilled Kuay mahouts. It is evident that there needs to be better tracking of elephants, both wild and domestic. This, coupled with the indebtedness of the mahouts in this area, does not paint a bright future for Thailand's elephant population.

How can Westerners help? A Western circus elephant trainer in the U.S., after searching me to be sure I was not from PETA, said that watchdog groups have made his elephants' lives better. They have a nice tent and other amenities that owners may not give to the elephants if it weren't for the bad publicity. Does being a watchdog help? Yes, it would help in Thailand. However, such efforts should be focused on small, concrete, benchmarked goals. If only conservation groups could DNA test every elephant and put a tracking device on them that was not easy to remove, this would be helpful. There are lots of ways to help the elephants, but it

must be in conjunction with the people who already do the work in Thailand. Western groups should ask them what they need. They should also ask mahouts what they need. Helping mahouts pay off their debts and starting farms for free, organic food for elephants would be a good beginning. In Thailand, where many of the elephants are privately owned, it is survival one elephant at a time, one owner and/or mahout at a time. Overlooking this leads to failed programs and bad feelings towards outside groups.

Government and elephants

In the West, government laws are looked at as a primary regulatory mechanism. For example, in the U.S., the Department of Agriculture inspects the living conditions of elephants in the circus. If the law is disobeyed, the conditions must be corrected and there are consequences for the owner. These rules come from the federal government and are acted upon at the local level. Thailand is different.

Law is mostly arbitrated through traditional understandings mediated by policemen and officials vested with considerably more powers than their Western counterparts. The result is that written law, no matter how correct in theory, is rarely followed to the letter of the law. . . . The primary disadvantage is that the elephant does not always receive the strict protection it deserves. The primary advantage is that the police and judiciary are very adept at gathering information and reaching conclusions acceptable to the community and thus not resented as interference by outsiders. (Lair, *Gone Astray*)

Understanding this difference can help Westerners realize that legislating saving the elephants may not be the most effective strategy. This sort of local agreement closely resembles what we in the West understand as a mediation agreement. It may be more prudent to focus attention on forming relationships on a local level with the owners and mahouts of elephants. There are other issues.

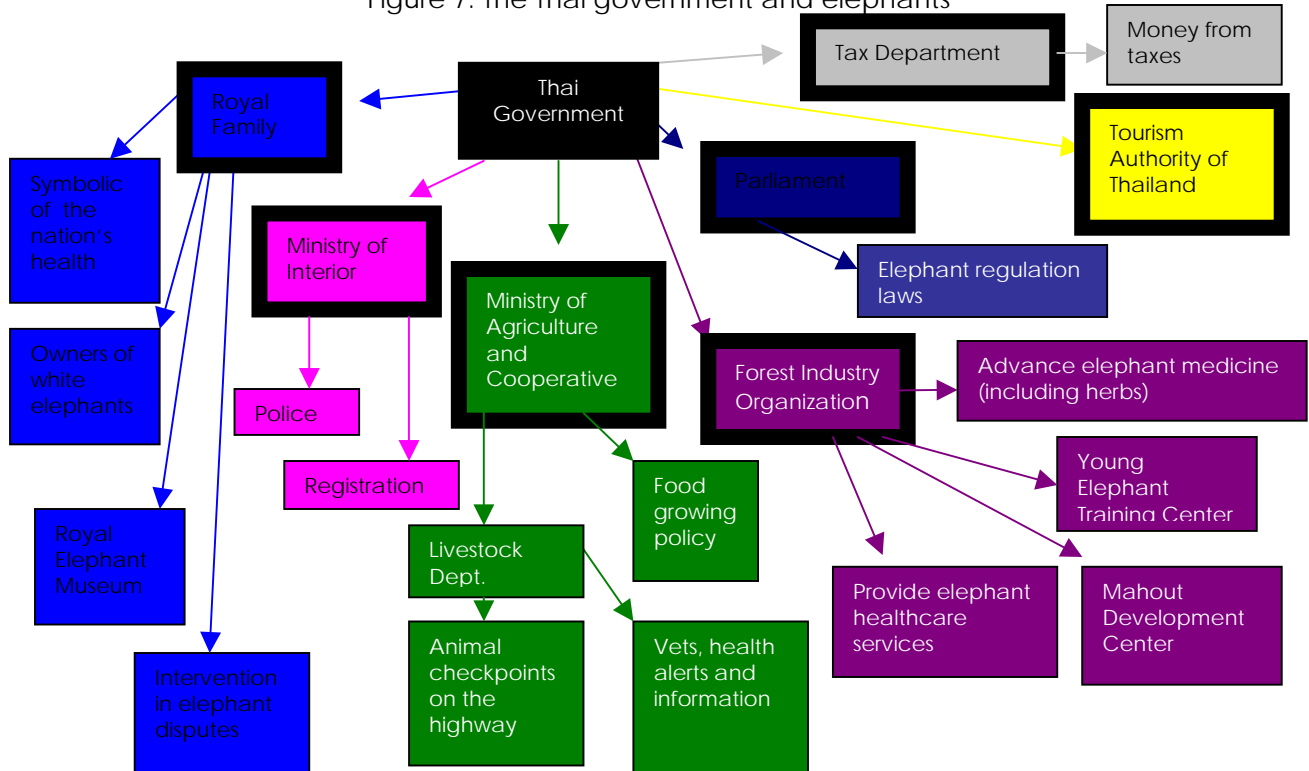
The most important government policy about elephants is the Draft Animal Law of 1939. Elephants must be registered at eight years old. If they are going from one section of the country to another, the police might ask to see their papers. Another government policy is that if a white

elephant is found it must be turned over to the king. As previously mentioned, there is also the cruelty law. Otherwise, domestic elephants have no special protection legislated by the Thai government.

There is reported to be a "lack of coordination between the various ministries, agencies and departments charged with elephant welfare. At this point, the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, the Agriculture Ministry, the Interior Ministry, the Forestry Industry Organization, the Livestock Development and the Royal Forestry Departments are all responsible for various aspects of domesticated and wild elephants. Often a villager who has a problem concerning his elephant has to go from official to official to find out which government body he should consult" (Rosenthal). (See the figure below, which provides an overview of the complexity of the interaction between the government and elephants. For a more in depth understanding of the logistics, see the report "Gone Astray" by Richard Lair.) Simply coordinating different parts of the government that deal with elephants would help their survival. Addressing the issue of smuggling elephants requires many resources and a commitment not just by the Thai government, but by countries that share borders, China, and other countries who are the recipients of the elephants.

In addition to the agencies listed on the chart, immigration affects the Karen mahouts. The boarder patrol makes raids for illegal Burmese immigrants, who are sometimes mahouts. Also, the government regulates export licenses for elephants.

Figure 7: The Thai government and elephants



Many conservationists complained about the lack of importance put toward regulating the lives of elephants. As Kama the mahout says, "Our government should do something now not later." This is an area where perhaps international attention and carefully built relationships can help.

In addition, Thailand suffers from the combination of corruption AND disorganization which is often a breeding ground for disaster. Where the elephants live is no exception. "The Thai government is accused of allowing elephant calves be smuggled by corrupt officials. The calves are captured in the wild. They are then given 'born in captivity' certificates and smuggled out of Burma" (Lees).

Tourism and elephants

There are many different levels of elephant tourism in every part of the country. Thailand has something very unique on earth – Asian elephants. Second, Thailand elephant activities are much cheaper than African safaris. Burma is the closest competition, but it has no where near the tourism machine of Thailand and a not-so-friendly government that tourists are rightly wary of. Thailand is tourist friendly and cheap. On the whole, Thai elephant groups have a rather good chance of attracting tourists and making money. As far as internal competition goes, there is not as much competition as is perceived by camp owners. (See appendix 6 for a spreadsheet of the groups, their activities and locations.)

What do Western tourists want? Have groups asked them or just assumed what their interests are? A survey about what tourists want from elephants is important. As a resource, they are in many ways even more influential than elephant owners.

Types of Tourists

A study of elephant tourism to see what tourists want from Thai elephants would be quite useful. From my observation, tourists who visit elephants fall into three categories:

- **Elephant riders.** They are taking the photo of this event home, which will seem very exotic to their families and friends. The tourists who want an elephant ride usually take it as part of a combo package with river rafting or sea kayaking or any of a myriad of combinations tour companies concoct. A tourist would look at the whole package, weighed against the price. In a few places, there is some local competition, usually just a few companies doing pretty much the same thing. They often choose an elephant ride when it is offered among the other things they want to do. Sometimes it

is simply decided if there is a Web contact or the person who picks up the phone speaks English.

- **Nature lovers.** These are the tourists who want to see a more natural elephant life. They are the nature lovers who are going to ask questions about the welfare of the elephants they are looking at. They would be more concerned about the “rights” of the elephant and want to see the elephants à la National Geographic style.
- **Elephant junkies.** This is a fairly specialized group. You won’t find them on a regular trek. They are looking for something different from Sri Lanka or Singapore. They can recite pages of elephant facts and compare all the camps for you. They are a fascinating, but hard to please, crowd. They are the minority of visitors. Elephant junkies all have the same look on their faces — their eyes are bright like four year olds, swapping elephant stories, topping each other’s knowledge of elephant statistics, telling stories of a particular elephant they love or telling the same story again and again of yesterday’s elephant conflict.

All the people involved with elephants realize that tourism is the elephant’s way to make a living now. To give an idea of the swiftness of the change from logging to tourism, in 1994, there were 15 elephants working on Phuket, the major tourist island. They offered short rides in an enclosed area or were hired by hotels to entertain the tourists. Now there are nearly 200 (Beatty 108). Any promotion of elephant tourism is important to everyone who works with elephants. Perhaps the Tourism Authority of Thailand could make one year “the year of the elephant.” There could be a Web directory with each group listed, the services they provide, and links to their individual Web sites. This list would allow elephant owners and camps to compare sites, see who is competing with them and find out what services are provided at competing camps. This list would also allow for a basic registration effort to see how many and what kind of elephants are where. (See <http://www.is.wayne.edu/thaielephant>.) (Also see Appendix 6 for a chart

version of the Web site, which is based on the chart in Tipprasert's report for the Food and Agriculture Organization. While the chart and Web site list many tourism destinations found on the Internet or those visited during the study, it is not complete. It is estimated that there are "approximately 150 elephant camps throughout Thailand" (Asian NGOs). Nonetheless, it is a useful tool to guide further study.)

Often at elephant camps the mahouts, mainly because of their low level of English skills, can not communicate with tourists. Education for conservation (and fundraising) should be implemented on the elephant's back. Tourists have many questions about conservation that go unanswered simply because the mahout cannot speak English. There is an invisible wall between the mahouts and tourists as they pour into the camps. The mahouts fade into the shadows or are merely the quiet men on the elephants. Many of the mahouts have years of experience with elephants that cannot be shared. Sometimes the tour guides do not know the answers to elephant questions that the mahouts could easily answer. Many mahouts learned English in school, but they need a conversation class to gain the confidence they need to answer questions. In cases where tourists are learning to ride the elephant, mahouts should speak English. At the very least, the mahouts should teach the tour guides some basic information about their profession. To Thai people a mahout's job is not so interesting, but to many tourists it is fascinating.

The camp managers

People who are in charge of the day-to-day operations of the elephant camps are sometimes run ragged by the passionate leader of their group. It is necessary to be careful not to burn people out for the sake of the elephants. This is an area that conservationists could help with.

Role of America in Asian elephant conservation

The first elephant to come to the U.S. was an elephant named Jumbo who was transported from London. Thomas Edison electrified a "killer" elephant, Topsy, who rampaged because she was tired of her drugged keeper (Scigliano 201). Now, the U.S. spends 5 million dollars per year on the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund, created by an act passed in 1997. According to its provisions, "There are authorized to be appropriated to the Fund \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002 to carry out this Act, which may remain available until expended" (United States, III Stat.). The Act was later amended to continue until 2007 (although I do not know if it is funded at the same rate). The following is a rough calculation, just to get a vague idea of what this amount of money means. It is 10 years at 5 million a year which makes 50 million dollars to be spent in total to save the Asian elephant (less, of course, the 3 percent administration fee). If we divide that by a round number of 50,000 elephants, it means that we are spending approximately \$1,000 per elephant in a ten-year period, or \$100 per elephant per year. Their population is declining 3 percent each year in 1999 (Beatty 108). Moreover, the act is written for wild elephants, not domestic.

