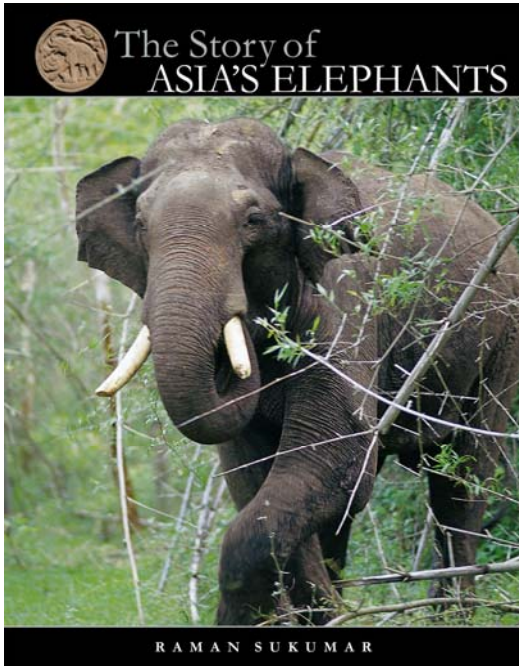


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THE STORY OF ASIA'S ELEPHANTS
by Raman Sukumar

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The relationship between elephants and people in Asia over thousands of years is a unique one. This story of the Asian elephant begins with a brief account of the ancient origins of the creature and its possible relationship with early humans, leading eventually to the taming of the animal between 4,500 and 5,000 years ago in the Harappan period. Subsequent chapters cover successive periods in Asian history, tracing the story of the elephant broadly under the major religious establishments – Vedic, Buddhist and Jain, post-1st century Hindu, and Islamic – of the Indian subcontinent and beyond, including the fate of the elephants that Alexander and his successors took with them to the Mediterranean region for use in battle. After a discussion of the fortunes of the elephant under colonial rulers in Asia, the author presents the post-independence history of the animal in 13 range countries. The final chapter presents a summary of the latest scientific knowledge of the elephant's ecology and behaviour, and of how we can plan for the conservation of the species.

This book is not an art history, but rather an ecological and cultural history of the Asian elephant. The focus is on India because of the great significance of the elephant in this ancient civilization as well as the profusion of material, both artistic and literary, available from the Stone Age to the present; at the same time however, the elephant-human relationship across the Asian continent, from the Tigris-Euphrates basin in the west to the Mekong in the east, is covered in substantial detail. This is the first single volume to comprehensively cover the history of Asia's elephants, profusely illustrated with images of the elephant in art through the ages, most of them taken by the author, and drawing upon a wide range of literary sources from ancient to contemporary times.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raman Sukumar is Professor and Chair of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Born in Chennai in 1955, Sukumar's early interests in natural history developed here; he documented the flora and fauna of Guindy National Park during the 1970s. Moving to Bangalore in 1979, he obtained his PhD in Ecology in 1985 from the Indian Institute of Science. His thesis on the ecology of elephant-human interactions, considered a landmark in this field, was published by Cambridge University Press.

Sukumar's research on the elephant includes its movement patterns, genetics, reproductive biology, communication, and cultural history. In 1992 he helped the Indian government set up Project Elephant, and during 1997-2004 he was Chair of the World Conservation Union's Asian Elephant Specialist Group and initiated conservation programmes in countries such as Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In 1997, Sukumar set up the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation that has carried out several field projects in India and other Asian countries. He has also been a member of the Indian Board for Wildlife (chaired by the Prime Minister).

Sukumar has travelled and lectured extensively around the world and is Adjunct Professor at Columbia University, New York (since 2001). He is the recipient of several awards including the Presidential Award of the Chicago Zoological Society (1992), Order of the Golden Ark (The Netherlands, 1997), Whitley Gold Award for International Nature Conservation, U.K. (2003), International Cosmos Prize, Japan (2006), J.C. Bose National Fellowship (2010), and Taru Lalvani Award of Rotary Club of Bombay (2011). In 2007 he received a commendation from the Prime Minister for his contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that shared the Nobel Peace Prize. His publications include three books and over a hundred scholarly papers in the area of elephant biology, tropical forest ecology, climate change, and nature conservation.

