



Human Elephant  
Learning Programs

2020  
Annual Report

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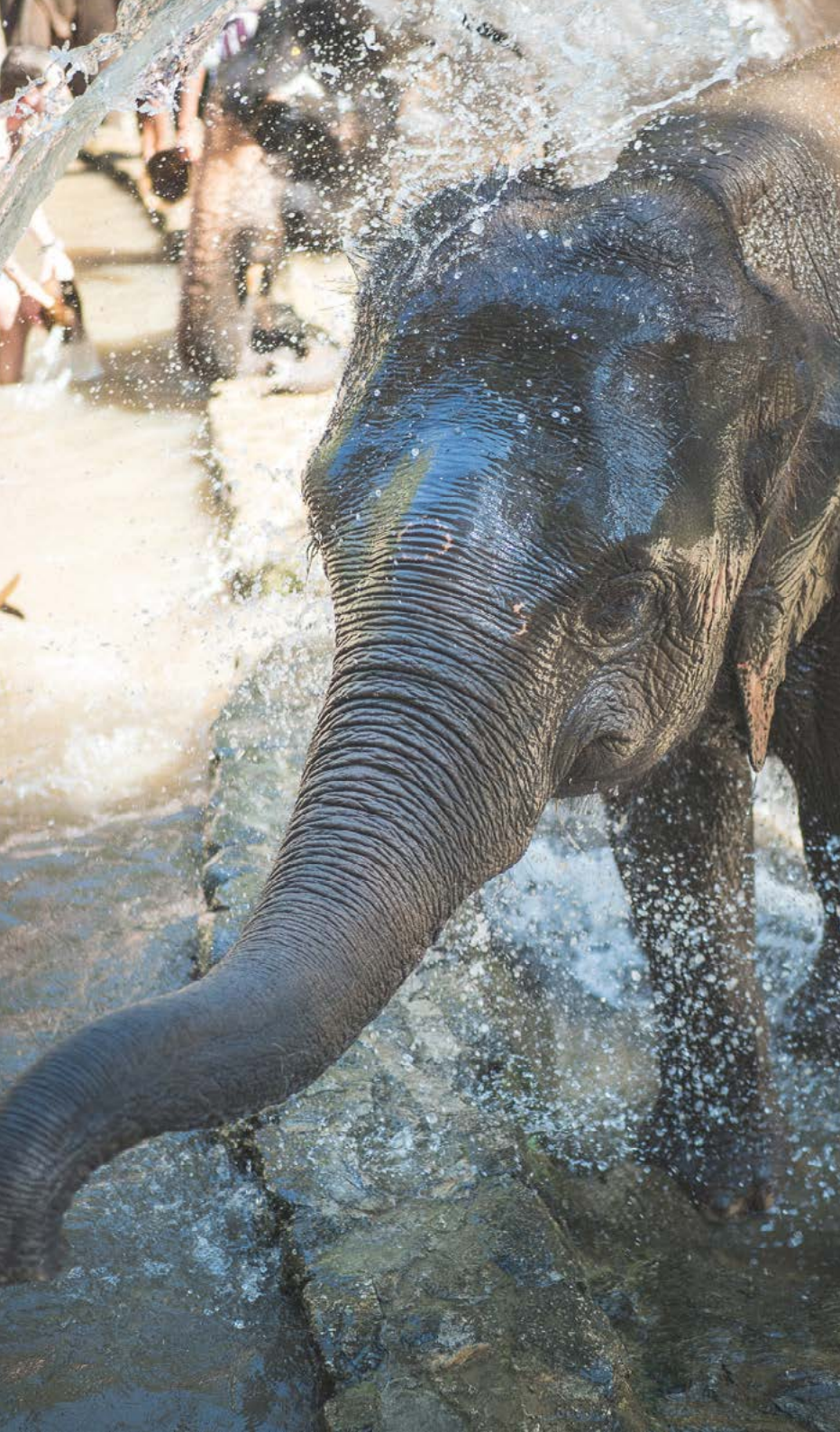
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# *Advancing Elephant Welfare*







## An update from our Chair, Marlee Horobin

2020 has been a year of upheaval, change and shift for the world's human population. The world of elephant conservation has not been spared. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on elephants and the people who care for them means our actions can now, perhaps more than ever, play an important role in the future of such an important species. This may well be the time that our H-ELP is most needed.