Chapter 5 —A Plan to Save the Domesticated Elephants of Thailand

The plan presented here does not focus on elephants at all. It barely includes any biology statistics and very little on mating schemes. Why? The elephant community in Thailand is not lacking in knowledge or solutions about saving elephants. Some groups have produced drafts of new laws, procedures, and whole plans to save the elephants. Each group holds a piece of the puzzle of how to save Thai elephants – the pieces are just not being put together. One group has a draft of a new cruelty law, another a plan for the elephants near Bangkok, and still another has a revised registration procedure. One person was still actively pursuing the government. A few of the others were disgusted and disheartened that their plans just sit dusty on the desks of government bureaucrats. The issues are not top issues on the government's agenda. One reason for both of these situations may be because the community is so divided. All the conservationist and owners agree on this. One noted, "Money cannot buy everything — we need more of a network."

Revealing the details of these conflicts would only make the conflicts worse. Groups were sometimes angry at each other due to a lack of communication. In some cases there is a complete absence of communication. They are all energetic, inspired, deep-thinkers. Their thoughts are reflected in the topics for discussion listed in steps one and two in the plan below. For this thesis, I have analyzed the conflicts between the groups. Many of these conflicts were due to miscommunication or lack of communication. For the purpose of this paper, there was little information from their conflicts that would assist in the conservation of elephants and the preservation of mahoutship. The conflicts between conservationists were like the conflicts of divorced parents, which in the long term have little to do with the less powerful people (children – or mahouts and elephants in this case). The mere fact that these conflicts exist is the important

issue. Without paying attention to this culture of conflict, any cooperative effort would fail. This researcher's contribution is the framework and the compilation of the list itself.

All the groups are caring for the elephants — whether they like it or not, they are all in it together. They can look to their left and right and see all the people who are going to decide if their national symbol — a source of great wealth in the past in the future in Thailand — will become extinct. These tourist camp managers, animal rights activists, elephant owners, government officials, mahouts, and farmers will be the ones to decide.

One way to begin to change to save the elephants is outlined below. After hearing all the issues and potential solutions from the different groups, I compiled them into the following plan. Because of the animosity between groups and the resulting inability for people to separate personal differences from elephant issues, there are no names attached to the following suggestions. There is very little that was originated by the author. Executing these suggestions could make Thailand the leader and model for domestic Asian elephant conservation.

	Action	Goals
Step 1	Information Sharing, Outreach and Needs Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collect and share data -Inform elephant owners/caregivers about programs government and nonprofits offer. - Build a foundation of support for Step 2.
Step 2	Stakeholder Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Build relationships -Set ground rules/tone -Solve non-controversial issues
Step 3	Regular Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Solve issues -Share information
Step 4	Forums about controversial Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Come to agreement about issues and solve them

Table 1: Plan to Save the Elephants

Step one: Information Sharing, Outreach and Needs Assessment

First, elephant data should be shared. Information such as the number of elephants in Thailand, their age, sex and location should be collected. It could be stored in an open, on-line database. This should be done first so all parties involved with elephants would know and have access to the same facts. A model for the database can be found at <http://www.is.wayne.edu/thaielephants>, in the "owner, mahout, and advocate section" under "elephant census". The information could be collected on an expedition across the country of a veterinarian who would give check-ups, a scientific researcher or their assistant to collect DNA samples, a government liaison to help register the elephants in each area, and an anthropologist to collect mahout stories. Mahouts could also be registered in a job bank. See a draft of the job bank on the Web site listed above, only click on "mahout search". The services offered in each area for elephants would also be listed in the database. This is also on the draft Web site. This would be an opportunity for direct communication between the government and the elephant owners, mahouts, and advocates. This would be an opportunity for needs assessment. Also, participants would be asked what would motivate them to participate in stakeholders workshops.

The Government Center at Lampang is very misunderstood by many groups, by both camp owners and mahouts alike. When the training school was mentioned to a few mahouts, they only had the impression that the camp was for tourists to take some fake course that would never teach them what they learned in their 10 years. Some experienced mahouts who were raised from childhood to be mahouts did not know that some camps hire 18 year olds with no experience and who really need to be trained.

Outreach from the Center is needed in which individuals go to all the camps and explain the programs they have and the research being done (even if it is a vaccine to guard the elephants

against fly bites – anything). One camp hadn't seen a vet in 2 years, yet the government and two NGO's offer free veterinary care. Outreach is very important to facilitate communication between the government and the tourist camps and to allow them access to government services, particularly the veterinarian care and new information. It should also be a vehicle for input from the people involved in elephants to voice their opinions and to see action. The person doing the outreach should be contracted to organize part two.

Step two: stakeholder workshop

The stakeholder workshop would be infused with finding a real plan for the future of Asian elephants by drawing on the vast knowledge of the people who care for elephants in Thailand. There would need to be some benefit for participating in this workshop and the future workshops. They could be given some kind of membership, in which they would receive discounted elephant food or some other benefits that would be attractive to them. This would be kicked off with a workshop that includes all the people who are involved in caring for the elephants. "If the right people are in the right room with the right information and the right intentions, progress toward the right decisions and actions will be made" (Westley and Miller 73). This includes government officials – national and local–owners, NGO's, camp managers, mahouts, researchers, some farmers who supply food for the elephants and others. They would spend a few days together with facilitators making a plan for the survival of the species in Thailand. One example of this sort of workshop is the "Population Viability Habitat Assessment (PVHA)," which is usually used for wild species. It brings together folks from as many different areas (biology, industry, community, conservation, etc.) to work out a plan for a species. They take all the data they get from the attendees and feed it into Vortex, a computer modeling program, to look at the future of the species (Westley and Miller 8). This program would have to be adapted to the unique situation of domestic elephants and the past histories of people involved in elephant care.

The importance of involving the mahouts is evident in how PVHAs have been done in the past. A good example is how Ulysses Seal, originator of the PVHA, worked with zoo staff.

In the creation of the database and the PVHA's Seal and his associates worked outside of the formal hierarchy of the zoo organizations. The initiation and support of ISIS (database) came from Seal's friendship with zoo directors and their professional staff. While initially Seal did not go directly to the keepers to establish or expand the database, the keepers' role has expanded through their participation in regional studbooks and by providing data to local record keepers who handle the database. Staff who directly care for the animals have been traditionally low in zoo hierarchy, but due to the rapid professionalization of zoo personnel, they have become increasingly specialized and educated. Seal's approach directly involved this group because they had the necessary information and also because they readily shared his vision. ' I go out and talk to the curator, the young people. We go out and drink beer with them and we'd go through the exercise, the logic, and . . . they can see the next steps, they're not quite so bound up in the hierarchy. (Westley and Miller 35)

This kind of meeting would not be new to Thailand. There was a workshop initiated by the Royal Thai Forest Department about captive gibbons. They had the workshop because they had violated the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), and in so doing, lost their U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) money and an embargo was created preventing foreign trade (Westley and Miller 68). Another reason for the workshop was the loss of face in being cited for this violation.

Drawing from an example of a PVHA in Canada, there are two issues that could be sources of conflict if this workshop was done in Thailand (Westley and Miller 157). The first issue is how the Vortex modeling was not working out using the narrative information from the Inuit. When involving indigenous people, anthropologists should be used to analyze the narratives for themes which are mildly quantifiable and could be used in the modeling. The second issue is that they faced was "co-management." "Operationally, the understandings of co management came down to different views about the process for involving communities in the design of research, monitoring, and management programs in which traditional ecological knowledge would be

prominent” (Westley and Miller 156). If they ever did a workshop in Thailand for the elephants, it would be wise to speak with the facilitators of this Canadian group to learn about their challenges. In the smaller group sessions, the native people avoided the scientific break out groups. This could be remedied by having a knowledge exchange, where the least adversarial local people could present information to the scientists, and the most accessible and down-to-earth scientists could present to the local people.

Negotiation and facilitators

Because of the animosity between the groups who work with elephants in Thailand, this meeting should be structured more like a negotiation than a stakeholder meeting. This would be the kind of negotiation on a level somewhere between Camp David and United Auto Workers union talks. It also needs to take into account the specific needs of Thai culture, particularly when dealing with conflict. For instance, the concept of saving face needs to be addressed. (Roberts Callister and Wall, 576)

There should be clear rules and structure, and all facilitators should have backgrounds in conflict resolution in a Thai and international context. They should have the ability to keep people strictly on task. They should not know or have any connection to the elephant community so attendees will not feel any bias. The background of the facilitators should be made clear to the participants. However, they should be prepped on the situation in Thailand and the past relationships of the groups to be prepared for any disagreements.

The workshop should begin with a session teaching some negotiation techniques, in which the participants interact with each other in scenarios that are non-elephant based, just for practice. A small investment of time in learning some negotiation techniques could only benefit the elephants and the blood pressure of many of the people involved in the problems. Perhaps

there could be a discussion of the main points of the book, Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In, by Robert Fisher and William Ury. This book talks about separating people from the problem and on focusing on interests, not positions. These are some issues that are hindering the elephant community in Thailand.

The workshop should be issue-oriented, with no room for chit-chat that may lead to some disagreements. There should be no discussion of each other's finances, personalities, or motivations – not in the larger group, not in the bathroom, no casual remarks over dinner. It should be out in the open that there are deep, long term, and philosophical differences between groups, but that these are not the issues to be discussed in any way during this weekend.

Location

The meeting should be held in a place that is highly secure. It may be that some of the groups would need to be sequestered from each other. All people involved in elephants should be invited. This means the elephant owners and the animal rights activists would be spending the weekend together.

Meals

Perhaps it would be best if meals were served separately. Meal time is normally a time to socialize. I think that with this particular group's past history, however, it would be better not to take the chance of a controlled dinner conversation with one wrong word becoming an issue that would ruin the entire negotiation.

Royalty

The gathering should be attended by a member of the Royal family because this is the only party all elephant groups have respect for. They may be the only people who are important enough to all the elephant groups to prevent any old/new disagreements from creeping up. The royalty should come at the beginning for a welcome and at the end to see the final results.

Mahouts / farmers/low-income owners

There should be travel scholarships that would allow mahouts, farmers, and low-income owners to attend. For mahouts, there should be money provided to pay another mahout to watch his elephant while he is gone.

Some desired outcomes

Outcomes would include solutions to problems that the interviewees all seem to agree are needed now: a new registration law, ways to feed all the elephants, increase elephant tourism, increase elephant medical care, and anything else they can agree on. Every plan written should have step by step implementation guidelines and benchmarks with dates. One neutral person should be on staff after the workshop ends to check on progress and work things through.

Step three: regular forums

There are meetings to share knowledge between groups and between the government and groups. All the groups could look forward to some good food and good information. All the topics should be non-controversial. How often these workshops would be scheduled would be determined by a survey of all involved. Some examples of the knowledge that could be shared include:

- A few of the people who work with elephants have been to other countries to learn different methods of handling elephants and issues that surround them. One interviewee told me there was no exchange of knowledge between Kerala, India (a place with lots of elephant programs) and Thailand. However, later, another interviewee told me how much they liked Kerala, and mentioned an elephant expert they respected from there. This same person wanted to know about Western protected contact methods, which I am sure the other person knew quite a bit about.
- How can micro-enterprise be successful for small-scale elephant owners? How can debt-ridden elephant owners be helped? Could a program like the Heifer International program be modified to help them?
- How to implement an annual elephant census?
- How can technology be used to prove elephant's origins?
- Another interviewee had just come back from touring Burma and the retirement place for their elephants. They could talk about what Thailand could do through the Pang La Elephant Nursery Centre and what it could do in the future (Saving the Thai Elephants).
- Lessons to be learned from Africa – like their successful trans-border areas. Sukumar notes that a contiguous landscape of over 10,000 square km² is still available at the border of Myanmar and Thailand. He recommends that there be 100-300 elephants in a group to survive in the short term (Sukumar 356). He recommends corridors of .5 to 1km wide and about 5km long. They should have protected borders so as to not come into conflict with people and vegetation that encourages the elephants to move along, not enjoy a slow banquet (Sukumar 359).
- Mahout Management. Camp owners, elephant owners, camp managers, and head mahouts all love the elephants, but how do they manage mahouts? What are the best ways to work with mahouts as employees? What are your camp policies? Wouldn't you like to know how other camps are run in terms of day-to-day logistics? New ways of

managing? How do you hire good mahouts? How do you keep them? How do you discipline? Some camps prefer mahouts who had not been trained as mahouts so they don't have to retrain them. Is it really better to start from scratch, or can you retrain the mahouts to fit your camp's needs or philosophies? What is the most effective way?

