

### **Mission and Vision:**

[Voice for Asian Elephants Society](#) (VFAES) is an Asian elephant welfare charity based in Los Angeles, California. VFAES's mission is to protect endangered Asian elephants in India, both captive and wild, by cultivating empathy and compassion through awareness programs, creating corridors for elephants, restoring their lost habitats, alleviating human elephant conflict (HEC), and operating rehab centers for captive elephants.

India houses more than 55% of the global Asian elephant population. Therefore, most of VFAES's work is based in India, particularly in the southern state of Kerala. It has the third largest number of wild elephants in India, with HEC reaching epic proportions, and fueling retaliatory killings of elephants. Kerala also has the largest number of captive elephants in India, over 500, 97% of them bulls.

VFAES received its 501(C3) status (charity #47-3943896) in July 2016. In mid-2017 VFAES formed a development committee to create and implement a fundraising plan that would enable the organization to build a sustainable base of philanthropic support in order to facilitate achievement of its mission.

### **Organization's Key Accomplishment in 2018 until April 2019:**

Awareness campaigns, tackling wildlife crime and advocating for legislative changes were VFAES's primary focus for the first two years. However, in its third year, the organization has expanded its scope to addressing issues directly related to protecting wild and captive elephants on-the-ground. Since its operations began in mid-2017, VFAES has achieved the following:

- Garnered the [Platinum Seal of Transparency](#) from Guidestar, after rigorous vetting of standards for trust and community support.
- Provided numerous sensitization symposiums for the Kerala Forest Department (KFD), law enforcement authorities, High Court judges, highlighting legal loopholes and lack of enforcement.
- Provided revised set of Kerala Captive Elephant Management rules, now being implemented by the KFD, resulting in stringent enforcements on parading disabled elephants in cultural festivals.
- The state police chief created Kerala's first Wildlife Crime Unit (WCU), and in collaboration with the KFD, police confiscated two abused bulls, currently at a KFD care center.
- Monitored and reported wildlife crimes in Kerala, prompting India's Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) to launch a series of investigations, resulting in hefty monetary fines on six elephant owners, who received official ultimatums from the KFD.
- Provided a groundbreaking youth empowerment pilot program - Project Asian Elephants 101- in April 2019, 100 Student Police Cadets (SPC) graduating with "Elephant Ambassador" certificates. This resulted in the Inspector General of Police inviting VFAES to conduct PAE101 in three additional districts next year.
- In April 2019, KFD and VFAES established an official partnership to create elephant corridors in the North Nilambur region, and restore the habitat (letter attached). KFD is also partnering with VFAES to provide capacity building programs for elephant handlers in government run elephant camps. These projects resulted from authentic engagement, and trust building with the KFD.
- Over the past 2.5 years, VFAES has held hundreds of awareness campaigns, not only in Kerala, but also in major cities in the USA, Canada, UK and India. VFAES has also proactively engaged schools, colleges, and universities across India and the USA, including the renowned Lewis & Clark Law School. VFAES used as a primary tool, the multiple award-winning and United Nations nominated film [Gods in Shackles](#), produced by VFAES's Founding Executive Director, Sangita Iyer. It has awakened tens of thousands of people around the world, who contacted Indian embassies to ban the commercial exploitation of elephants behind the veil of culture and religion.

### **An Overview of the Plight of wild Asian Elephants in India:**

Globally there are approximately 45,000 wild Asian elephants, of which 27,312 ([Elephant Census, 2017](#)) are in India, mostly spread across 29 Elephant Reserves, covering 11 elephant landscapes in 14 states. India houses approximately 55% of the global Asian elephant population, and protecting them in this last bastion is their only hope for survival.

Human population in India is growing exponentially, at [1.36 billion](#) as of May 14, 2019, according to the [Worldometers](#). Linear developments, irrigation canals, transport infrastructure developments that cut through critical elephant habitat, and unsustainable use of land in many parts of India, are all causing habitat fragmentation, confining elephant populations to small islands of land. In addition, the threat from poaching for ivory has considerably depleted the number of tuskers, leading to a highly skewed sex ratio.

Megaherbivores such as elephants, are most affected by habitat fragmentation and its depletion, as it pushes elephants out of the forest to find food, leading to HEC and senseless loss of lives - both human and elephant. On an average 400-450 people are killed by elephants, and around 400 wild Asian elephants are killed each year in India, caused by electrocution, railway collisions and poisoning, pushing the species closer to extinction.

### **The Urgent Need for Elephant Corridors in Key Landscapes Across India:**

Securing elephant habitats and restoring corridors that elephants have been traditionally using would alleviate HEC, and prevent unnecessary deaths. This is of particular importance now, as the number of corridors has gone up due to the unprecedented land fragmentation in the past decade. According to the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)'s [Right of Passage Report](#), in 2005 WTI had identified 88 key corridors. But by 2015, that number had risen to 101, confirming the reckless and unsustainable land management.