The financial devastation COVID-19 has had on the people who care for elephants, the villages and families who rely on the income from tourism, means whole communities are suffering. Elephants are enormous animals which require full time care and attention and the organisations, elephant conservation camps, trainers and the individuals who dedicate their lives to their welfare need to be highlighted and supported.

H-ELP has been working tirelessly through the year to understand how we can change our operations. We want to ensure that the people who are directly and indirectly affected by the pandemic in the countries we work in are able to access the learnings of Dr Andrew McLean's science-based elephant training.

The recruitment of a number of board members with diverse and deep skill sets in communication was our first step which has proven to be an asset with the implementation of the 'ZOOM with an Elephant' campaign. This initiative has been extremely successful. For a AU\$200.00 investment participants are able to get a live 10-minute session with an elephant in care at the Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort. This elephant camp supports 23 elephants and although now reopened, only Thai residents can visit. This campaign has so far allowed people from all over the world in places like nursing homes, organisations, and private businesses to purchase intimate access to what it is like for these elephants in their everyday living environment.



Our second great achievement of 2020 is the recruitment of board member Kevin Ovenstone, who lives in South Africa and has added a depth of experience and understanding to our elephant training. Very heavily involved in the [animal welfare space](#), Kevin has been integral in the thought process of how we shift our approach from what you see in this training video to a more accessible online approach.

In 2021 we will be looking at the opportunity to move our teachings online. Working through the cultural and logistical challenges it is a concept with the goal of ensuring that mahouts everywhere are able to easily access a training resource.

We would like to thank all those who have donated this year. Your contribution will assist in this project and we look forward to bringing our donors and stakeholders on the journey. Finally, a sincere thank you to our board members and volunteers in the fields. The tireless efforts of our people, time donated and skills utilised doesn't go unnoticed and is extremely valued.

As a registered charity, we encourage donations to support our organisation and we look forward to getting back into the field as soon as Australian borders are open for business.



— Marlee Horobin  
Chair



“We would like to thank all those who have donated this year. Your contribution will assist in this project and we look forward to bringing our donors and stakeholders on the journey.”



## A note from our Founder and Vice-Chair, Andrew McLean

The 2019/2020 year has been nothing short of monumental in so many different ways not the least of which was the effect of the pandemic.

During our visit to South-East Asia in 2019, we became increasingly aware of the strong push from the public regarding the plight of elephants in captivity in South and South-East Asia. The most difficult thing for people to comprehend is that the captive elephant in Asia represents at least 33% of the entire population of Asian elephants. This is something worth thinking about for everybody who loves elephants. While it would be wonderful to see the Asian elephant happily roaming in its natural habitat, the sinister truth is that there is simply not enough habitat available, because human populations are increasing exponentially in those regions, and more and more land is turned to farming and crops such as palm oil.

So the question is what do we do with the 33% of Asian elephants that are currently living in captivity when there is no space for them in their natural habitat? The answer must surely be to do the best we can with what we have got.

In other words, we must make human-elephant interactions as humane as possible and teach those who manage elephants the importance of providing good care. This comes in the form of health, nutrition, safety and shelter, and good welfare by being able to access social partners through touch, foraging needs (beyond nutrition i.e. munching on fibre most of the day) and enabling sufficient movement.

This year, I am proud to have been the co-author of the latest iteration of the 5 Domains Model – the world's most respected and applied model of animal welfare. The new 2020 Model arose as a result of my instigation, where I felt there was a strong need to insert human-animal interactions as a vital element of the 5 Domains Model because so much can go wrong in that area. [This paper has now been accepted for publication](#). The importance of socialisation foraging, movement and training that is based on the science of learning is now embedded in this latest seminal model.