- Dealing with tourists. What do you do when the French won't go on the trek with the British? Why? What are safety issues with the elephants and tourists? How do you deal with the culture gap between foreigners and Thai people most successfully? With the language gap?
- How do you increase elephant tourism? What part of elephant rides, trekking, and elephant care appeals to tourists? How is it listed in guide books? On the government's Web site? On other Web sites? How could elephant tourism have a more effective presence on the Web and at travel agencies? Could all the groups share a Web site directory that searches the part of the country and the services they provide?
- Reintroduction – what works, what doesn't? How to tell if an elephant would be a good candidate? Statistics, etc.
- A briefing about the wild elephants in Thailand. Are there any shared issues with domesticated elephants? (This would be good for tour guides to attend, or it could be taped and sent out.)
- The wild elephant capture and the magic that surrounds it. Will the knowledge be saved for future generations?
- Elephant magic – Karen and Kuay belief systems. How is elephant magic based in practical rules for elephant keeping? What are the differences and similarities between the two belief systems? This should be a sharing session that is taped so it can be recorded and transcribed.
- Healing elephants. Herbal medicine for elephants. What do elephants do for themselves? How to make the herbs available for the elephants to take when they need

them. What are some interactions that could have a negative effect? What do you know that you want to share? Traditional meets modern medicine.

- The tradition of elephant keeping in Thailand. What do the ancient elephant keeping books say?
- Conflict with neighbors. What do you do when your elephant is eating the neighbor's banana plants? How do you show if what they are saying is true? Legal issues.
- Elephants recovering from amphetamine use. Easing their way.
- The economics of elephants – getting the most from your elephant tourist business. Ideas that work and those that didn't.
- Elephant pressure points.
- How to help mahouts see their importance in conservation. A presentation you can give to the mahouts that work for you. Information about the number of Asian elephants left, how people from other countries view elephants, etc.
- To what extent are training manuals utilized and other formal mahout training and elephant care education used? What is the best way to transmit the information?
- How could the UNESCO World Heritage categories be used to the advantage of the elephants and the people who work with them? For example, any place there is mahoutship may fit into criteria v. "an outstanding example of a traditional human interaction with the environment. . ." (Criteria for Selection).

Step four: controversial issues

At this point all the groups would know the structure and the rules. They would have met together several times successfully, worked on changing the elephant laws, fixing registration problems, making sure vets are freely available to everyone and they all know about it, no elephant is hungry or overworked anymore, and breeding is going on successfully. The next step is to address more difficult issues, including:

- Animal rights
- Training, and especially the hook
- Work loads
- Export
- Wild elephant capture
- How politics affect elephants
- Accountability – ways of gaining public trust for your charity
- Media – sharing the spotlight, working the system
- Donors – getting them and keeping them. From celebrities to housewives, what you need to do to keep them happy
- How to get donations to reach the elephant itself

In the future, the group would then be a cohesive force, both nationally and internationally, recognized for their ability to work together and how they saved the Thai elephants from extinction. They meet regularly, but the issues they have to deal with are much less severe as time goes on. Other groups who deal with endangered animals ask them for advice.

Future research recommendations

- DNA sampling of all elephants for breeding purposes
- A population count of Asian elephants in Thailand
- An economic analysis of the macroeconomic impact of elephants on the economy, particularly their contribution to tourism (once there is enough data)
- The total effect of the logging ban on elephants
- What are the ways in which mahouts communicate with elephants?

- What elephant jobs give elephants the greatest satisfaction? A specialist in animal behavior, particularly elephants, could observe elephants in different settings to see which is making the elephants the most satisfied.
- To what extent are mahout training programs and training manuals being used? Do mahouts, owners and advocates know about them? Are they in a format that is the most useful? (For example: would information be better conveyed as a film or a booklet?)
- What ancient human-elephant communication methods still exist?
- What are the origins of the mahout command words? How do mahout commands vary with the different ethnic groups who use them?
- What are the different methods of elephant keeping from different ethnic groups?
- Which parts of which mahout traditions are more satisfying to an elephant? Perhaps an animal behavior specialist could observe elephants in different traditions. Also, since elephants often move from the Kuay area to the Karen area, do they experience a sort of culture shock?
- How are wild and domestic elephants linked through illegal trade?
- Is mahout knowledge respected in other countries?
- What is the actual dollar value of elephants to the tourism industry?
- What do tourists expect from elephant tourism?
- Do mahouts prefer tourism to logging as an occupation?
- What would make mahoutship a more attractive profession to young people?
- What makes a killer domestic elephant?
- Would unionization work (legally and culturally) for Thai mahouts?
- Does Western protected contact work better than traditional Eastern methods? What knowledge could be exchanged?

Conclusion

Without a concentrated push toward collaboration that is inclusive of elephant owners, advocates and mahouts, the Thai government, and international organizations, there will be no more elephants in Thailand. All the people involved have the answers. Acting effectively and collectively on these answers is the issue. No amount of research can make that happen. This is not the time for research. It is time to act.

As I sat in the elephant camp's van to the airport with a woman from Botswana, she was proudly choking back the pain of leaving the 80-year-old elephant who had just begun to listen to her commands, I can only think that even more tragic than losing another species on earth is the loss of a bond that has formed over 4,000 years. Later, I sat down with a child who may be the end of this long line of humans who have enjoyed this relationship.

I met a little boy during the one afternoon I spent drawing elephants in Ban Ta Klang with the neighborhood kids. As I started to sing the elephant children's song, "Chang, Chang, Chang" in the midst of a group of Kuay kids, only one kid joined in. He was staring at me as if I had come from the moon. How did I know this song? Why was I in his village staring at elephants and spending the afternoon with his mahout grandfather and his elephant? The whole time, all I could wonder was, what is your future, little boy? Will you get to know the magic of mahoutship, or will it be forgotten? Will it be lost with the secrets of the elephant capture? Does your grandfather have a loan on his elephant? If so, will he be able to get out? What secrets does he know about the giant man-killer bull he watches over? Will you have the chance to learn? Will you care? He took the elephant pictures we drew to show his family. What is his future? What will the adults on earth decide for him and for his grandfather's elephant? It is hoped that the ideas presented in this thesis will in some way contribute to this effort.

APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

For non-profits who deal with elephant conservation

What does your organization do for the conservation of the elephant?

What kinds of programs do you run to carry out that mission?

What do you think needs to be done to help the Thai elephants?

What other groups and individuals do you think are important to elephant conservation in Thailand?

What do think about the future of the profession of mahout?

What role do international groups play in elephant conservation? How do you feel about it?

How would you define success in elephant conservation? Do you have some examples?

What do elephant conservation groups need to be successful?

Can you recall times when multiple conservation groups and other non-profits and government departments worked together for the elephants? Why was or wasn't it successful?

Question guide for mahout survey

How long have you been a mahout?

Are there other mahouts in your family? If so, who?

How did you obtain the elephant?

What are the most important issues for mahouts?

What do you see for the future of yourself and the elephants you work with?

Have you registered your elephant? Why or why not?

Do you receive any assistance with your elephant from any group (example non-profits, government)?

Could you use any help with your elephant? If so, what kind of help?

Would you be interested in being interviewed for a longer time? Please leave your name and a way to contact yourself.

Question guide for mahout life interviews

How did you become a mahout?

How did you decide to be a mahout?

Did you have to be trained?

Did you go to formal school? If yes, how far did you go? How did you feel about going to school? Did you go as far as you would have liked?

At what age did you begin to train for it?

What did the training include?

How do you feel about this job?

How have things changed in the past 20 years for mahouts?

How do you feel about your job as a mahout?

How the profession has changed or stayed the same?

How do you feel about 'conservation'?

Would they still be a mahout if you had a choice of any profession?

Was anyone else in your family a mahout?

What roll do women play in mahout life?

What do you think the future of mahoutship is?

What do you think the future for Thailand's elephants are?

Question guide for elephant care / elephant-mahout relationship

The following are some sample questions, but more would come about as the mahout does new things.

Can you describe the process of getting the elephant ready for work in the morning?

Where do you get the elephant ready?

Who gets the elephant ready?

What supplies do you need to get the elephant ready?

How do you know when an elephant is well-cared for?

If you could take another job, would you? If so, what job would it be?

How do you feel about the elephants you work with?

Have you had a favorite elephant? If so, describe him/her.

Do you remember the first elephant you worked with? If so, could you describe him/her? What was her temperament like? What kinds of things, looking back, were the special needs of that particular elephant? How did he/she react to you? Would you change any way you treated him/her?

Have you had an elephant you didn't get along with? In what ways did you not get along?

How do you feel about working with male elephants?

How do you feel about working with female elephants?

How do you feel about working with baby elephants?

What do you do in the morning with them?

How do you wash them? When? How often?

Describe a typical day with your elephant.

What are some things you only do occasionally? How often do you do each? How do you do each?

Do you know if there is anything you do that differs from how other mahouts do it? What is it?

How far do elephants walk each day?

Is there anything you have to do that is particular to this elephant?

Do you do everything the way you were taught or have you changed some things? If so, what have you changed?

How do you communicate with the elephant?

How does the elephant communicate with you?

What commands do you use?

APPENDIX 2**Full Mahout Interviews****Anupap**

Brief Biography: – He is 26 years old and from the Northern part of Thailand. He is not from a mahout family. His family sold bananas in the elephant camp. At seven years old, he learned to be a mahout from the camp mahouts. His apprenticeship consisted of learning to ride the elephant and giving the elephant showers. He started to be mahout at 13. He stopped going to school at 13 or 12. In the north, he explained, people are poor. After 13 everyone helps the family by working. During the interview, he was a mahout at a tourist camp. He can also train elephants to do tricks. As of late 2005, he was not working as a mahout.

Interview (through a translator)

He doesn't know what else [other job] he would do. He's always been with elephants. If there were no more elephants would not know what to do.

It's a good job to have - like a pet. Take care of them. He can teach them anything and he loves elephants because he has been with them since he was a baby.

If there is not enough food for the elephant you have to give the elephant to the government.

No work, no job, no food, no place for the elephant. You have to work to make money.

He went to Lampang. It is good for elephants if they are sick. He did not like it because he saw sick elephants. Government mahout school is not like a promotion. You must train 10 years to be a mahout. You must know everything. The government just gives you a certificate. There is no experience.

We should free the elephant in the forests and give to the natural world. It is not good for mahouts because we cannot make income. But now there are no big forests in Thailand.

If the elephants don't work hard the elephants will be saved but if they work hard, there will be fewer and fewer elephants in Thailand. In his hometown they could give the elephant time to baby now there is no time for elephants to have babies. In nature is a better place for elephants to have children. It is difficult because the female has to be ready to have sex.

If he had money he would change his work. He doesn't know how long the elephant can stay with us. He would own an elephant if he could. Money is the most important to own an elephant.

[Why do elephants stay with us?] To elephant's eyes, I am big and so the elephant cannot fight us. His big body and smaller mind than us. The elephant can kill the mahout from negligence. In the city he's from, an elephant can work five hours each day. In the morning they get timber from the forests and then the elephant is free and the elephant eats. Now elephants work with tourists. They chain them in the forests.

He used to work at a tourist camp in the North.

Aran

Brief Biography – a mahout at a tourist camp. He is Karen. His family kept elephants in the north. At ten years old, he learned to ride elephants. There was no one else able to care for the elephants, so he quit school at 19 and took the job. Now in his twenties, he works at the camp to earn a living. He is currently the mahout of a female elephant.