A corridor is defined as “linear landscape elements which facilitate accelerated movement across habitat patches”. These corridors are meant to increase landscape connectivity and facilitate movement of organisms between two fragments, thus minimizing the risk of inbreeding and extinction, increasing local and regional population persistence and facilitating colonisation (Doak and Mills, 1994; Fahrig and Merriam, 1994; Sjorgen, 1991; Simberloff, 1988). In the fragmented landscapes that typify most elephant habitats in Asia, corridors thus ensure that the nutritional, demographic and genetic needs are met.

### **Purpose of this funding request is specifically for *The Kerala Corridor Project*:**

The southern Indian state of Kerala houses [more than 5,000 elephants](#), spread across four elephant reserves, according to the 2017 elephant census. Anamudi, Wayanad, Periyar and Nilambur are part of the Western Ghats, one of the 10 global biodiversity hotspots. Nilambur, also known as the valley of biodiversity, located in Malappuram district in Northern Kerala, is the focal point of this project.

The Nilambur Appankappu corridor (map attached), is located at the inter-state boundary of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Elephants move from Wayanad South Forest Division to Gudalur Forest Division, Tamil Nadu and Nilambur South Forest Division through a bottleneck forest patch between the Appankappu Estate and Munderi village in the Nilambur North Forest Division. **Specifically, it is this corridor that VFAES and the KFD are looking to expand through land purchase and habitat restoration.**

The land proposed has rubber and banana plantations. Its value has been assessed by the Malappuram district collector, and is the foundation of our financial assessment. The estate in Pothukal Village, Block 102 is approximately 58-acres, including its product value. The estate is worth 2157.51 Lakh Rupees i.e.

US\$3.08 million. It is contiguous, but shared among five people, who own two, four, six, 16 and 30 acres of land respectively. VFAES's five-year goal is to acquire 12-acres, worth a total of US\$240,000.

The first patch of land is a two-acre plot, adjacent to a corridor, currently just 500 meters wide. Acquiring this plot immediately is critical, as the tribal people living next to the elephant corridor interfere with the elephant movement, fueling HEC. There are 96 dwellings, with around 600 people, who depend on forest resources for sustenance and encroach into the habitat. Our long-term goal is to hire them to plant native and endemic species, and protect the corridors, so they relinquish their dependence on forest resources.

### **Outcomes:**

The first step is to acquire the 2-acre plot, not only to widen the existing corridor from 500 meters to one kilometer, but also, restore the balance of the 2-acre's cultivated land into an elephant habitat. The land purchase is worth US\$40,000. The next phase would involve purchasing the adjacent 4-acre plot, and then the 6-acre plot. This could take 3-5 years, depending on the availability of funds. The Malappuram district collector has already negotiated land value with individual owners. VFAES will purchase each plot, and immediately transfer ownership to the KFD, before jointly creating the corridor and restoring the forest.

VFAES will achieve its first goal - purchase the 2-acre plot - by collaborating with the KFD, (letter of partnership attached). [Dr. Raman Sukumar](#), an ecologist and Asian elephant specialist, who created the first corridor in India, will provide expertise every step of the way. KFD's Chief Wildlife Warden, [Surendra Kumar](#) has been involved in forestry and wildlife for over 40 years, and brings a wealth of experience related to administrative processes. His leadership will ensure timely implementation of our plans to create the corridor and restore the area. The Divisional Forest Officer of the North Nilambur division, Yogesh Kumar, has at least 19 divisional forest officers, who will work directly with VFAES.

Meanwhile, VFAES has proactively begun discussions with the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Senior Programme Officer, Mirjam Kuzee, head of Forest Landscape Restoration, for advice on steps to restore biodiversity in the area.

This project will not only protect the endangered Asian elephants, but also alleviate HEC, provide livelihoods to the tribal people, and promote the return of native and endemic species. It is a win-win situation for humans and elephants, creating a cascading effect across the landscape.

VFAES needs to raise \$40,000 to purchase a 2-acre plot of land to create the first corridor for elephants in this forest area. This will enable Asian elephant population in Nilambur to travel safely between the two forest patches, helping individual elephants to survive and the herds to thrive. VFAES respectfully requests a grant of \$40,000 to purchase the 2-acre plot of land to widen and enhance the corridor for elephants in this forest area.

With regards to timelines, the goal is to secure the first 2-acre plot from the plantation owner, transfer it to the KFD by mid-2020, and work collaboratively to create a corridor by the end of 2020. At the same time, VFAES will be raising the additional US\$200,000 to purchase the remaining 10-acres of land and proactively begin capacity building programmes for the tribal people.

VFAES is less than three years old, and has largely relied on crowdsourcing, Facebook fundraising, and individual donors. With the assistance of the Regina B. Frankenberg Foundation, VFAES can take

the next step in its development as an organization and begin direct assistance to this noble species, the Asian Elephant, that desperately needs our attention and help.

VFAES is very grateful to the Regina B. Frankenberg Foundation for the opportunity to submit this proposal, and we would be happy to answer any questions or provide more information. We look forward to hearing from you.