The pandemic, like many catastrophes, has provided opportunities for rethinking our approach and perhaps hastening projects that we had on the 'back-burner'. Coupled with our increased involvement in elephant conservation, our focus has turned to developing an online course for mahouts, so that they can improve and save the lives of many elephants in South-East Asia. Of course, we realise there is much you cannot teach online when it comes to interactions with animals, however on the other hand there is a vast amount of knowledge to be gained that can greatly inform practice. This online project for mahout education is now underway, and we thank our vital donors for providing us with funding that we can use for this course which will be translated into many languages.

What is vital from the H-ELP Foundation's point of view is we recognise that our remit is to train mahouts to do what they have always done but in the most humane way, rather than impose upon them purely western zoo models of training. While these methods undoubtedly have their place, we believe it is also important to respect the culture and ancient knowledge of the mahouts who handle the elephants every single day, from day one. The mahouts have to care for and control the young elephants in all goings-on that happen in captivity, so it makes sense that they learn in mahout school how to do the best they can for elephants.

This online course will really help us in our future trips to Asia where we can monitor and improve the education of the people directly involved with the 15,000 Asian Elephants in captivity. Once again, a very sincere thank you to all our donors for showing up for these endangered animals.

— Andrew McLean  
Founder and Vice-Chair

“This online project for mahout education is now underway and we thank our vital donors for providing us with the funding that we can use for this course which will be translated into many languages.”





## The Elephant Camp Situation In South East Asia During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hit tourism hard the thousands of elephants that reside at the elephant ‘tourist’ camps across SE Asia are suffering. Without the inbound tourism, income has dried up, mahouts and elephant camp employers have lost their jobs, the elephants face an uncertain future at the hands of their owners.

Since early 2020, the majority of Thailand’s estimated 300 elephant camps have been closed to the public. The lack of income and the national restrictions on business operation has meant that many of the elephants have had to leave the camps – sold, traded or sent back to their original owners as they are too big of a financial burden if they themselves generate no income through tourism.

Before COVID-19, it was clear that the elephant industry is vulnerable, as its very foundation lies in the hands of the tourists that choose to visit. The criteria for sustainable tourism activities has increased continuously along with the demand for higher animal welfare at tourist venues across SE Asia. In particular, the focus on elephant welfare has grown and the demand for welfare-based initiatives, such as gentle training and practical local application of learning theory through mahout education, has proven to be of great interest and value to both the camps and the elephants.

H-ELP has for many years been a keystone for this positive development and has through the years been widely accepted as a part of the solution to improve the lives of elephants and their mahouts in SE Asia. Now more than ever, H-ELP’s evidence-based elephant friendly training methods will play a key role in the years to come as elephant camps who engage with the elephant friendly training methods will be preferred by tourists and will therefore become more sustainable and elephant welfare focused. This paradigm shift is positive and in the wake of COVID-19 the demand for welfare-based training will be greater and more important going into the future.

— Nina Brask  
Program Coordinator  
*Lao Elephant Initiative*



## Elephant Friendly Mahout Training In Laos With H-ELP Featuring Dr Andrew McLean and Kevin Ovenstone



## Highlights



Training workshops in  
Laos and Thailand

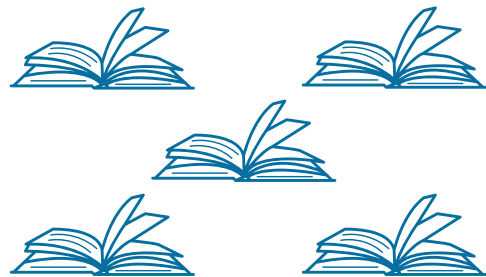
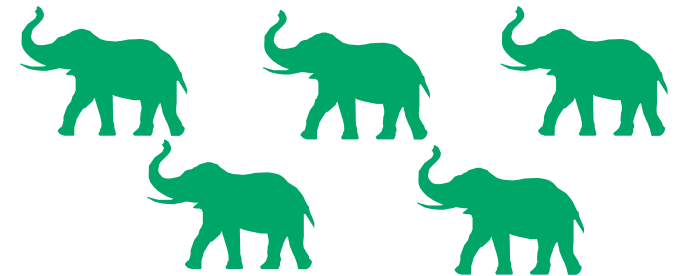


