



## Project Mongma Rama: WLT appeal launches to expand community-owned elephant corridor network in India

- Weeks after [UN scientists urged](#) to fight climate change by protecting habitats, World Land Trust has launched a new appeal to fund a project with scale to make a difference
- Project Mongma Rama will help partner WTI protect a fourth elephant corridor in India's Garo Hills, saving thousands of hectares of a globally threatened biodiversity hotspot
- In a year when calls for locally-led conservation [have dominated](#) UN biodiversity talks, this appeal will fund a new phase of a project where Tibeto-Burman people own reserves
- Known as A'chik Mande, local communities will lead the creation of protected areas and benefit through WTI's support to livelihoods, healthcare and education

WEDNESDAY 20 APRIL 2022 | A project where Tibeto-Burman people lead and benefit from the protection of the forests they own has entered one of its most crucial phases yet in India, promising to safeguard tens of thousands of hectares of one of the world's most threatened biodiversity hotspots even as it creates new livelihood opportunities for local communities.

**Since 2003, 20 villages of the Garo Hills of Meghalaya State have joined Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) to set aside 4,000 ha for conservation,** in the process safeguarding three corridors that elephants, leopards and many other species have been able to use to travel between existing protected areas. With help from the new £350,000 Project Mongma Rama appeal from World Land Trust (WLT), this year WTI and other villages can save a further 4,000 ha – a fourth corridor.

**Following the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s conclusion earlier this month that nature's protection and restoration is [among the top climate mitigation strategies](#),** this project will deliver impact at scale. The direct protection of 4,000 ha across the fourth corridor will help to connect a chain of protected habitats totalling 12,908 ha, with only smaller gaps left to safeguard until an entire protected spine of 37,677 ha can be linked.

**Combined with biodiversity-friendly management plans, restoration and reserve watchers** (see table below for full details), **the creation of a fourth corridor will benefit hundreds of species.** Garo's tropical and subtropical forests are home to 85 mammal species – from Clouded Leopards ([Vulnerable](#)) to Western Hoolock Gibbons ([Endangered](#)) or Chinese Pangolins ([Critically Endangered](#)) – as well as 62 reptile species and 206 bird species such as the Great Hornbill ([Vulnerable](#)).

**The key beneficiaries will be Asian Elephants, a species whose Asia-wide populations are thought to have halved since 1945.** “Garo is part of a broader area that supports 1,000 elephants but unlike elsewhere in India, conflict with humans remains low because there’s enough forest for all. Through this new corridor, we can preserve this balance and offer herds safety to travel within this area of Meghalaya,” said Upasana Ganguly, the head of WTI’s ‘Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors’ project.

**In a year of [UN biodiversity target talks](#) dominated by calls for conservation to be led by and benefit local people, Garo’s communities will remain the engine of this project.** Since 2003, the A’chik Mande villages setting land aside for conservation have received support to new livelihoods (rice mills, fishery ponds, bee-keeping training, irrigation pipes, solar lamps), healthcare (hospital equipment and sanitation facilities) and education (school renovations, computer centres).

**Garo Green Spine’s latest phase will extend these benefits to the villages that own the new reserves.** “Since 1989, WLT has only ever funded projects where local conservationists and communities own and manage the land and Garo is no exception,” said WLT CEO Dr Catherine Barnard. “The A’chik Mande people can protect these habitats better than anyone and in a changing world, this project gives them the tools to continue managing land sustainably as they have for millennia.”

#### **COMMUNITY-OWNED RESERVES, MICRO-PLANS, TREES AND WATCHERS: THE PROJECT’S VARIOUS CONSERVATION APPROACHES, AT A GLANCE**

**Community-owned reserves:** The main thrust of Garo Green Spine’s new phase (2021-2026) will be the protection of a 4,000 ha corridor (2,000 ha with funds from WLT’s appeal) through two community-owned approaches: Village Reserve Forests and Community Reserves, the latter conferring slightly higher legal protection. The creation of either reserve begins with a FPIC [free, prior and informed consent] process where villages are helped to understand what these reserves entail – their community-owned nature, the ban on activities harmful to habitats – followed, if villages want to proceed, by the granting of No-Objection Certificates and later designation.

**Restoration and watchers:** Also between 2021 and 2026, the project will seek to restore 400 ha (170 ha with funds from WLT’s appeal) through the planting by local people of 300,000 native trees. This will come alongside the enlisting of five watchers (three with funds from WLT’s appeal) from local villages, to join the 19 that the project has already hired to patrol community reserves.

**Biodiversity-friendly community management plans:** The 4,000 ha corridor aside, WTI will seek to inject speed and scale into habitat protection by aiming to bring a further 35,000 ha (15,000 ha with funds from WLT’s appeal) into community micro-plans, a legal instrument that allows villages to continue extracting resources but mandates such use to be responsible and in accordance with wildlife conservation and movement, with logging regulated and poaching banned outright.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**World Land Trust (WLT)** protects the world's most biologically significant and threatened habitats acre by acre. Through a network of partner organisations around the world, WLT funds the creation of reserves and provides permanent protection for habitats and wildlife. Partnerships are developed with established and highly respected local organisations who engage commitment among the local community. WLT also works to raise awareness, in the UK and elsewhere, of the need for conservation, to improve understanding and generate support through information and fundraising. <https://www.worldlandtrust.org/who-we-are-2/>

**Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)** formed in 1998 in response to the declining state of India's wildlife and natural environment. Today WTI employs a 150-strong team that coordinates 40+ projects across 23 states. WLT and WTI became partners in 2003, when WLT funded the protection of the Siju-Rewak Corridor – the first stage of the Garo Green Spine project. WLT and WTI have since worked together to expand the Garo Green Spine; create three other elephant corridors elsewhere in India; and protect threatened wetlands and mangroves. WTI are also involved in a range of projects outside of WLT support, such as tackling wildlife crime and conducting species recovery programmes. <https://www.wti.org.in/>

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**Pictures and maps of the Garo Hills and the life that will be protected** through the latest expansion of this community-owned network of elephant corridors can be found in [this gallery](#) and used in coverage, provided that they are appropriately credited.

To find out more about the **species** that will be protected through WLT's Project Mongma Rama appeal, follow the links to [WLT's dedicated pages for Asian Elephant](#), [Clouded Leopard](#), [India's Leopard subspecies](#), [Western Hoolock Gibbons](#), [Capped Langur](#) and [Indian Giant Flying Squirrel](#).