



Saving Jumbo

PROJECT ELEPHANT NATURE PARK
 Thailand - Singapore Management University

by JUMBO, THE ASIAN ELEPHANT, IN CHIANG MAI, THAILAND AND KENNY, TEAM LEADER OF PROJECT ELEPHANT NATURE PARK, THAILAND

The Youth Expedition Project (YEP) has touched many lives from humans to animals. Here is the story of Kenny and Jumbo, the Asian Elephant, in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

"Performing for a circus is not what I am born to do. I was ill-treated by cruel mahouts - I yearned for freedom. My father was never the same since the day his tusks - which were his pride - were cut off and sold.

These painful memories are fading. I now trust my life with the Elephant Nature Park (ENP) which aims to conserve nature and wildlife through providing a sanctuary for distressed elephants like myself, restoring rainforests and educating visitors.

In May 2009, a group of Singaporean youth arrived. I grew fond of them. They actively assisted ENP's reforestation campaign to restore my natural habitat. They did daily chores of maintaining the park and harvesting corn to feed my family. At my ENP mahouts' village of Huibakbak, they built a well to support the village. I documented daily activities at the ENP. Kenny Tan, the team leader of the group, plans to organise a photo exhibition to educate the public about elephant and nature conservation.

Kenny told me, "project offered a different, holistic experience since we were dealing with multiple issues that are linked together. I've always been interested in how massive deforestation in the world has contributed to the decline of wildlife such as the elephant population, and how communities dependent on wildlife have been subsequently affected." Kenny also shared his hopes to introduce more sustainable initiatives for the Park and its stakeholders, which would provide a better living environment for my family and friends.

As for leadership skills, I saw Kenny mature as this project helped him learn to prepare, equip and manage the team to be responsive to any unanticipated changes on the ground.

And as students, Kenny and the team shared the interest and enthusiasm for the project, but they were financially constrained. Thankfully, the National Youth Council supported the team in implementing the project through the Youth Expedition Project grant.

My elephant family and mahouts ENP hope to continue collaborating with Kenny and his team in conservation efforts as it would strengthen the symbiotic relationship of nature, wildlife and mankind. ■