**30+**

Mahouts trained in the H-ELP  
Elephant Training Technique

**30+**

Asian elephants trained  
during our training trip



**100**

H-ELP Elephant Training Technique  
manuals distributed

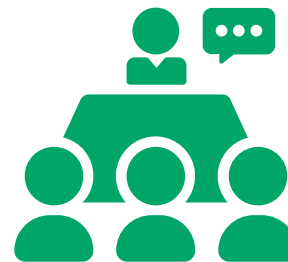
**5**

Languages — Thai, Burmese, Laos,  
English, Malayalam



**\$12,700**

Donated from loyal patrons  
and the general public



**2**

Elephant welfare  
conferences attended



# The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human–Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare

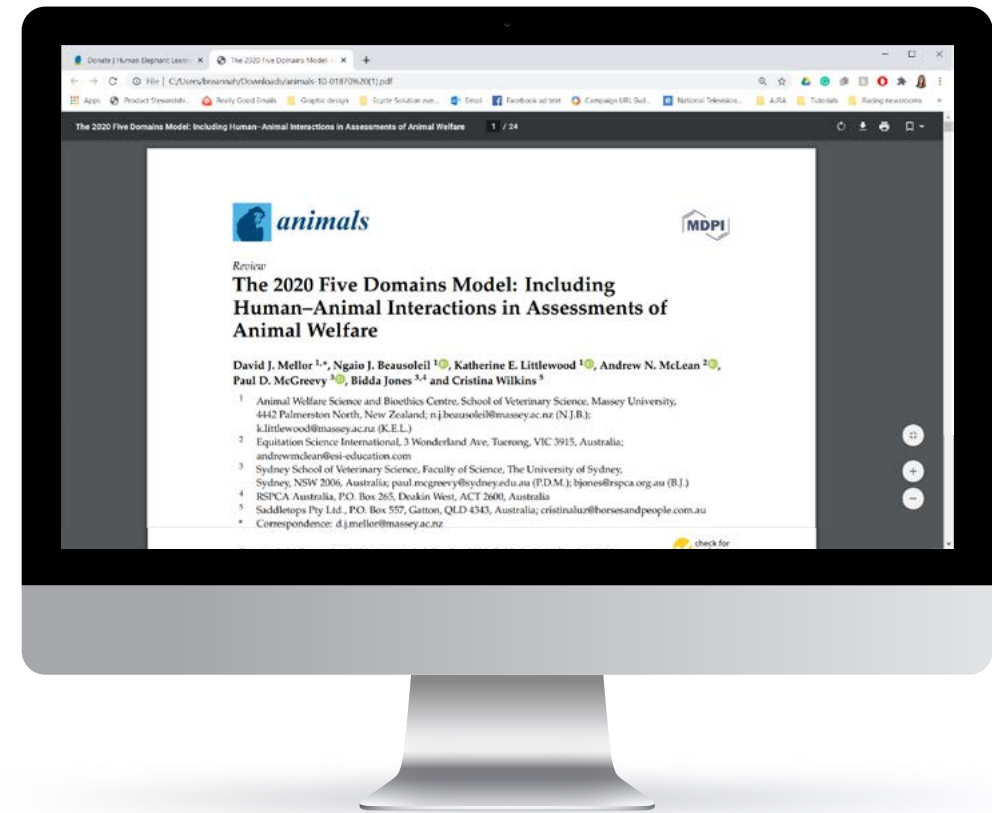
In 1994, Professor David Mellor and Dr Cam Reid proposed a new model of assessing animal welfare. This model described the five domains as Nutrition, Environment, Health, Behaviour and Mental State. There has been many revisions over the years, however one fundamental flaw of the model was its lack of consideration around human-animal interactions.