Interview

When I was born my family had elephants. I started to ride the elephant at 10 years old. My parents taught me. I used to be in school. After, no one else could help the family take care of the elephant. I quit school at 19 years old. I would like to continue school but it may be too late. [Sirikit, camp manager, translator and cultural guide adds - In Thailand you cannot go back to school once you stop. You can only learn through apprenticeship.]

I learned the commands first. I love being a mahout except when I am sometimes I am with a stubborn elephant. It can make me mad. A mahout needs to control the elephant who is like that – like a teacher needs to control students.

[Sirikit - The Karen people got elephants from the British. Karen people began to work with elephants more and more. Sons and grandsons do not want old elephants. They will sell them. New mahouts right now most 50% of them, who never been with elephants before, they just learn from friends. Take it just to take a job. There is a mahout here like that. They have to have a job.]

The difference between mahouts who are younger and older is that young mahout's learn from them (people who already work with them) - they learn the different personalities of the

elephants then they can tell them how to take care of them. This one is stubborn, that one like to play, etc. We teach them in two days if they speak the same language. Foreigner like you would take a long time.

The future of elephants in Thailand: elephants now lots have to be in the village. Its their only work. Used to carry rice from the farm to the village and there was legal logging but now there is no job for the elephants. The only kinds of work to do is tourism industry. He doesn't like logging, he likes tourism better.

He was given [the elephant he currently works with] – he had no choice. He has the slut elephant. The slut elephant only likes boys, not girls. [Sirikit adds - I can see from her eye, she doesn't like me. She doesn't listen to me.] He likes that his elephant will chase someone if she doesn't like them.

He would be a tour guide if he could change his job [to take Sirikit's job]. If he had any chance to learn English he would take it. If he could learn it on the computer it would probably be too hard use the computer.

I came three or four years ago to this camp. I didn't know one word of English. But because I have more work experience from tourists I know more.

[Sirikit – mahouts would like to speak English. When people ride elephants from the river, the mahouts copy her words, not knowing what they are saying.]

I've never had a favorite elephant, not a special one. He likes all the elephants boy/girl etc.

My normal day with the elephant is to get up in the morning, clean the elephant's area, pick up poop, feed the elephant, set the elephant free. All mahouts have the same schedule. They have to clean the area. If the elephant smells poop or pee elephants won't eat.

[Sirikit adds: Sometimes they throw poo at the elephants feet to make them walk faster.]

When he had his elephant in his village he would release the elephant in the jungle. Every two days he would check where the elephant was. How the villagers keep the elephants: The elephant would move around away from their poo. Every two or three days they will check on the elephant. Sometimes they have to listen for the bell on their neck if the elephant goes far away. All have different sounding bells. Without the bell, it is difficult to find them because the elephants walk so softly - they are so smart they just stop moving and hide. Elephants prefer to be free. Elephants eat and go and eat and go. Maybe they would be in trouble in the property of villagers.

For his children he believes kids need an education first. His son should graduate from secondary school and its up to him what he wants to me.

The elephants now belong to the family. He can still have the elephant but he works here. The elephant is from his ancestors. The family spreads the elephant around and takes turns passing it around. To buy an elephant is difficult since it has a birth certificate - whose name is on the first certificate? This can make a family fight. He has to take care of the elephants in his family.

They had seven elephants. Four died. The first elephant died as its tusks were stolen it got a brain infection. It was a huge elephant and it died. Second elephant was poisoned at a trekking

camp. Third elephant died after traditional ceremony of tetanus. Fourth elephant died from eating pesticides. There are three more for the family: two females and one is pregnant.

If the elephants live at the camp they have to pay rent for the elephant. The elephant is not working hard at the nature camp. There is no money to pay for rent, only can own the elephant. It is 8,000 baht per elephant for rent. Renting is complicated. For example, if an elephant dies a camp is responsible.

Bob

Brief Biography – an American elephant trainer in the U.S. He has been a trainer for 15 years in the circus.

Interview

I have been an elephant trainer for 15 years. Before that, I was a carpenter. I had a friend in the business, I learned quickly. I began by shoveling (poo). I spent 2 years as a groomer. You can be read right away if you can be an elephant trainer: if you can understand their intelligence, what to expect from them and what they can expect from you.

You see young people interested (in being an elephant trainer) but if their patience wears thin and then they aren't ready or if the trainer isn't ready to teach them, then it's a long, drawn out process to be able to command an elephant. Younger people want to quickly be in the ring. You have to pay your dues, react when the elephant reacts. You have to learn to read them. They will tell you anything. You can't just put any two elephants together. Elephants travel in herds. You have to know which elephants can be together or there will be a war you can't fight.

If I wasn't an elephant trainer, I would just go back to carpentry. A month ago I got a call to come back. . . .The other elephant trainer got another job. They offered me a mint so I left my family behind. I may stay with the elephants.

I love what I do. It's a 24-hr job – a labor of love. There is nothing more special than being around elephants.

For 12 years [one elephant] has been my favorite. Her personality and character make her my favorite. She is 50 years old, street smart, a brilliant elephant. She's much smarter than the other elephants. If she could talk, she would. She speaks in grunts. She learned every trick when she was baby, but now she tells me what she wants through grunts. If she does something bad, she whimpers. She communicates with me. I'm a friend.

No one in my family was in the circus. Most good trainers were brought up in the business.

If people acknowledge the fact that if they ban elephants and realize that children will only know elephants in pictures. We (circuses) double their lifespan. They are catered to. They live a good life here and people don't want to see this species go extinct. I think we help them survive by breeding them.

Watchdogs have made elephant treatment and traveling better. They get electric fences so they are chained at night only. The watchdogs have improved elephant standards of transportation and housing. If the watchdogs want them back in the wild, their habitat is shrinking and there are poachers. The elephants are part of my family. If they can stop people from taking their tusks. . . .They should stop them from killing them for their tusks. The poachers should at least anesthetize them, take them out and leave them alive.

I like African elephants as well, but they are more high-strung than Asian.

The treats I give them are fruits and vegetables – any day old stuff. Stores like to donate knowing it is going to an elephant. The elephants get a bath every day, a fan when its hot, hosed down. One hour before each show they are fed. They are never thirsty. I pet them. They know I care for them very much. I don't let them stand in their own shit and piss when they are chained up.

(I then asked him about how Chet had told me that the elephants won't eat if the poo is not cleaned up. Dave explained that how they are chained up at night, they poo behind and eat in front.)

My favorite part is when they are in the ring and I see the joy on the kids faces. I like the see the strength of them. Like when we used to do mud shows (elephants pulling a car from the mud). They no longer do the mud shows.

Elephants like to perform.

Cost to feed per day: 10 bales a day @ \$5/bale, 1 bag grain: \$6

About \$150/day for 3 elephants (+ soap etc.)

We don't pay for water, but if we did it would be expensive.

Caretaking schedule:

Get up at 6:30am unchain.

Give water to drink, we pick up poo.

Put down lime to disinfect urine.

M-F 10:30 show – throw ½ bale of hay

9am wash

10:30 ready for show, then elephant rides with my favorite elephant.

Come back, brush her off, put on head pieces, do act.

Come back, get water, headpieces off, 2 hour break.

They each get 1 bale of hay, clean up, sawdust to soak up pee. If hot, another bath.

10pm, drink, chain up. Sweet feed (molasses and grain provided vitamins and energy – like a supplement), 50lbs.

They lay down to sleep about 6 hours. When it is cooler, they sleep more. When it is hotter, they eat more. The heat increases their metabolism and to flap ears more to cool down.

Elephants have the intelligence of an 8 year old. They are smarter than some adults I know.

Chet

Brief Biography – a mahout at a tourist camp. Chet's family had an elephant. He grew up in the mid-southern part of Thailand, near the border with Burma. When he finished high school at eighteen, he became a professional mahout. He is currently the mahout of a female elephant.

Interview- I like the elephant I work with. It is good work. Humans can communicate with animal and you show to it visitors. Not many people can communicate with an elephant.

The two kinds of trained elephants: one works with tourists, the other works in the jungle. They get timber, haul things a long way (many Kilometers) for villagers. They know many commands. Sometimes the mahout has to hit the elephant to make the elephant remember. They have to

repeat the commands every day until the elephant can remember. Mahouts have very short words for elephant. They are like magic words. Many many years ago they believed these words make the elephants fear. It is like a language of the elephants. Example word: "how" = stop. A short, short magic word. If a mahout has an elephant when it was small, every day the elephant remembers the face of the owner. The elephant can only remember him. He uses the same word every day to train the elephant. The elephant can remember what the mahout says.

There is no choice about my career, I love elephants, I have a close relationship with elephants. If I could change, I would be an elephant owner because I love elephants. A mahout and an elephant can rely on each other. I feed and train the elephant every day.

I finished high school.

Yes we need to conserve elephants for elephants to live with us for a long time. It is difficult to feed the elephants if you do not have time. It is better to work at a tourist camp to find food for the elephant. Better than walking around with elephant begging for food. Without a camp the mahout must stay with the elephant all the time and there is no time to go get food while you are watching the elephant.

The elephant is a useful animal. The way we use the elephant to move timber etc. is just work - not to punish the elephant. Just to teach to work - they have a big body. They can work just like humans.

If the elephant is too fat – crazy and lazy and hard to control. If he elephant eats much it will become lazy. It can run too fast and be hard to control. It wants to sleep and be left alone.

I don't know about the Thai elephant numbers - if they are up or down. We need to make more space for elephants. A mahout has skills to look after all the elephants, not the owner. Now we train a new mahout to look after the elephant because he needs a new mahout to take care. Sometimes he goes out and away from the elephant. If the number of elephants goes down, the number of mahouts may go down also.

The job doesn't make a lot of money. I am proud to be a mahout. We can earn money for our labor.

The elephants can come from forest to eat farmer plantation – there is not enough food for elephants to eat. If we free them, they can eat.

Being a mahout is not a career. Maybe he will change his future to be something else. - he jokes that he would like to be a district official.

In the tsunami, I don't think they should use the elephants to bring the dead bodies. Too unstable – the ground and rubble. Danger for the elephant.

He has many skills with the elephant and a close relationship with them and many things connected to them.

He would like to make a little more money, but he's proud to be a mahout. [He changes his mind.]

[Elephant routine] I wake up in the morning, look at the elephant, see how it feels, need to take a bath, is it ill?. I bring the water to the elephant for drinking. First, I see if it's sick, is it hungry? Did it go to the toilet or not? I put the people back pack on. Before trekking, the elephants get in a

line to pick up tourists. They then go elephant trekking. Come back from trekking, I look at the weather, see if the elephant sprays water on her back then I know the elephant needs to take a shower. The elephant takes a shower three or four times a day. I look at the food. If food is left or not. I give the elephant more food. Elephants eat all time.

I have many feelings about my elephant. I feel pity like a son, a friend - I cannot describe. Some are lazy and you want to hit them, She is like a child – like when I need to punish her. I compare an elephant to a friend, a mother-sometimes elephant works hard and takes care of the business and obeys us.

My elephant gets along with all the elephants.

I would get one elephant if I had money. I would get one female elephant. I would just feed her and we could stay together. If I had a male elephant, he would work. For a small (young) elephant, you must have lots of time to train her. I would like an older one who already knows me, what the mahout wants, one who already has been trained, one who already knows the commands.

Every mahout loves every elephant, especially a male elephant with long tusks. For a mahout who stays with elephant a long time, no need to have a beautiful elephant. Just one elephant so they can live together for a long time. I would have a lot of elephants if I could. You always want more elephants if you have one. More, more elephants. If you have one elephant, you want two elephants.

If you want to get a new one you cannot just have money. People don't just sell elephants to anybody. It's not like just going shopping. You can only sell an elephant to a friend or relative (to

your own children). For mahout, if he wants to sell the elephant, he must make sure that people who are buying the elephant are responsible to take care of the elephant and can keep them. Must be sure they can keep a male elephant, can keep a female elephant. Just to keep an elephant - not for work.

Rich people get elephants to show other people you have power and they can look at you.

Our country is an agricultural society. We have a close relationship with animals--especially with elephants. More examples cow, water buffalo, pig, etc. It's different from you and your society.

Some owners who sell their elephants may not have time, no one to look after to take care of the elephant. So, they want to sell it to anybody.

