

SPECIAL TROPILUNCH

MEME - The messy business of conserving elephants in Malaysia, a rapidly developing country

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Tuesday, October 31st

12:45 – 1:45 PM

Grinter 376

SUMMARY

Peninsular Malaysia is home to approximately 1,500 wild elephants that, in less than two generations, have seen over half of their natural habitat replaced by plantations, dams, and urbanized areas. This development has led to a sharp decline in elephant range and an increase in human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the form of crop raiding. What is the future of elephants in Peninsular Malaysia? How can we mitigate the effects of HEC, both on people and elephants? What are the ecological consequences of local elephant loss? I will introduce the work of the [‘Management & Ecology of Malaysian Elephants’ \(MEME\)](#), an interdisciplinary collaboration between local wildlife authorities and university researchers that aims to bring a science-driven approach to the conservation of Malaysian elephants. We use a combination of GPS-satellite tracking, camera-traps, non-invasive molecular tools and other ecological and social science techniques to study elephant behavior and ecology, and their interactions with people. We believe that Malaysia can become one of the last strongholds of elephants and other wildlife in Southeast Asia. Conservation is a messy business, therefore, I will also discuss MEME’s interdisciplinary journey – from a purely ecological project to one that increasingly needs to focus on policy, economics, and people’s values and emotions; and from an exclusive research focus to one that includes capacity building, advocacy, and public awareness for the sake of wildlife conservation.

BIO

Dr. Ahimsa Campos Arceiz works in a region with a high rate of tropical deforestation and biodiversity loss. His research interest lies in the behavior, ecology, and conservation of Asian megafauna, particularly elephants, which he has studied for over 10 years. He is interested on the ecological role of large animals in seed dispersal and work on evidence-based strategies to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts. He lives and works in Peninsular Malaysia but has also conducted research in other Asian countries. Although he is an ecologist by training, his work is increasingly leaning towards the social sciences. He believes that understanding human behavior is the main challenge for conservation science in the 21st century. He works closely with the government at local, state, and national level and leads initiatives to mainstream interdisciplinary conservation science through outreach and training.

Tropilunch is a weekly seminar run by graduate students from the Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) Program. It provides a forum for discussions and presentations related to TCD research. Special guests, visiting scholars and practitioners also participate. It happens every Tuesday @t 12:45 – 1:45 p.m. in Grinter 376. The presentations are recorded and posted weekly on TCD’s [YouTube Channel](#).