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Restoring India's D'ering-Dibru Saikhowa Elephant Corridor

Our Plant a Tree project
with partner WTI



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Country: India

**Partner/Organisation:
Wildlife Trust of India**

Biome

Tropical and subtropical moist
broadleaf forests

Ecoregion

Brahmaputra Valley semi-evergreen
forests

Habitats

The corridor extends across the flat floodplains of the Brahmaputra River, featuring wide riverbeds and agricultural lands and villages. The dominant habitat is the short grassland known locally as *raidang*, a landscape that has been intensively grazed by cattle and then covered by a species of small *jhau* tree (*Tamarix dioica*) that is not eaten by cattle or wild animals. The main forest types within the corridor area range from the Assam Alluvial Plain semi-evergreen forests to the riverine forests of the floodplains all along the Siang, Dibang and Brahmaputra (Lohit) rivers.

Project summary

Widespread destruction of foothill forests has restricted connectivity for elephants in this region of northeast India, escalating human-elephant conflict. In a bid to solve these issues, WLT partner WTI are working with local authorities and state departments to establish the D'ering-Dibru Saikhowa Corridor, connecting elephant populations of Pasighat and D'ering Wildlife Sanctuary (Arunachal Pradesh state) with Domdooma Forest Division and Dibru Saikhowa National Park (Assam state).

Donations to Plant a Tree will help to restore 494 acres (200 ha) within this corridor by funding the planting of 150,000 trees across degraded areas, alongside assisted natural regeneration activities. The trees – set to be planted between 2021 and 2023 – include 32 native species that mimic the original landscape, like the tropical *Chukrasia* trees known as the Indian mahogany. Collected from local suppliers and forest areas, seedlings will be propagated and managed at nurseries staffed by local people, unlocking new livelihoods for the area's communities.

After villagers have prepared the restoration sites and taken care of the planting, WTI staff will enhance seedling survival through weed removal every six months in the two years after planting, coupled with fire prevention activities and seedling survival and biodiversity checks for three years after planting. The restored areas will link degraded forest fragments, boosting connectivity for elephants, tigers, leopards and more.

Main threats to the area

The chief threat to the area's biodiversity is the degradation and deforestation of habitats by livestock grazing, human settlements and fuel wood collection. With 85% of the population of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam states living in farming-reliant rural areas, these human pressures are commonplace and have led to the fragmentation of elephant habitats, pushing herds into villages and resulting in damage to life and property as well as retaliatory attacks on elephants. For wildlife, these conflicts are compounded by the changing course of the Brahmaputra River during the monsoon floods, a major natural threat that erodes the soils of the Dibru Saikhowa Biosphere reserve and leaves elephants in a changing riverscape where crossing points grow ever scarcer.

Nurseries are creating local jobs



Asian Elephant



Tiger



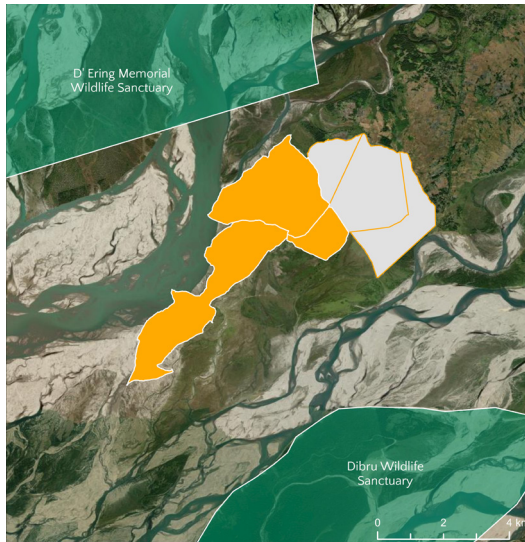
Key species¹

Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*, EN), Tiger (*Panthera tigris*, EN), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*, VU), Wild Water Buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*, EN), Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*, CR), Western Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*, EN).

¹ The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species includes categories of Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), Near Threatened (NT) and Least Concern (LC)

Main methods for land protection

At D'ering-Dibru, the habitat restoration funded by Plant a Tree sits alongside a number of other approaches followed by WTI within the corridor area, including the designation of a Community Conserved Area (CCA); capacity building among local authorities; resolution of human-wildlife conflict; and the training of local Green Corridor Champions.



D'ering-Dibru Wildlife Corridor

- Maer Community Forests
- WTI Restoration Areas
- Protected Area



Global prioritisation

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are one of India's most crucial elephant landscapes, supporting >75% of the 9,000 Asian Elephants estimated to live in the country's northeast. Across these two states, WTI has identified 18 elephant corridors that require protection. This project, set within the Eastern Himalayas Biodiversity Hotspot Region, represents a conservation priority owing to the strategic role it plays for elephant populations.

Biodiversity

This corridor will support the movement of over 500 Asian Elephants, along with iconic species from Tiger to Leopard, Western Hoolock Gibbon and Wild Buffalo. The natural grasslands within the project area are also known to be key breeding locations for the Critically Endangered Bengal Florican, a large, crested bird that is thought to only number 350-1,500 individuals across India, Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam.

Local communities

The main inhabitants of the corridor area are the Adi and Mishing people. Though mostly farmers, these groups also rely on cattle grazing and selling milk. This Plant a Tree project is working to improve local livelihoods by hiring villagers for nursery management, quality seedling production, restoration site preparation and tree-planting, with WLT partner WTI stepping in to provide training in all these areas.

Partner/NGO

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) was formed in 1998 in response to the declining state of India's wildlife and natural environment. Founded with only three staff members, the organisation has since grown to employ >150 people who co-ordinate projects across 16 locations. WTI became a WLT partner in 2003, when we supported their project to protect the Siju-Rewak Elephant Corridor in the Garo Hills (state of Meghalaya). Further projects under the WTI-WLT partnership include other elephant corridors at Mudahalli (states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu) and D'ering-Dibru, as well as a Sarus Crane wetland project (state of Uttar Pradesh).

UN Sustainable Development Goals directly advanced by this corridor project