In 2019, Founder and Vice-Chair of H-ELP, Andrew McLean, engaged Prof David Mellor to develop a new revision of the model which included human-animal interaction as part of the fifth domain – Behavioural Interactions (previously named ‘Behaviour’).

The 2020 revision, published on the 14th of October, continues to use the five primary domains, however it provides guidance on how to assess the negative and/or positive impacts of human behaviour has on elephant welfare. The need for socialisation foraging, movement and training has become apparent during the ever-evolving science of how elephants learn and develop.

The principal focus of human-animal interaction is the impacts of the presence and behaviour of persons as primary causes of animal’s behavioural and affective responses.

The latest revision by David Mellor, Ngaio Beausoleil, Katherine Littlewood, Andrew McLean, Paul McGreevy, Bidda Jones and Christina Wilkins was published on 14th of October. This model will now be used worldwide as a guide to assess animal welfare in captivity.



**Download the revised Five Domains Model**



## 2019 Thailand Trip Report

The H-ELP training team met in Bangkok and it was exciting to see each other again after so long apart. We were joined by Nina Brask from Danish Animal Protection, making us a group of five: Nina from Denmark but living in Bangkok, Andrew from Melbourne, Kevin from Cape Town and Sophie and I from Perth. We fell very quickly into our established roles within the group – Andrew is everyone's favourite mentor, he has so much knowledge (about well, everything) and is a natural educator which makes these trips both educational and fun. Sophie and Kevin are really establishing themselves as trainers now and growing in confidence and skill every day. Nina is a biologist with a passion for conservation and has excellent bartering skills which came in very handy when dealing with tuk-tuk and taxi drivers! And, as Kevin said, I'm like the camp mom, who tries to make sure we stick to schedule and helps out wherever necessary. I like to think that we are developing our training skills as a team, particularly in the classroom where we are using games and role playing to great effect.

We spent our first day in meetings. We met with Betty Thogersen from Danish Animal Protection, Daniel Turner from Animondial and Gary Searle from Flight of the Gibbons discussing future collaborations and funding possibilities.

We then headed up to Kanchanaburi on the local train which was a great way to see the country plus a lot cheaper than a taxi – albeit a whole lot sweatier! Our host for the next four days was Vijo Verghese, owner of Our Land Thailand, environmentalist, snake rescuer and elephant conservationist. (Vijo is also the most enthusiastic translator we've ever had.) Our Land provides local wild elephants with a narrow corridor to reach the river which is otherwise blocked by farmland and residential estates. It was exciting to see the footprints of wild elephants by the river each night when we went down for a swim after training.

Vijo took us to a local elephant camp where we spent three days training their mahouts. They were a very enthusiastic bunch of guys but there are a few problems with the way the organisation is set up which leads to some problematic behaviours developing amongst the elephants. As we were to discover, because of the pressure of tourism, many elephant parks are advertising “no hooks.” This means that whenever there are tourists the mahouts cannot use their traditional ways of controlling the elephants and, apart from our visit, it seems that they are yet to replace them with any further training. So, good training is really necessary. The mahouts must be offered more training than they are receiving in order to keep themselves safe and maintain the clarity of the elephant's responses.

The message we try to convey everywhere that we go is that welfare is an holistic thing. It's not just no riding or no hooks because these are not necessarily measures of the animal's wellbeing. Welfare is far more complex than just those two factors. Elephants need to walk, socialise, forage... they need friends, freedom to move and to express their natural behaviours. In many instances the camps that promote themselves as having good welfare because they have no hooks sometimes have obese elephants who stand in small enclosures eating bananas all day to please the tourists. I believe that H-ELP's work will increasingly



have to cover not just mahout education but also to try and educate the tourist agents who determine which camps to send people to.