If a millionaire wants it, you don't sell it to them. They don't know how to take care of elephant, how to walk, how to talk, how to train. Like you. The owner would not sell the elephant if he did not know how to take care of the elephant.

In Thailand tradition, no women were mahouts. Some kind of work woman cannot do. Woman stayed in the home cooking, cleaning, looking after babies. For old people in country, people pay respect to elephant first before going on the elephant's back because elephant and Royal family, Buddha. Thailand people do not eat elephant meat. We burn the elephant if it dies. We can eat dog or cat.

To tell if elephant is well cared for: You observe it is a thin or fat. Does it play with its food or does it eat it? Observe the elephant has more poop today or less poop from the day before?

[Communication with elephants] Speak everyday. Sometimes use magic words to make elephant understand clearly. Sometimes no need to use it. For example sometimes elephant will not obey human language, so you use the elephant language. "MA MA MA MA" come on, and we use the magic word to make the elephant come. If someone who is not a mahout uses the magic words, it won't work. But if you are a mahout and you can say it in the right tone, they can obey. You can use the words with domestic elephant but wild elephants may understand. You meet elephant in the forest, if you are a mahout, every elephant can understand who is trained These are the commands I use the most.

- Muek = Come
- How=Stop
- Pei (in Surin = Bin) = Turn
- Som Reart = lay down
- Don = stand up, get up

[How elephants communicate with you?] Many elephants cry if mahout is angry. Elephant can make a little purr noise if elephant knows mahout is angry. If elephant is unhappy, the mahout knows. Some elephants if they hear another animal under the ground, (like snake) they use their trunk to hit the ground. Two of the elephants are scared of snakes etc. and will start to make noise in the night and they have to go over and calm them down or all the elephants will start trumpeting.

There are three times elephants will try to kill mahout. When they are very hungry, when they are too hot and when male elephant in musth and the mahout will not let them near a female elephant.

Elephants stay with us for food (like a dog or cat), and we make elephants scared of us. They have a close relationship with us. They don't want to run away from us. They remember our smell. For example when a mahout goes away for a long time and he meets elephant again and elephant can know the mahout. If a person who is not a mahout wants to ride the elephants back, its not the same as between a mahout and the elephant.

Mahout can speak with elephant.

You cannot use a baby elephant to work. A baby elephant is just for show. A mahout can use elephants to move things for local people. Most mahouts want to keep and feed the long tailed male elephants. A white elephant is the best one. Most people want the white elephant. I love a beautiful girl with a long tail.

Once in a while, put food, water aside for elephants. New mahout to take care. There must be a place with food, and water and a long chain so elephant can take care of itself. Food like bamboo must be there.

He has the same habits as other mahouts, but some mahouts give a lot of bananas to their elephants. Every elephant is different. Some eat pineapples and some don't. A mahout should take time to observe and look after the elephants. A special thing for the elephant is a bag of bananas or a special snack.

To register elephants properly: there is a photo of the elephant sent to the animal ministry to identify. Most people do register their elephant. You put down the identifying characteristics and give to the forest ministry and they give an ID to the owner. The elephants here have a microchip in their ear. You must show the ID card to buy or sell them.

[He was 18 when he started to mahout. He makes 3500 baht with free housing. He did not think it was a good idea to use elephants for the tsunami clean-up because the elephants could get hurt on the unstable debris.]

Kama

Brief Biography – the head mahout at a tourist camp. He grew up in the mid-southern part of Thailand, near the border with Burma. He trains the elephants to do tricks. He is in his thirties. His father was a mahout -- it is his only profession.

Interview

30 years old. [He used to be the mahout of an elephant. He was promoted to the head mahout this past year.]

His father was a mahout. He became one after his father. He finished middle school at the sixth grade. He is too old to study. He has no money. He has a family to look after.

[He is a mahout] because he has no knowledge for other jobs. He only knows about elephant. He cannot stay without a job.

He is better with elephants than when he began. His relationship with elephants is better. It is good to keep the job he is at. All mahouts don't care about the money. They prefer to work with elephants. He is chief of the mahouts. He wants all mahouts to love elephants from their hearts not for tips from the tourists.

He loves all elephants and to take care of all the elephants. He wants the government to conserve elephants. We bring elephants to this company not for torture, not for cruelty, but for working and to give them food. We can help each other - human and elephants. In Thailand there is less nature. It is hard to find food in a forest. We can find food for them in this company. I want the elephants to live in Thailand forever and for the mahouts to have a lot of money and a bright future. The elephant is a symbol of Thailand so we need to conserve the elephant. My plan to save the elephant is to feed them, look after them all the time, and if neighbors need them to move a timber or work, we can do it. Just to help out neighborhood people who need help, who need an elephant.

The future for elephant is the same as now, continue the same thing.

[Elephants don't kill us because] elephants love mahouts. Elephants are thinking all the time. You can see it in their eyes. The Relationship between elephant and human closer and closer every day. [He uses the baby elephant hitting a tour guide as example of thinking.]

[Why does the family no longer own the elephant?] It is the high costs.

I would like to own and elephant but I have no money to buy one.

Our government should do something now not later.

Mandy

Brief Biography – a Western zookeeper who came to Thailand for professional development. She wants to become an elephant keeper in the West. In Thailand, she works with elephants at a tourist camp. She is the mahout of an elderly female elephant.

Interview

A mahout spends more time with his elephant than with his wife. When he is with his elephant, the wife and kids clean up after the elephant to. When mahout comes home with his elephant at night, quite often the kids get up on the elephant with their father to a river to learn about taking care of the elephant. When the kids get older, they will just take the elephant. The separation of tusks on an elephant has never been done before. It is happening to two elephants. The movement at the top is minimal, but the movement at the bottom is more.

There are about 6,000 elephants in Thailand – 4,000 domesticated and 2,000 in the wild. There is not enough habitat to sustain the 2,000 in the wild. They are dying more quickly than breeding in wild. If its left like that, they will end up being extinct. A lot of elephant people have one or two elephants, and they don't necessarily breed. Then the elephant can't work so then there is no income. By him having a breeding program, he is insuring the elephants have a future on earth

Sam

Brief Biography – a Western mahout who began his apprenticeship with baby elephants. He went back to visit and took a job as a mahout. He is in his thirties and previously worked in a record store in the West. He is currently the mahout of a male elephant.

Interview

Sam was asked to come and work with a particular elephant. Another mahout stayed with him at first. Sam learned by mimicking and watching. Then he just learned by trying. The elephant was used to just anybody taking care of and he just listened out of habit. His elephant is 43 years old. The elephant never attacked him. He has been his mahout for two years. His wages are enough for cigarettes and phone calls home. When he was little he loved elephants he thought they were mythical magical animals, gentle, intelligent, with a sense of humor and a family bond, from a time gone past. They look like an animal from another place. Sam's background was in illustration and sound engineering but he didn't want to finish his training. He loves this job. He doesn't like telling the elephant what to do, putting a chain around his leg. However, they are necessary parts of the job. He believes in the project, it will only get better and better. He loves to be responsible for the elephant's welfare.

Its hard to tell an animal 16 years older that you and two times your size what to do. Doesn't seem right.

Elephants don't want attention like a dog they would rather be off with the exception of some elephants that are brought up by humans. They get medical care and a chance for survival. We get more out of it. You can tell an elephant is well cared for: good weight, eat well, soft skin, healthy all over, the look in its eyes here versus the camp down the road. In two to three years of tender loving care my elephant came back to life. Male elephants stubborn unpredictable aggressive and must solitary. Females easier to work with, more timid, gentler. Babies hyperactive with the need to nap. Adults just like to eat, shower, and hang out. Babies are we looking for trouble during the day. Sam used to be responsible for cutting grass. Elephants chained to an area with food. Now brings food with a truck pay other people. Elephant here

eat fruit etc. Wash the elephant. Next "elephant time." The rules are that the elephant stays on property, out of some areas and gets medical treatment.

Daily routine: See if the elephants eat everything in the morning. Sam gets up, takes his elephant off his chain and sees where he goes. I let him go where he wants unless he's going some where he shouldn't. He doesn't like the other elephants too much. I let him finish an area. He gets into the river, drinks and showers. I take him some snacks. He hangs out I stop him from doing bad things. Most mahouts feel the need to be more in control. I let him pick the spot.

Every mahout has their own way. From the past in trekking or in logging there needed to be more control. My elephant doesn't lay in the river. He gets scrubbed down on top. I look for sunburn, parasites. Once a week or every two weeks. I check under his belly and for infected cuts. Here there's not so many foot problems (they are walking on natural areas). They rub off their own dry skin. Elephants know how to take care of themselves.

The future of mahoutship is declining. It doesn't hold esteem, no sense of community. Men are mahouts. Women stay and cook, knowledge is passed down. There's a science to it. Sometimes people are mahouts for the lack of other skills. Elephant knowledge without being brutal the pressure points this is disappearing here. Elephants are now a business tool for the most part. Don't care. Could be a kid on the street given a hook and then they go. There is very little pride right now in being a mahout. If there was a sense of pride it would be better and try to make them proud. In Thailand the elephant situation is not very good. Unless something major is done quickly, there's not enough to sustain a population. Elephants are broken into different camps and this is not sustainable. Elephants have only 50 to 100 years to live. The biggest problem is the loss of habitat. The government is not interested in creating room. The government must set

aside land. There should be a cross border area like in Africa for all the wild elephants in one area to self sustain and grow. For domestic elephants there should be a reintroduction program for whatever ones can go. The reintroduction program in Lampang is not big enough. People are still illegally taking elephants out of the wild. Many domesticated elephants are not interested in breeding. Females in the wild live to 80 or 90 years old. In trekking, they live from 50 to 60 years old. The training process for two year olds – 50 percent may get out of it 50 percent of them go crazy. It is illegal to train babies outside of the Lampang Government Center. Another mahout is the best mahout here. [He speaks only Burmese fluently.]

APPENDIX 3**Select Field Journal Entries**

March 6 I landed in Bangkok. Later that morning, I left the hotel to look for street elephants. I wanted to go to Patpong (the area with a night market and all the infamous sex shows) to find the street elephants. When I asked a taxi driver to take me there, he wouldn't. Part of the reason was that I look so young, and he was an older man. He thought I had no business there. He explained that the government crack down on the elephants in Bangkok left none on the street at night. If I wanted to find them, I would have to look in shopping areas in the day time. A Thai student who I was in email contact with told me the same thing so I believed him. I was happy to not go to Patpong anyway. I went to a shopping area the next day, only to find no elephants. I asked around and no one had seen elephants.

March 7 I left for the first interview early in the morning by train. I arrived at the tourist ride elephant park that takes people around the ruins on an elephant back. I was at the wrong part of the business. The tuk tuk driver took me on to the right part of the camp, about 20 minutes from the tourist center. I arrived early, which turned out to be a good thing. I found a group of people sitting on a shady porch. The man was the elephant owner. A Western zookeeper was there to further her career and become an elephant keeper. A quiet tusked elephant stood near the porch, eating. The man was tinkering with a machine. At this camp were lots of baby elephants, a grandma elephant, elephant dung cooking, and elephant dung paper being made. There was an area for the elephants to socialize, the area for the mahouts to live, a river, an elephant nursery. The elephant nursery is just an area divided up with metal bars, about waist high that divide the space into rooms for each mother and baby.

A kind woman sat in to translate for him, but left about a half hour into the discussion. I could understand him best if no one tried to translate. I didn't know how to communicate that broken English is my second language. They were being so helpful and protective of the man. After the interview, the zookeeper and her partner kindly spent the day showing me around. They were basically managing the camp with the help of a couple of the mahouts. In the afternoon, a gasoline fire broke out from some machinery. Everyone was scared it was going to blow up, so they moved the elephants away from it and left me with the grandma elephant. They told me if it blows, to get out of her way because she is going to run. I could not believe this was just the first day of a whole month. I was scared to death, alone – half-way across the world with my life flashing before my eyes. The fire burnt itself out, started again and then died out. Camp returned to normal – or as normal as that camp with many elephants, lots of mahouts, their families, and the occasional royal visit, can get. The Westerners bought me lunch, and even ordered vegetarian for me. I met a fine baby elephant I liked quite a bit. I played with him, shoving him like I'd seen baby elephants do to each other in the wild on TV. When I got shoved back, it hurt. I stopped.

