

# How the Globalist Agenda Impinges on Animal Rights: ‘Chased from Every Side’: Sumatran Elephants Pinned Down by Forest Loss

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*Saleh Kadri, a young farmer from Leubok Pusaka village in North Aceh district, was on his way to his plantation when he spotted eight elephants on the riverbank. From his canoe, he recorded a video with his phone. The animals looked stunned. One seemed to be staring at Saleh’s moving canoe, while the others turned to flee. “Elephants! Elephants!” Saleh and his friends shouted until all the animals were gone behind the trees.*

“They were trapped,” said Nurdin, a conservation official in North Aceh, a district near the northern tip of Indonesia’s Sumatra Island. The herd, he told Mongabay, had nowhere else to go. They couldn’t cross the river and they couldn’t return to the forest due to land-clearing activities in the opposite direction, in the neighboring village of Cot Girek.

A few days later, the herd finally managed to escape during a downpour. But the story didn’t end there. When they reached Cot Girek, the elephants found food in the villagers’ farms and destroyed four houses. The villagers were not happy.

In the past few years, there’s been massive land clearing in North Aceh, which lies along Sumatra’s eastern coast in the province of Aceh. Despite the district’s enforcement of a moratorium on issuing new permits for corporate oil palm plantations, conservationists report ongoing deforestation on the ground. The North Aceh government has granted permissions for land clearing for smallholder oil palm farms, some of which are said to be controlled by powerful people in the region. This land-use change, conservationists say, has further fragmented the habitat of Sumatran elephants. “If we don’t take this problem seriously, I believe the animals will soon go extinct,” Nurdin said.

According to the latest population assessment by the Indonesian Elephant Conservation Forum, known by its Indonesian acronym FKGI, Aceh is home to 42% of the Sumatran

elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) thought to remain in the country. The rest of the [estimated population of 924-1,359](#) is struggling to survive in oil palm and pulpwood concessions in Riau and Jambi provinces, while a few are in national parks in Lampung province. “Aceh is our [best] hope,” said Wahdi Azmi, a conservationist who leads [CRU Aceh](#), a local conservation group. Across the province, 392-456 elephants still remain, according to the latest assessment, doing their best to survive in the fast-changing environment.

“More than 85% of Sumatran elephants live outside conservation areas,” Azmi said. In Aceh, there are four to five human-elephant conflicts reported every day, he added. In June, conflict intensity escalated in North Aceh, where much of the land has been cleared for oil palm.



Cot Girek sits between a vast palm oil plantation and Leuser ecosystem. Image by Fieni Aprilia for Mongabay.





Members of the government's local Conservation Response Unit on their way to see one of their captive elephants in the jungle. Image by Fieni Aprilia for Mongabay.

## Living on the front lines

In Cot Girek, a loud bang from a PVC air cannon woke Junaidi at 2 a.m. The 41-year-old farmer heads the village's elephant patrol team. Hearing the sound, he knew it was a sign that wild elephants were moving in. "Shoot the canon five times if you find wild elephants around your house" — that's how the villagers have been told to communicate with others who might live kilometers away with poor cellular service. Junaidi only heard one shot that night, but as patrol leader he had to get up and investigate despite the rain. In the darkness, he walked some 10 kilometers (6 miles) along muddy roads around the village to check the situation.

Since early June, Junaidi and other villagers in Cot Girek and Leubok Pusaka have been staying awake at night. In the space of a month, four wooden huts were reportedly destroyed by elephants. Asnawi, a smallholder oil palm farmer who lives 3 km (nearly 2 mi) from Junaidi's hut, was shocked to see 400 oil palm shoots in his plantation chewed up by elephants. Looking at the damage, "we couldn't sleep well," said Ida, Asnawi's sister, who didn't want her crops to meet the same fate.

Husna, an environmental activist from a local NGO called People's Conscience, or SAHARA by its Indonesian acronym, said the increasing cases of human-elephant conflict are caused by habitat loss. Cleared land can be seen from Junaidi's hut, showing the forested hills from afar. Deforestation has eliminated the transition zone between the hills and the village. No lowland forest is visible in between.

"Elephants are coming from that hill," Junaidi said, pointing to a forested area over the horizon.



An oil palm farmer in Cot Girek showing palm shoots demolished by an elephant and its calf the night before. Image by Fieni Aprilia for Mongabay.

According to Lukmanul Hakim, the geographical information system manager at Forest, Nature, and Environment Aceh (HAKA), a conservation group focused on Sumatra's Leuser Ecosystem, North Aceh has long had one of the highest deforestation rates in Aceh province. His analysis of satellite data generated by PlanetScope, which he called the most accurate satellite image provider, shows the district lost 7,508 hectares (18,553 acres) of forest from 2017-2020.

Satellite data generated from forest monitoring platform Nusantara Atlas show significant deforestation in Leubok Pusaka and Cot Girek, in the northern part of Leuser, over the past two years.





One of the recently cleared lands on the way to Alue Buloh, Cot Girek. Image by Fieni Aprilia for Mongabay.

Nuridin, the conservation agency official, said data he had collected from GPS collars tagged to elephants in North Aceh from 2016-19 showed that rainforest had been cleared within the elephants' migration routes.

Lilis Indriyani, the head of the North Aceh Plantation, Livestock and Animal Disease Agency, acknowledged land-clearing activities in Cot Girek. "But these lands are classified as non-forest," she said. Lilis also said most of this clearing was done by local people rather than corporate actors. In general, she said, the district is pro-environment. Since 2016, the district has actively applied a freeze on new oil palm permits. "We no longer give permit for companies to open up new oil palm plantations," she said. "Nor do we give oil palm seeds to smallholder farmers."

But on the ground, people are looking at different facts. Junaidi said the cleared land around his hut is owned by powerful government officials. There's also more of a chance of new deforestation under a central government policy [granting 8,000 hectares \(19,800 acres\) of land to ex-combatants of the Free Aceh Movement, or GAM](#), a now-disbanded armed insurgent group. Partai Aceh, the governor's political party, is the political extension of the movement.





Ricky, a Conservation Response Unit mahout, with Marni, a 46-year-old captive elephant that assists the mahouts to herd wild elephants back to the rainforest. Image by Fieni Aprilia for Mongabay.

It has always been poor villagers and elephants who suffer from conflict. In Aleu Buloh, Junaidi's hut sits between the forest and oil palm plantations owned by state-owned PT Perkebunan Nusantara I. Junaidi said the company relies on the villagers' patrol team to mitigate elephant conflicts, but don't give them any compensation. "We are guarding their gate ... all information about wild elephant movement comes from us," he said. (PTPN I did not respond to an interview request.)

People like Junaidi and Saleh Kadri have to rely on their own resources to herd the elephants away from their village. "We have reported about elephant conflicts in our village so many times but there has been no response from the government," Saleh said. "Conflict, always conflict. We are tired of this ... We hope the government can help farmers like us."

A week after they strayed into Cot Girek, the elephants managed to leave the village, Nurdin said. They were last seen heading to Paya Bakung, a subdistrict of North Aceh where a huge infrastructure project is being constructed. To mitigate the annual flooding in Lhoksukon, the capital of North Aceh, authorities are building the Kreung Keureto reservoir in Paya Bakung, which would end the herd's movements. "It's a dead end. They will have to come back to ... Cot Girek and finally Langkahan, where they can't cross the river and start their journey all over again," Nurdin said.

"Poor elephants ... they are chased from every side," he added. "They don't know where else to go."

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*Featured image: A Sumatran elephant with its calf. Image by Fieni Aprilia for Mongabay.*

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