

Field Report to the International Elephant Foundation – 4th July 2013

Satellite Tracking of Bornean ‘Pygmy’ Elephants

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Overview

This is a short update of the program activities under this grant since the previous report. The three satellite collars funded by IEF that were provided for purposes of monitoring Bornean elephants have now been deployed and have been active for a month. They were deployed together with collars supplied by the Danau Girang Field Centre (DGFC), in this collaborative project.

June 3rd – 5th 2013 Collar Deployment

The collaring operation took place over three days and we were fortunate that the team was able to deploy all five of the collars they had with them. The team included Ms. Nurzhafarina Othman, who selected the individuals for collaring based on her dissertation research, and staff from the Wildlife Rescue Unit and the NGO Hutan, who provided the technical assistance. DGFC Manager Mark Ramp helped in preparing the collars and programming them and Dr. Goossens remotely monitored the positions of individuals who were already collared to facilitate finding them if needed.

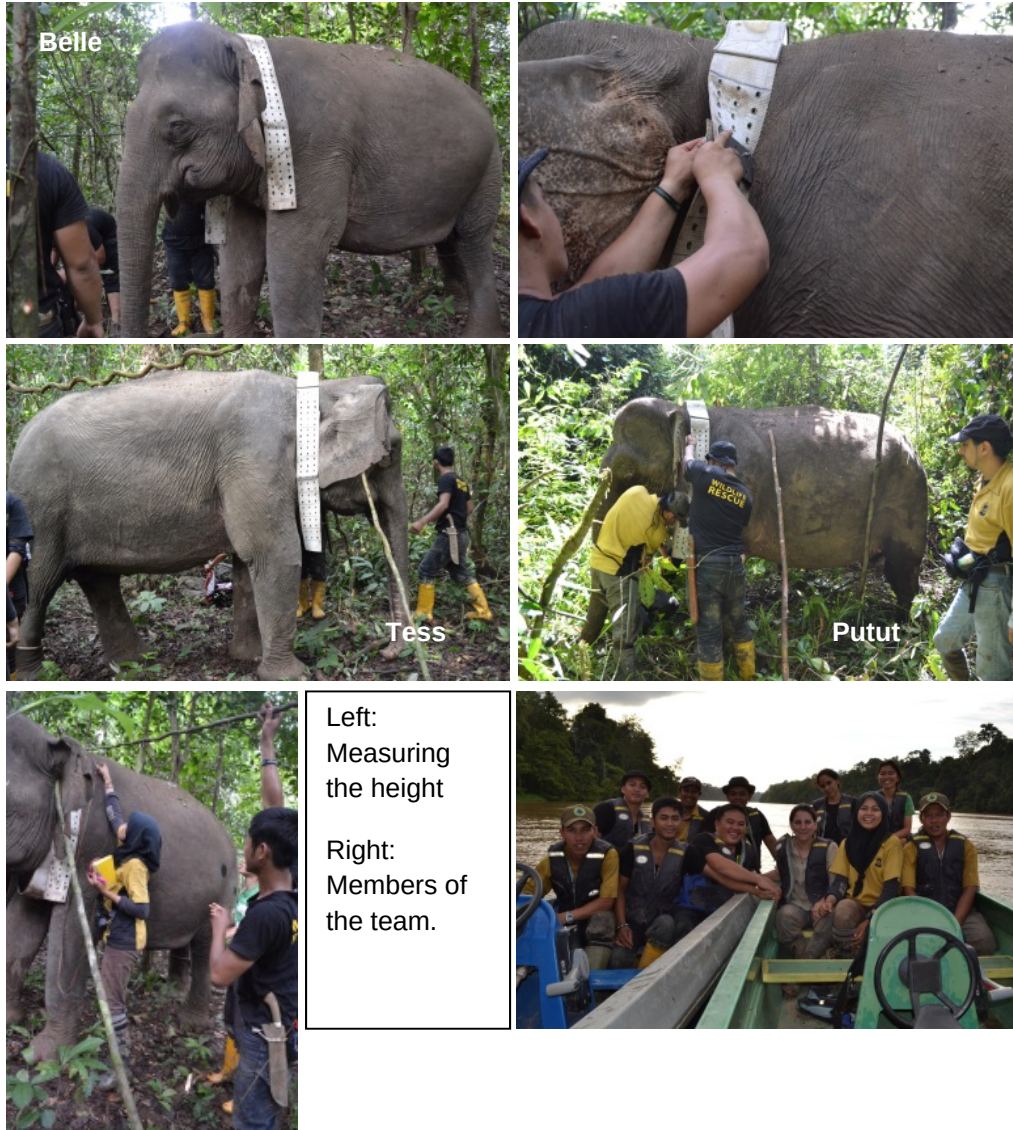
Events looked promising at the outset as a large herd of twenty elephants had arrived right at the Field Center as if on schedule. Ms. Othman selected an individual when the group had split up into smaller foraging parties. But their initial target gave them the slip after being darted, and two members of the Rescue Unit got lost during the chase. Not seeing the others, they eventually called in to Dr. Goossens, asking for the positions of one of the other collared females. After some tracking, they located Ita, a calm adult female who was easily darted directly from the boat and fitted with an African Wildlife Tracking collar from the DGFC.

The following day partially repeated the experience of the first, when a bull the team darted managed to escape. However they were able to collar another adult female, Putut, with one of our Sirtrack collars. Putut and Ita are putatively from different social units. Later in the afternoon they managed to collar a bull with one of their AWT Collars, whom they named Sejati (“True,” or “Genuine”).

The morning of the third day began with no elephant sightings. But Ms. Othman did not want to give up, so they set off again in the afternoon. There were two females on the target list who had not been seen since the first day, but their luck turned when they encountered Belle, the first of the pair. Her companion Tess was also nearby and to the team’s immense satisfaction, she remained close even after Belle was darted. Clearly they were very closely bonded, which enabled both to be collared in rapid succession.

In total, three collars funded by IEF, manufactured by Sirtrack, were deployed together with two collars provided by Dr. Goossen’s group. They were placed on five adults as follows:

- 1) Ita: Female, >40y old, 7 ft. tall, African Wildlife Tracking collar.
- 2) Putut: Female, 45-50y old, 7 ft. 3 in. tall, Sirtrack collar.
- 3) Sejati: Male, 30-40y old, 7 ft. 3 in. tall, African Wildlife Tracking collar.
- 4) Belle: Female, 40-45y old, 7 ft. 3 in. tall, Sirtrack collar.
- 5) Tess: Female, 40-45y, 7 ft 9 in. tall, Sirtrack collar.



All collars are programmed to take six positions per day. Data can be downloaded through the internet as needed in addition to being automatically emailed to Dr. de Silva once per month. The Sirtrack collars sometimes appear to be reporting fewer positions per day than scheduled, however all collars have been functional over the past month.

The operation, part of long-term monitoring efforts, involved many participants: the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD), NGO Hutan and the DGFC. Funding has been provided by the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund of U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Mohamed Zayed, Species Conservation Fund, Elephant Family, Houston Zoo and Columbus Zoo.

This concludes this update, thank you.