The Westerners took me off to the bus to Bangkok. When I got there, I ran into the hotel, grabbed my luggage and got on the night train to Lampang. I didn't get a shower – I smelled worse than I ever had in my life. It was the elephant spit.

March 8 I arrived at the camp for mahout classes. I got a crash course in a busy office. Then we were given suits, a sheet with the schedule and the commands. They took me to my room. I was so tired and stinky that I was not very friendly. I fell asleep on the bench in front of my occupied room. Finally I was able to settle in. Class began at 1pm. We began by standing near the mahout and their elephant assigned to us, and from then on we were mahouts. We just had to get up on the elephant and ride. We had to learn mostly from the folks in the group who were

on their second or third day of training. The mahouts spoke very little English. I enjoyed my three days with the 2 Philadelphians (one guy was going blind but still bravely riding) and the girl from Nagoya, Japan.

March 9 Our mahout day began at 6:30am when we went to the forest to pick up the elephant where they were chained up and feeding. The mahout would unchain her and then I would get on her. We would walk back from the forest and I would be on her back. At first the mahout was on her with me. Once he felt secure, he left me up there alone. I was a little scared, like when you first ride a bike with no training wheels. I had no idea I could have that feeling twice in a lifetime. We would take her to the training ground where they would do the tourist show. We would watch them take a bath and then go up to see the show and the "graduating" tourists in the show to see what we would be doing the next day. Then we would practice a bit. This was fairly traumatic for me. I have the arm strength of a flea and a butt as heavy as a gorilla's. I couldn't pull myself up without my mahout's help. What made it worse was that I was so sore from the day before, I could hardly move my legs. I respected the mahout's physical strength quite a bit after this. They are small but super strong. Then it was time for lunch. After lunch we would go back to practice. My elephant was a painter, a musician, and a pig. The other elephants were not nearly as greedy as my girl. This meant that she moved her head quite a bit in search of snacks. The snacks could be high in a tree, down a steep slope, into the bleachers or in another elephant's mouth. This was a scary thing from the perspective of the back of her neck. Her head would jerk around all the time making me feel like I was on an amusement park ride. She didn't seem to mind having me on her, as long as she was free to snack. In the afternoon, all the students took a regular elephant back ride on a bench. I found that scarier than being on the neck.

When we walked the elephants back to the forest for the night, my mahout took me in the river, because I kept begging to be in the water with the elephant. To be on an elephant back with her trunk up out the water was so exciting, I wasn't even paying attention to my own safety. I just knew I was on an elephant submarine! The mahout hung onto my mahout suit's back quite well. He even poked me by accident with the hook trying to make sure I didn't fall in the river and get kicked inadvertently! The hook didn't hurt so bad. He said I had tough skin like an elephant.

When we walked the elephants back to the forest for the night, I had to sit on the chains on the elephant's neck. It was uncomfortable at first, but later was OK. The elephant would even help the mahout pull in the chain or move it around – imagine an elephant assisting in its own captivity! Our class had dinner together and then almost fell asleep as we sat on the dinner mat on the floor. By 8:30 we would all be going to bed. Mahoutship makes you tired.

March 10 In the morning we went to get the elephants. We would walk past the cows. My mahout thought it was funny to irritate the cows with the elephant. Many cows do not like elephants and many elephants do not like cows. He also thought it was funny to make her run. Also on our way was the mahout development center with all the baby elephants in front. I would fantasize about riding a tiny elephant, not this giant girl with a penchant for hard-to-reach snacks. Later I would learn that the center is the only legal place to train a baby elephant. Once we came back with the elephant, we were in the elephant show. We got up on our elephants after their bath and got in the line. Our elephants held onto each other, tail to trunk. We circled around the tourist show ground. Thank goodness I was not required to get up on the elephant in front of everyone! I think the mahout was tired of lifting me up and he may have been sensitive to my sense of shame. My elephant's show solo was to show how an elephant could put a hat on a person. Even though I had been on her back for three days, I still did not feel comfortable with her. After the show, all the mahouts and students take their elephants to get snacks from the audience. I always felt safe when my elephant was eating from one place. I knew she would

stay kind of still. It was fascinating to be on the back of the elephant while the tourists fed them. They turn the tourist into the spectacle. It struck me as something from a novel. We each got a certificate and a hook keychain and the program was over.

March 11 I went to my next interview by car to another city.

March 12 The interview continued the next day over lunch.

March 13 I left by bus to the next city for my next interview the next day. That evening, I interviewed an anthropologist who had spent a lot of time with the Kuay people. He brought up many good questions I had not even imagined to ask about the situation of humans and elephants.

March 14 I interviewed a conservationist in her office. The interview took place in a lively room full of tourists. She gave me a t-shirt and chose the color to match my outfit. There was a woman there who was leaving the camp but was writing a check towards an operation for one of the people at the camp who was going blind. She said he shouldn't be going blind because he needed a simple operation. I think she was trying to get me to donate, or she was just talking to me because I could understand (You get that way after a while, just happy to be understood about anything). After the interview, she took me to camp for the day. I couldn't help but like the place. I tried to remain objective though. I went up with a man from Idaho and a woman from England and two Australians. On the way, we picked up bags and bags of pineapple and corn. It was all tourist chat in the van until I got the girl from England to start telling her crazed adventure stories of how she went to Sierra Leone and more. When we arrived at the camp, they were planting a garden. The girl from England and I helped to plant it. We were given inpatients to plant! Not natives! The gardener was a boss though, so I couldn't really do anything

but plant and hope he wasn't going to replant everything we did. We planted next to the Burmese women who had a great time staring at us, wondering what we were doing there. The guy from Idaho came over and planted too. He asked the British girl what she was planting with. It was the bottom of a chair leg. She said it with a British accent and he thought it was a Thai word and repeated it exactly the same until he took a good look at it. Then we all busted out laughing. It did work quite well though! We were planting a sitting area. The conservationist was planting orchids with an American woman who clearly had been there for some time. The elephants kept trying to sneak over the fence to the grass area that was planted for their food. I left for Bangkok that same day because I already bought the ticket and my friend was waiting in Bangkok. I wanted to stay longer.

March 15 I was in Bangkok to visit my friend. I got lucky and called another elephant owner. He said he could meet me on the 17th.

March 16 Relaxing in Bangkok.

March 17 I met the next owner at the World Trade Center in Bangkok. I wasn't feeling well and wasn't at my best for the interview. He was clearly tired of researchers, but still had hope someone could help the elephants. I got on the night train, second class sleeper back to another interview.

March 18 I was back in the same city I had visited a few days before to meet a conservationist. I also lucked out and met another one at the same time. A Japanese student was interviewing them that same day. Our interview times accidentally overlapped. The second conservationist was a real elephant guy through and through. He drove me back to the city I was staying in and told me lots about mahouts. He worked with them for many years and has a healthy respect for

them. I would like to take a class with him. I regretted I could not spend a whole summer just following him around.

March 19 I called to get back to the camp I had left before returning to Bangkok. It was too late to go on the tour for the day. They said I could come tomorrow.

March 20 I took a local train to there. People got on and off the train with all sorts of food that I didn't recognize and lots of orchids.

March 21 The tour company van picked me up. I was like a boomerang coming back. I went up there with two volunteers I had met before. When I got there I got to know one of the volunteers well because I lived next door to her in the tree house. She was great. We would help unload the pineapples and corn and shuck corn. This day I got an interview with a mahout. We sat on the porch after he came in for dinner and from chaining up his elephant for the night. He was very relaxed in the interview. He took me to see the elephant afterwards. He was a bit reluctant about taking me because the elephant had acted up with other tourists. He was OK with me. The elephant had a healed broken leg. He was hit by a semi. When cars came up to the park, he would start to head the other way. Poor giant sweetie. He seemed a little magical at night. Actually, all elephants and the mountains have a very special way about them at night. Elephants sleep about four hours a night. I didn't see that. I did see them at night from my treehouse. I was sensing something was going on I couldn't see.

March 21 This day we shoveled elephant poo and it was great quiet. There were no new tourists. There was just me and my neighbor working. We watched the elephants take a bath. I went and snuck some of the elephant's pineapple from the mahouts preparing it for them. My neighbor told me I should have helped the mahouts before taking it. I know for next time. I think they cut it

up so there is more to go around. Another volunteer showed me how fascinating it is to watch elephants take the top part off the pineapple and eat the rest. There is nothing like fresh pineapple. I went riding on an elephant (a former circus elephant and beggar). She was so different from my training elephant. My neighbor encouraged me to "get back in the saddle" since I was so scared from my training elephant. I did it and it was fine, except for when the mahout was heading toward a steep hill. I got off. She was a great elephant to ride. We had also seen another volunteer and her grandma elephant out there. She was so happy with that elephant. I often wondered if I when I was old, I would be like her. She would say, "I just want one ele to take care of". The buffet at that camp was stellar. My neighbor noted that the elephants get more snacks depending on how many tourists are there. Then a whole new load of tourists arrived. The entire tempo of the day changed. We ate our buffet dinner. Jewelry was displayed for tourists to buy. The buffet dinner was hilarious. If you leave the covers off the food too long, you have to pick the June bugs out of it! I got a roommate from Canada. She was a chemist working on some enzyme and she was an elephant junkie.

A stud elephant lay down in the middle of the day. This is a warning sign of elephant sickness. He lived just outside our treehouse. It horrified us. My neighbor ran to get anyone to help. After a little while, he got back up. Then he went down again. They called the vet to come tomorrow. The next day, he was fine. We all stared long and hard at him from our porch, worrying. A human's heart can drop right along with the elephant's body. He was a rental stud elephant too. If he would have died, the camp would have had to pay.

At the end of a long day for them, I interviewed the mahout of one girl elephant. The camp manager kindly translated.

March 22 I left the camp. My neighbor told me she wished I would stay longer. She was staying for a month. I guess lots of tourists don't work when they go to the camp. My neighbor knew I'd shovel poo every day with her. She was interested in my research as well. I left with another volunteer. Her leaving was a big deal at the camp. She was a mahout to a grandma elephant, but some human politics got involved and someone else had the job. There was something heart-broken and bad about the whole thing. In the car she noted how much she loved the initiative Thai people have and the creativity they put into their work. I got on the plane to my next set of interviews.

March 23 I arrive at the airport in the new city. I hurried to the park the next morning to look for the woman who emailed me. I see a mahout I knew from my last trip (when I spent many mornings washing elephants with them). He waves me in. I was trying to be official and to speak with the woman, but this time I am a friend. These mahouts are like cousins to me. Over the next few days, I got to know lots of people at the tour company. They are a very kind group of people.

March 24 I get up at 5am and walk to the park to wash the elephants. One mahout lets me ride his sweet elephant. He is surprised I can get her to go, but is happy. He has no problem with a girl on an elephant. The mahouts tell me how business is not so good. The company split and the other half of the company got the route that takes the tourists to the scenic area. All they had left was a short trail through a patch of jungle that was steadily getting encroached on by summer homes. They would be moving the whole operation to a coconut plantation in a couple months. I felt badly for them at first. As the days went on, they got more and more busy and I didn't feel as bad. I took a songthaew back to the hotel, but the driver decided I was like his pretend best friend for the morning and took me around to get breakfast from his favorite spot,

help a woman whose motorbike was broken and more. After I told this to the mahouts the next day they laughed and made sure someone from the camp took me home each day.

March 25 I get up early and walk to wash elephants. I went for elephant ride with two mahouts I knew from last year with the other tourists. It was weird to see them against the backdrop of the tourists. They took a tourist picture of me on the elephant. They are very funny. I was so happy to not just be on an elephant, but to be getting to know the drivers. I think lots of people would like to know about their profession. If only they spoke English! They wouldn't let me pay for it.

In the evening, I sat on the porch with the mahouts. They told me about Thai ghosts, the bad parts of Thailand and their fascinating hometowns. They were such a fun group. I just did not know that they would only get more fun. I probably should have been writing.

I am beginning to get to know the tour guides. One of them remembered me from last year. I am the girl who washes the elephants. She translated the letter I sent them. The mahouts thought I was crazy that I would take a three day class and think I could be a mahout.