On our way from Kanchanburi back to Bangkok we stopped at the POW cemetery which was both interesting and sad. There were elephants used on the Thai Burma railway but after their Burmese mahouts died from dysentery they could not be controlled so they either ran away into the forest or were killed. Which just goes to show that controlling elephants is not a purely modern problem!

We arrived in Luang Prabang and it was great to catch up with our friends at Mandalao. The bull elephant we worked with last year (Kit) has grown enormously and his training is progressing really well. The focus of our work here was foot control and care. Elephants in captivity need to have their nails trimmed and they also often suffer from small cuts on their feet caused by walking through the jungle. These cuts need management and care and often the elephants are not willing participants in this process. We came up with a good protocol for foot management, working with a Thai mahout who has spent time in zoos in Europe and is great to work with. We were very confident that, when we left, they would be able to maintain the work and manage the foot care.

After Luang Prabang we headed to Chaing Saen in Thailand to the Anantara Elephant Camp. This five star hotel tries very hard to maintain its elephants as well as possible and our trip coincided with a visit from an elephant osteopath – which was interesting. We had an excellent group of elephant camp managers, owners and vet nurses to work with here and they all spoke fluent English which made our job much easier.

It was at the Anantara that I felt our work really came into its own. We were able to introduce evidence based training to people who, between them, care for a significant percentage of the world's captive elephant population. One camp had 72 elephants and another had 60 – which is a lot, if you consider that there are only 15,000 captive elephants in all of Asia. We ran a very productive discussion about the threats and pressures on their industry and again, the education of tourists was a major theme.

It is an interesting conundrum. Everyone agrees that the habitat for wild elephants is shrinking. The populations left in the wild are under increasing pressure from poaching and from human/elephant conflict over crops and access to water. If we want to preserve the Asian elephant as a species we must look to the captive population because some experts predict that by 2050 there will be no elephants left in the wild. However, many welfare agencies and tourism bodies with good intentions but very little knowledge and no actual experience in managing elephants have created a situation where the captive population is under threat because tourists are being told to avoid elephant experiences. It costs an awful lot to feed and keep an elephant so it is imperative that we find a solution to this problem.

This is where I see H-ELP's role as vital. If we create and deliver mahout training schools that deal, not just with training, but with overall welfare, it will give the tourists confidence and it will provide the camp managers with a way of demonstrating their commitment to elephant welfare.

At the moment being a mahout is considered to be a very lowly job. But it shouldn't be that way – these mahouts are our best chance of saving a species from extinction. That's why H-ELP's role must be twofold. We have to educate the mahouts in a way that honours their age-old traditions while making their practices more ethical and sustainable. And at the same time we must educate the public to understand that welfare is far more complex than they have perhaps been lead to believe.











## Trainee Trainer, Kevin Ovenstone, reflects on his H-ELP trip experience

I am taking a moment to reflect on my second trip to Thailand and Laos with H-ELP. Last year was my initiation to working with elephants and their mahouts and what an amazing and insightful experience it was. Largely it was difficult to fully articulate the entire experience as it was so profound. The same can be said for this trip.



In my first trip I was initially concerned about making the transition from training horses to elephants but was surprised how smooth this was. This speaks to the strength of understanding and using techniques based on learning theory. It truly makes cross-species training fluid as the clarity of the training language is simple. In the same vein, this clarity assists in training the mahouts to work with their elephants in a more effective way which ultimately improves the elephant's welfare.



This year we have had the opportunity to work with a couple of new elephant camps in addition to the ones from last year which has been incredible as more organizations are seeing the value of this type of training. This year however we too are continuing to evolve as an organization and as trainers to really create a holistic platform that addresses not only the training aspects but the all the issues that will improve the welfare of the elephant in SE Asia. Clear training is critical, but so is addressing the social needs, the healthy eating requirements and the mental wellbeing of the elephant to name just a few.



