

We know ROCKY.  We know SMALL DOGS.™

Meet ROCKY's friends. >



Discovery STORE    SHOP NOW

Discovery Channel  
TLC  
Animal Planet  
Travel Channel  
Discovery Health

► Site Index

# animalplanet.com

Search



August 18, 2010

## Animal Planet Feature

### Safari Special: Elephant Rescue



#### Thai Elephants

#### The Sordid Underbelly of the Elephant World

By Wendee Holtcamp

Like many endangered species, Asian elephants face habitat loss and illegal poaching. In Thailand, elephants also suffer a unique predicament: drug addiction, homelessness and unemployment.

Before 1990, over 4,000 elephants had jobs pulling logs, carrying people and goods cross-country, dragging plows, and performing in ceremonies. When Thailand outlawed rain-forest logging in 1990, thousands of elephants were suddenly out of work.

Each elephant owner had to find a way to feed his animal — elephants can eat 500 pounds of food daily. Some owners turn to illegal logging, which became far more dangerous. Forcing the beasts of burden to work faster, loggers prod them with spears and hooks, and feed them bananas spiked with amphetamines. Many logging elephants become drug-addicted, exhausted and ill.

✉ Send to a friend

📄 Printer-friendly



#### Ele-Fact

During its life, an elephant has six sets of teeth. As one set wears out, a new set comes in tooth by tooth from the back of the mouth. When the sixth set is

#### Advertisement



Others take their elephants to beg from tourists. City elephants scavenge on discarded food and plants polluted from car fumes, and become malnourished. Public pressure forced the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority to ban elephants from entering the city. As with logging, the law discouraged some but forced others underground.

the month. When the sixth set is used, the elephant then dies of starvation at about 70 years of age.

Today, nearly 300 elephants still beg on the streets of Bangkok, a booming metropolis. By day, mahouts hide the elephants outside of town. At night, elephants plod along crowded freeways to get to tourism central. Some beg illegally, while many others work in entertainment and tourism — the only legal use of domesticated elephants in Thailand today. Elephants carry people on rides, dance and perform in shows.

Why not reintroduce the elephants to the wild? "There is not enough space in Thailand, or anywhere in south or Southeast Asia for releases," says Asian elephant expert Dr. Richard Lair. "Too bad, because well over half would probably adapt quite well." The few thousand elephants that remain truly wild live in disconnected nature preserves and mountaintops around the country, and males are still massacred for their ivory tusks. Despite the disheartening situation, Lair and a handful of others have initiated innovative projects that bring a ray of hope for elephant conservation in Thailand.

◀ PREV

NEXT ▶



Pictures: Sakchai Lalit/AP | Richard Vogel/AP | Apichart Weerawong/AP |

[Discovery Channel](#) | [TLC](#) | [Animal Planet](#) | [Discovery Health](#) | [Science Channel](#) | [Planet Green](#)  
[Discovery Kids](#) | [Military Channel](#) | [Discovery News](#) | [Investigation Discovery](#) | [HD Theater](#) | [Turbo](#) |  
[FitTV](#)

[HowStuffWorks](#) | [TreeHugger](#) | [Petfinder](#) | [PetVideo](#) | [Discovery Education](#)

Visit the [Discovery Store](#): [Toys & Games](#) | [Telescopes](#) | [DVD Sets](#) | [Planet Earth DVD](#) | [Gift Ideas](#)

By visiting this site, you agree to the terms and conditions  
of our [Visitor Agreement](#). Please read. [Privacy Policy](#).

ATTENTION! We recently updated our privacy policy. The changes are effective as of September  
10, 2008.

To see the new policy, [click here](#). Questions? See the policy for the contact information.

Copyright © 2010 [Discovery Communications, LLC](#).

The leading global real-world media and entertainment company.