March 26 I am walking to wash the elephants and these dogs start to chase me. I was scared of taking the motorbike taxi until this moment. When the dogs were chasing me in the quiet, deserted morning, I hopped on the first motorbike that went by. I washed elephants. I interviewed one of the mahouts. That night I went to out with the tour guides. No mahouts came.

March 27 I washed the elephants, went to the beach and came back to interview mahouts. The arrangements I made with the tour guide who volunteered to translate, were misunderstood. I went to the store with a tour guide who was now my friend.

March 28 I washed the elephants. After, I interviewed two of the mahouts. I sat by the friendly elephant and the baby elephant. Two mahouts are sitting there. A load of tourists pours in. A woman sits down next to me. She is from Australia. I introduce the mahouts to her. They look at me like I am crazy. They probably regret letting me know they speak English. They disappear to leave me with the tourist who then is asking me questions about elephants having babies, etc. The mahouts watch me from far away talking about me. I don't know why they were so shocked to be in the tourist's world. It was the strangest thing. I am surprised they ever talked to me in the first place, after I see this reaction.

March 29 I washed elephants. My tour guide friend takes me to the airport and gives me a shirt like the tour guides wear, and tells me next time I come back, I am staff. I leave for another city. In my stop in Bangkok, luckily I found the name of the program while I am between planes. This was by the skin of my teeth. There is only one internet terminal in the Bangkok airport, and I somehow got it and found the exact place and man I was looking for. I landed in the new city, to meet a nice man and his wife. We walked out of the airport to see a fleet of Mercedes and a million soldiers. It turns out the Prince was coming in soon after me. I really had no idea where I was geographically. The landscape was something I had never seen before. It was flat for miles and miles with orange soil and bright green trees mixed in with lots of parched, skinny trees. As we drove, it was like Ontario's landscape, only all rice fields. We arrived to their home. They had an American kitchen, but I think they still preferred to cook outside. My host made a special frog dish for me. I think he didn't understand I was vegetarian. I faked like it was too spicy and ate all the fish I could bear to eat (but it was delicious, so it wasn't too hard).

March 30 I went around looking for elephants with my host. We found a few. It was very kind of him to do that for me. I went to the forest temple because another researcher recommended I

go take a look around. It was very interesting. I met the monk and the temple dancers showed me around. This was a piece of forest saved by having the temple there. He had a bull elephant. There were elephant statues and elephant bones. A man on a trip stopped there to get a blessing. My host is surprised I walk to the temple. They are very motorbike dependent there. The village is like a tiny island among rice fields. My host took me to the elephant museum, explained a few things, told me not to touch the elephant catching rope because as a woman, I would give it bad luck, and went on his way. The museum included some panels with pictures on them. Some of the pictures were falling off. The captions were all in Thai. They had all the elephant capturing supplies. There was an elephant skull, and a dead baby elephant in formaldehyde.

I was not there for an interview. My host even made some joke about how the academics all get out their notebook and their tape recorder.

I spent time with a famous elephant's mahout and his grandkids. I was drawing the elephant and so I offered the kids pencil and paper. They were really timid about asking for anything. Thai people have a lot of respect for other people's things. We drew elephants. It was too hot to move. When we were done, I went back home and one little boy followed me on his bike. He looked up at me and talked to me in Thai or maybe Kuay. He was telling me paragraphs. It was something about the elephant drawings. It was something I should have suspected. All children act the same. I think I was just suffering from heat stroke. I got him to follow me back to the place I was staying. The boy and his brother sat down in a chair together. My host asked them what they wanted. They would not speak. Then somehow I understood that the little boy did not get a drawing from me. His brother did, but he didn't. So I drew him one. Then there were all the neighborhood kids. They drew for me, and I drew for them. Everyone wanted one. They would pick out pictures from the children's book made about their village and have me draw them.

They were certainly not my best work. I had sweat through my clothes, my stomach hurt, I was in a world unlike any other. They weren't going to let me go in the house. The family was surprised to see the whole neighborhood in the front yard. They asked me back as a teacher. I liked that family so much. The neighborhood kids wanted nothing to do with learning English, but they would teach me Thai.

March 31 I just stayed around the house because I was too hot to move any further. I had lunch with my host's mother - the best lunch I have had in a very long time. She explained about all the food without English and we ate till our mouths were on fire. My host's kind wife took me around on her moped to see the weaving ladies everywhere with their kids around them and chickens wandering. Some have an elephant in the backyard. I regret I cannot speak Thai because I can see she is very funny.

At the airport, my hosts met a group of people they knew. Two were mahouts. One was leaving the country. I spent time with the mahout after my hosts left. He didn't seem nervous about leaving. He had been a mahout in other countries as well. I landed back in Bangkok. The next day, I went to the National Elephant Museum and a puppet show. Then, I left for Detroit.

APPENDIX 4

Groups involved in elephants and their missions

Asian Elephant Foundation

1. Through research and proper organisation, the Asian Elephant Foundation of Thailand will supplement and support various official, educational, private and public bodies in their efforts to assist in the efficient and far reaching preservation of wild elephants both in Thailand and beyond.
2. The Asian Elephant Foundation of Thailand will improve the general quality of life for captive elephants by creating an environment conducive to good physical and mental health.
3. The foundation will supplement and support coexistence between humans and elephants living in both captivity and the wild.
4. The foundation will act as a database and centre for documents and reference materials involving Asian elephants. This is in order to promote a proper understanding of elephants and to encourage an exchange of information and dissemination of knowledge to the public which will arouse consciousness and goodwill.
5. The foundation will supplement services and welfare assistance to people whose livelihoods involve elephants by working to preserve traditions and trades which rely culturally and professionally on working with elephants.
6. The foundation will impartially raise funds from individuals and organisations or institutions which are interested in helping elephants. It will also proceed in distributing these funds to various projects for the greatest benefit to elephants and will ensure that these funds are spent according to the patrons' wishes.
7. The foundation will act as a centre for studies and research in order to arrange and transfer technology to facilitate the conservation and management of elephants in Thailand and beyond.

"Goals". Asian Elephant Foundation. 12 February 2006.
<http://www.asian-elephant.org/default_e.shtml>.

Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Center

AERCC was established in March 1998 to undertake applied research and direct field conservation activities pertaining to the Asian elephant and its habitat. The current activities include field surveys of elephant distribution, mapping habitats and identifying important "corridors" that are under threat, maintaining records of elephant mortality and the ivory trade, studies relating to elephant-human conflicts including ecological studies and possible remedial measures to mitigate such conflicts, and compilation of a technical manual on the management of captive elephants. AERCC has also conducted and has assisted in the conduct

of workshops and training programs on issues relating to elephant conservation in India and elsewhere.

"Organisation Profile". Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Center. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.asiannature.org/history.html>>.

Ayutthaya Elephant Camp

A group of dedicated individuals with a lifelong love for elephant, concerned about the problems facing these magnificent creatures, founded the Ayutthaya Elephant Camp in 1996 to provide homes for elephants forced to earn a living in the streets of Bangkok. Today, these same elephant work giving rides to tourists on the site of the ancient palace at beautiful Pha Nakhon Sri Ayutthaya Historical Park.

This innovative project to help working elephants was developed with the cooperation of the Elephant Care Assembly over the past 3 years. The Assembly is an organization of people who care about elephants, and who work alongside them in a variety of capacities every day.

"Message from Ayutthaya Elephant Camp." Ayutthaya Elephant Camp. 12 February 2006. <http://www.saveelephant.com/news/message_eng1.htm>.

Eleaid

To promote the preservation and conservation for the public benefit of the Asian Elephant through, but not limited to, education and the promotion of research into such conservation and the dissemination of the results of such research.

"Objectives" Eleaid. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.eleaid.com>>.

Elephant Alliance Project

The Elephant Alliance project, with help from government and private enterprise organizations, is determined to keep life in Trakarn much the way it has always been. A bid to keep man, his elephant, and village life intact to help villagers maintain their way of life and earn a livelihood through cultural tourism. "We don't want them moving to cities to perform in shows. We want to support them in their chosen way of life so they may preserve their unique way of living. Where we can help is in providing the motivation to bring this about and that's what our project is all about," concluded Mr. Pittaya.

"The Elephant Village" Circle of Asia. 12 February 2006.
<<http://www.circleofasia.com/Elephants-in-Thailand-The-Elephant-Village.htm>>.
Group Web site (in Thai): <http://www.elephantalliancethailand.com/>

Elephant Nature Park

1. Sanctuary for endangered species: We provide homes for these animals as well as contributing to their welfare and development. By liaising with like minded

Conservation and Environmentalist groups, NGO's (Non Government Organisations) and other interested parties we are able to keep abreast of the latest techniques in health care and resource management.

2. Rain Forest Restoration: One of the most exciting developments at the park is our programme of tree planting the surrounding area. The ecological balance of plants and animals will be encouraged by the re-introduction of the rain forest. Some 25 acres of the mountainside will be planted every year for the first 5 years.
3. Cultural Preservation: To maintain, as much as possible, the cultural integrity of the local community. By creating employment and purchasing agricultural products locally we are assisting the villagers in sustaining their distinct culture. Park managers are recruited locally to oversee the park's progress.
4. Visitors Centre: To educate visitors, individuals, study groups, schools and interested parties. Emphasis on the plight of the endangered local species will be presented in an entertaining and constructive manner. Future phases will include audio / visual equipment and other modern educational aids. It is anticipated that small conferences and workshops will be organised at the park.
5. Act independently: of pressure groups and political movements that we consider contrary to the well being of the park and the creatures in its care.
 "Mission Statement". [Elephant Nature Park](http://www.elephantnaturepark.org/missionstatement.htm). 12 February 2006.
<http://www.elephantnaturepark.org/missionstatement.htm>.

Elephant Reintroduction Foundation

Support a systematic and effective approach to returning domestic elephant to the wild.

- Campaign for a better understanding and caring approach to elephant conservation
- Support review of law and regulations concerning proper protection and management of elephants
- Build international collaboration to solve elephant problems

"Background". Elephant Reintroduction Foundation. 12 February 2006.
<http://www.elephantreintroduction.org>.

Friends of the Asian Elephants

- To assist elephants to enjoy improved living conditions and eventually survive and adjust themselves within natural surroundings.
- To aid professionals related to elephants (raisers, researchers, vets etc.)
- To gather data on elephants.

- To publicize data and produce public reports on status of elephants and movements related there to.
- To undertake for a public cause or to collaborate with other charity organizations.
- To deal in no way with political affiliations.

"Foundation's Main Objectives" Friends of the Asian Elephant. 12 February 2006.
<http://www.elephant.tnet.co.th/index_23.1.html>.

National Elephant Institute

- To make To make the National Elephant Institute the main entity responsible for cooperation in conserving Thai Elephants.
- To establish standards for domestic elephant care, personnel and camp operators, and promote quality tourism and products.
- To cooperate in creating work for communities dealing with elephants and building medium-size non-governmental businesses that encourage self-improvement.
- To propose income and other guidelines for communities that keep elephants, so that they earn enough money and have enough space to keep elephants and sustain their career in tourism and at other legal jobs, rather than begging or illegal logging.

"Objectives." National Elephant Institute. 12 February 2006.
<<http://www.thailandelevator.org/eng/about02.php3>>.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), with more than a million members and supporters, is the largest animal rights organization in the world. Founded in 1980, PETA is dedicated to establishing and protecting the rights of all animals. PETA operates under the simple principle that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment.

PETA focuses its attention on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time: on factory farms, in laboratories, in the clothing trade, and in the entertainment industry. We also work on a variety of other issues, including the cruel killing of beavers, birds and other "pests," and the abuse of backyard dogs.

PETA works through public education, cruelty investigations, research, animal rescue, legislation, special events, celebrity involvement, and protest campaigns.

"PETA's Mission Statement." People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.peta.org/about/>>.