The situation in SE Asia in terms of human-elephant interaction is complex and I have come to realize there are no easy black and white solutions but if we are to be an advocate for these incredible apex animals, then they need a voice based on holistic approaches founded in evidence-base knowledge across the spectrum of topics. Sweeping and uneducated comments such as 'ban this', 'boycott that', 're-wild all the elephants' will only quicken their already tentative existence. In this I am proud of the piece I am contributing as a trainer for such an enlightened and progressive organization like H-ELP to find this way forward for the elephant.

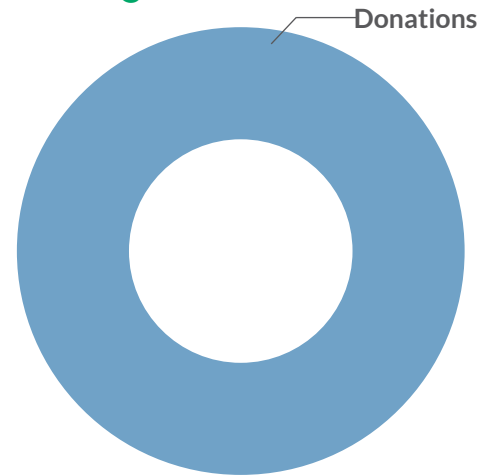




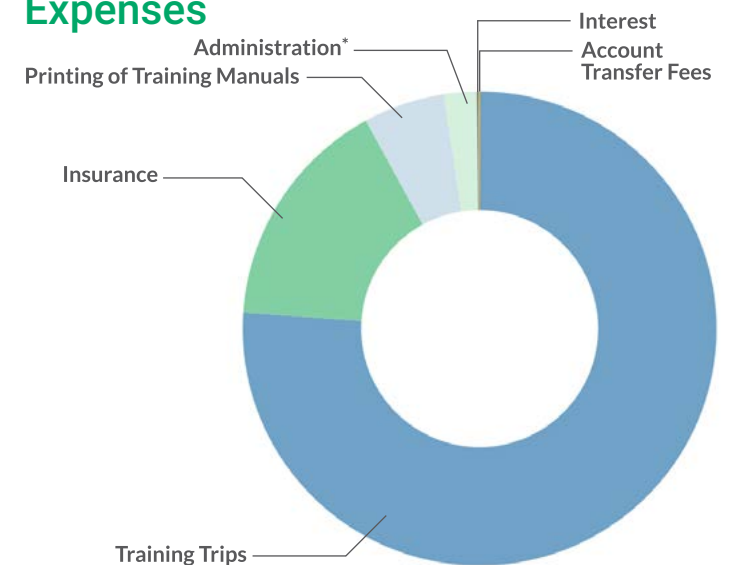
## Financial Review

H-ELP relies entirely on donations to fund its initiatives which work towards improving the welfare of working elephants in Asia. All donations contribute to printing training manuals, trip expenses and insurance, and the ongoing support H-ELP provides to mahoots in Asia.

### Funding



### Expenses



\*Including subscription for a video meeting software and website maintenance.



# Financial Reconciliation

**Bendigo Bank Account 162 091 532 Opening balance 1 July 2019** **\$11,933.75**

## Credit to 30 June 2020

28/01/2020 Transfer from PayPal	\$5,000.00
18/2/2020 Private Donation	\$2,235.39
13/5/2020 PayPal Balance transfer	\$4,780.34
1/6/2020 Private Donation	\$10,000.00
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>\$22,015.73</b>

## Expenses incurred to 30 June 2020

Account keeping fees	-\$2.00
International Transfer fee	-\$10.00
Printing of manuals	-\$753.50
Insurance	-\$2,171.78
Zoom (Meeting expense)	-\$251.88
Oct 2019 Training Trip to Laos and Thailand expenses*	-\$813.56
Oct 2019 Training Trip to Laos and Thailand Airfares*	-\$4,774.34
Training Trip Expenses Incurred by Andrew M and Sophie W – Oct 2019*	-\$1,110.80
Training Trip Expenses Incurred by Ovenstone – Oct 2019*	-\$1,608.15
Trip Expenses for Elephant Conference in December 2019	-\$1,545.07
Marlee H attendance of US Elephant Fundraising conference	-\$500.00
Website	-\$55.96
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>-\$13,597.04</b>