Thai Animals Guardians Association

Thai AGA is a non-profit organization concerned directly with animal rights and animal welfare in Thailand. Thai AGA aims to protect animals, promote kindness, and relieve animal suffering. Of all animals, commercial animals and pets are the closest and most dependent on humans. They also face the most risk of exploitation and cruelty. Strayed animals and disabled animals are direct results of pet neglect, which can lead to many health and social problems. Our assistance to animals is given through our three major areas of work: animal rescue (for animals in need of emergency relief); animal clinic (a less expensive alternative for pet owners, providing treatment to animals); and mobile clinic (providing neutering and spaying services to animal lovers to control the population of strays). Other work includes campaigns against elephants entering cities and dog skin and meat trade; as well as being a member of the drafting committee of the Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals Act.

"Thai Animal Guardian Association" Thai Animal Guardian Association. 12 February 2006. <http://www.thaiaga.org/about_Eng.htm>.

Thai Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The key current aims and objectives of the TSPCA are follows:

1. To instill in young people and the wider general public, a better understanding of animal needs and rights - encouraging a culture of kindness, care and understanding.
2. To provide education, accurate information, guidance and advice on animal care requirements.
3. To campaign in the prevention of cruelty to animals, and for improved legislation for their protection.
4. To work in collaboration, with other organisations, governmental and private, in Thailand, or internationally, in the achievement of similar aims.
5. To support first-hand animal 'careers' in their collective or individual work.

Not restricted in its work to the welfare and care of pets, the TSPCA has initiated, and is active in campaigns against cruelty to animals of all types, including wild animals such as monkeys, gibbons, bears and elephants, farmed and other commercial animals such as horses and logging elephants, and laboratory animals such as mice, rabbits and monkeys used in medical and pharmaceutical testing.

"Aims and Objectives." Thailand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.thaispca.org/english/aimsandobjective.htm>>.

Surin's Elephant Village

In order to support the livelihood of the villagers at Ban Ta Klang and to open up opportunities for education and tourism, the Surin local authorities designated Ban Ta Klang as a Tourist Village.

Source: Surin's Elephant Village Brochure

Treasure Our Elephants Fund: Foundation for the Conservation of Northern Elephants

The Treasure Our Elephants Fund - Foundation for the Conservation of Northern Elephants was established in July 1993 to provide continuing assistance to the population of elephants in the area – particularly the growing number that are in distress. At the same time, the Foundation has been working towards longer term solutions for the survival of the Asian elephant population in Thailand.

"Treasure our Elephants Fund" Treasure Our Elephants Fund. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.treasurethai elephants.org/about.html>>.

Wild Animal Rescue Foundation of Thailand

- Prevention, education and active campaigns against hunting and cruelty to wild animals.
- Rescue wild animals, especially those which are disabled or maltreated, and help them to spend the rest of their lives in a sanctuary in a natural environment.
- Seek assistance or advice from experts, both local and foreign to: train captive wild animals and their offspring to survive in the wild, train local and foreign people interested in wild animal rescue or conservation to be familiar with this work and encourage them to participate in the projects of the foundation.
- Promote conservation and the balance of nature with ecological systems essential to the survival of wild animals.
- Cooperate and coordinate with the Thai Government agencies or other organizations both local and foreign concerned with the rescue and conservation of wild animals, educate school children about their responsibilities in environmental conservation and preservation, and publicize these activities amongst the general public.
- Conduct activities and cooperate with other charitable organizations for the public benefit.

"War Objectives." Wild Animal Rescue Foundation Thailand. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.warthai.org/>>.

Wildlife Friends of Thailand

- Rescue wild animals from places where they are maltreated and/or neglected, and help them to spend the rest of their lives in a sanctuary as close to the natural environment as possible with the best possible care. In

particular, provide sanctuary for those animals that no-one else is prepared to care for, e.g. the sick and disabled.

- Educate people, particularly children, to stop cruelty to animals. In particular campaign against the illegal trade in wild animals for the pet industry and discourage the use of animals for entertainment, for example in performing animal shows.
- Prevent hunting and promote conservation of all natural resources, fauna and flora alike. Educate local people, tourists and the international community to appreciate, understand and protect wild animals and their rainforest habitat. Cooperate with and assist the Royal Forestry Department and other organizations concerned with the rescue and conservation of wild animals.
- Gather knowledge to start up a release program for those animals that qualify for re-introduction into the wild.
- Set up and join activities with other charitable organizations and authorities for the public benefit.

“Objectives”. Wildlife Fund of Thailand. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.wfft.org/>>.

World Wildlife Fund

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption

Our work covers many different areas - from policy work to campaigning, on-the-ground action to education and capacity building.

“Frequently Asked Questions”. World Wildlife Fund. 12 February 2006. <<http://www.panda.org/faq/response.cfm?hdnQuestionId=2372001359388>>.

APPENDIX 5

Thai Elephant Web site outline (See <http://www.is.wayne.edu/thaielephants>)

Welcome page: choice of tourists or owners, mahouts, advocates

Tourists

Explanation: This part of the Web site could be entirely separate or a part of the Tourism Authority of Thailand Web site. It would serve as a Web portal, a directory, to all the elephant tourism groups. The goal would be to increase elephant tourism. It would also be to let tourism groups know what the other groups are doing. It is a marketing tool for all the groups and a knowledge base for them.

Domestic Tourism Web site

Search

Type of tourism

- Trekking
- Hands-on
- Overnight
- Home stay
- Hospital
- Volunteering
- In Nature
- Shows
- Festival
- Museum
- Painting
- Music
- Education for Children
- Traditional Village
- Zoo
- Circus

Area of country

- All Thailand
- North
- Northeast
- Central
- South

Time of Year

- Year Round
- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- June

July
August
September
October
November
December

Results

Group/Company Name
Web address
Phone
Part of country offered
Time of Year offered

Wild Elephant Tourism Web site

Search

Type of tourism
Viewing
Safari Type
Overnight
Area of country
All Thailand
North
Northeast
Central
South

Results

Group/Company Name
Web address
Phone
Part of country offered

Owners, Advocates and Mahouts

Elephant Services

Search

Type of service
Veterinarian
Organic Food Grower
Food Delivery
Advocacy
Funding
Mahout training
Research
Cruelty Prevention
Government
Herbs/Medicine
Area of country
All Thailand
North
Northeast
Central
South

Results

Name
 Web address
 Email
 Phone
 Part of country offered

Elephant Census

Of course this section could only be possible with an elephant census. This could be simply two people traveling around the country taking a count. It would be additionally useful if they were registering the elephants, micro chipping them and sampling their DNA. Then, it could be funded in part by a scientific grant. At the same time, mahouts could be interviewed about their family history, elephant care methods, and uses of magic.

Goals:

1. To increase the transparency of elephant ownership. While this is something that large scale elephant owners will balk at, it is necessary for the survival of the elephants. However, if it means nonparticipation of the large scale elephant owners, then by all means the ownership portion should be filled in on the database for the government, but not accessible on the Web.
2. To be able to be used for breeding of the elephants. Knowledge of elephant family history may be being lost with the loss of mahouts. This requires further study. In any case, it would help to insure no inbreeding.
3. To be of use to researchers.

Search

Sex of elephant
 Age of elephant
 Birth date
 Name of elephant
 Previous/other Names
 Origin
 Medical History
 Distinctive Marks
 Microchip ID #
 Owner
 Owner address
 Owner Province
 Owner contact
 Address where elephant works
 Renter
 Renter address
 Renter contact
 Photo
 Known Relatives
 Work History
 Registered by
 Mother's Name

Father's Name
 Date Registered
 Nails
 Tusks
 Back
 Birthmarks
 DNA

Results

Sex of elephant
 Age of elephant
 Birthdate
 Name of elephant
 Previous/other Names
 Origin
 Medical History
 Distinctive Marks
 Microchip ID #
 Owner
 Owner address
 Owner Province
 Owner contact
 Address where elephant works
 Renter
 Renter address
 Renter contact
 Photo
 Known Relatives
 Work History
 Registered by
 Mother's Name
 Father's Name
 Date Registered
 Nails
 Tusks
 Back
 Birthmarks
 DNA
 Results

Mahout Search

This section would be useful to elephant owners looking for good mahouts. It would also help mahouts to find jobs – they could have more options in finding an owner that matches their needs.

Search

Name
 Age
 Years as mahout
 Any
 1
 2

3
4
5
6 to 10
11 to 20
20 or more
Training
Family
School
Specialty
Bulls
Cows
Calves
Mating
Former Employment
Languages Spoken
Any
Thai
English
Karen
Kuay
French
German
Preferred geographical area to work in
Any
North Thailand
South Thailand
Northeast Thailand
Central Thailand
Abroad
Results
Name
Age
Years as mahout
Training
Specialty
Former Employment
Languages Spoken
Preferred geographical area to work in

Name of Place	Services provided													Web site																				
	# of elephants					For Tourists													For Elephant Groups															
	Total - estimate	To ride on seat estimate	for hands-on estimate	under 3 years	males	studs	female	Elephant Trekking	Elephant Show	Elephants in traditional village	Hands On Elephant Care	Elephant Festival	Elephants in Nature	Overnight Stay	Elephant Education for Children	Elephant museum	Elephants who play music	Elephants who Paint	Circus	Volunteering	Zoo	Wild Elephants	Overnight Home Stay	Free Veterinary Care	Training for baby Elephants	Free Food Delivery	Free Food	Pesticide Free Food	Cruelty Prevention	Herbs and Medicine	Funding	Research	Advocacy	
Thai Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals																																		http://www.thaispca.org/enGLISH/aimsandobjectives.htm
Wild Animal Rescue Foundation of Thailand																																		http://www.warthaif.org/
Wildlife Friends of Thailand																																		http://www.wffl.org/
Outside Thailand																																		
Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Center																																		http://www.asianature.org/hstory.html
Eleaid																																		http://www.eleaid.com
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals																																		http://www.pefa.org/about/
World Wildlife Fund																																		http://www.panda.org

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ABSTRACT

FOR THE LOVE OF ELEPHANTS: MAHOUTSHIP AND ELEPHANT CONSERVATION IN THAILAND

by

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May 2006

Advisor: Marsha Richmond

Major: Interdisciplinary Studies

Degree: Master of Interdisciplinary Studies

Mahoutship, the art of training and caring for elephants, is disappearing along with the endangered domestic Asian elephant in Thailand. This study uses an interdisciplinary approach including anthropology and biology. It examines the reasons for the decline in elephant population and the decrease in the number of traditionally trained mahouts. It is based on an extensive literature search coupled with interviews with mahouts and conservationists in Thailand. The profession of mahoutship is examined in depth. This includes working conditions, recent changes in the economy and the impact these changes have on mahouts as elephant owners, understanding the role of ethnicity in mahoutship, the search for food and work for the elephant, and the worth of the mahout and elephant in Thai society. A conservation plan is compiled from input from the mahouts, conservationists, literature and observation. It includes recommendations such as developing accurate data on the domestic elephant population and facilitating cooperation and communication between conservation groups, mahouts, elephant owners, government and international organizations.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Jean Vorkamp attended Wayne State University for her undergraduate degree in labor studies with a co-major in peace studies and graduated cum laude in 1995. She received the John Dewan Memorial Scholarship, Wayne State Board of Governor's Scholarship and the Michigan Competitive Scholarship. She has participated in several internships. At the City of Detroit Mayor's office she did research for the total quality management/joint labor management project and on privatization. At the International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit she researched refugee cases for the Board of Immigration Appeals representatives and assisted with the children's Ethnic Enrichment Education project. At the Service Workers International Union, Local 79, she helped organize nursing home workers. She wrote the paper "Black Teenage Mothers and Welfare Reform", which was accepted to the poster session of the 1995 National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics Convention. During her undergraduate studies she was accepted in Northern Illinois University's program at Charles University in Prague. There she studied civil society, politics and art. After graduating, she assisted with a study on Detroit's Living Wage Ordinance, which was published in *Economic Development Quarterly*. She completed the Multi-Cultural Immersion Program from New-Detroit, completed 40-hour community mediation training and taught a class on conflict resolution. She is the founder and director of The Front Porch, a nine-year old non-profit for children in Detroit, in the neighborhood in which she grew up and now lives. In addition, she has been a part of several capacity building trainings for non-profits over the years. She is an avid urban gardener. She is on the community board for a local transportation non-profit and for the local recreation center. She believes academic endeavors should always be for the benefit of the community.