**162 091 532 Closing Balance 30 June 2020** **\$20,352.44**

**Bendigo Bank Account 162 091 516 Opening balance 1 July 2019** **\$9,980.00**

## Income

Interest	\$12.12
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$12.12</b>

## Expenses

<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
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**162 091 516 Closing Balance 30 June 2020** **\$9,992.12**

**Bendigo Bank – Total Cash at Bank 30 June 2020** **\$30,344.56**

\* Training Trip consisted of H-ELP members travelling to camps in Laos and Thailand to train their Mahoots on our H-ELP manual for training working elephants.

Private Donations	\$2,750.00
(Transaction Fees)	-\$33.21
27/1/2020 transfer to Bendigo bank account	-\$5,000.00
13/5/2020 transfer to Bendigo Bank account	-\$4,780.34
21/5/2020 Private Donation	\$100.00
21/5/2020 Private Donation – PayPal transaction fees	-\$1.40
1/6/2020 Private Donation	\$100.00
1/6/2020 Private Donation – PayPal transaction fees	-\$1.40
24/6/2020 Private Donation	\$300.00
24/6/2020 Private Donation – PayPal transaction fees	-\$3.60

**Closing Balance 30 June 2020** **\$493.60**





## Supporting H-ELP

The Human-Elephant Learning Program Foundation relies heavily on the support of patrons and the general public. By supporting H-ELP you will be contributing to the welfare of working elephants in Asia through the systematic application of humane, evidence-based training initiatives, education, engagement with local communities and relevant stakeholders.

### Methods to support H-ELP



[Visit our shop](#) to view our print collection and zoom call initiative



[Donate](#) to contribute to the welfare of working elephants in Asia



[Join our mailing list](#) through our website



Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn:  
[@Helpelephants](#)





# Addressing the Elephant In The Room

Zoom video calls have become the norm and the replacement for many face-to-face meetings during the coronavirus. Unfortunately, these calls can get a bit repetitious and tedious, so some farms in the US have started offering llamas, donkeys and goats on calls. There is no greater animal than the elephant though, the largest land-based animal on the planet, with an intelligence and personality to match. So the challenge for H-ELP was how to bring these magnificent gentle giants “home.”

From September 2020, H-ELP has partnered with the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF) in Thailand, an organisation that has facilitated workshops for it.

For \$100 people can bring an elephant on their Zoom video call for ten minutes or for \$200 they can get an additional 2-minute introduction and 3-4 minute question and answer session with a GTAEF expert. All elephants live at GTAEF and the donation will be split between H-ELP and GTAEF projects and the upkeep of the elephant you meet. It is sure to brighten up your meeting and be educational! Importantly, the funds will help the welfare of Asian elephants.

## About Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF)

The Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF) was set up primarily to help elephants that cannot help themselves: for those that find themselves, through abuse or through circumstance, unable to provide and maintain an income for themselves, for their mahouts and their families.



Similarly to H-ELP, GTAEF believes that in an ideal world all elephants would be wild and there would be no need to discuss elephants' work. As a result, H-ELP and GTAEF work together to facilitate workshops.

**Book your Zoom Call through our shop:**  
<https://h-elp.myshopify.com/>

“ The Asian elephant is already an endangered animal thanks to poaching and loss of habitat, but the drying up of funds to support domesticated elephants means there is a real risk many could starve or their parts end up in China for medicinal purposes. So this is a chance for us to raise funds to prevent that.

— Marlee Horobin, *H-ELP Chair* ”





# Human Elephant Learning Programs

*Advancing Elephant Welfare*

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