

Return of the Elephant

Learning to live alongside giants in India again

A low rumble moves through the forests of Bandhavgarh in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. You feel it before you hear it—a vibration in forests that were quiet for over a century after hunting and capture drove elephants from this part of India.

Now they are back. As habitat shrinks and mining expands in neighboring states, many pass through Madhya Pradesh. Some stay for months. A few remain all year.

Elephants are ecological engineers reshaping the forest. They spread seeds, break through dense undergrowth and carve paths that other species follow. But for nearby communities, it is a reckoning with a neighbor they have not lived alongside for generations.

Elephants move through villages and farmland, damaging crops and homes and, at times, causing serious injury or loss of life. In 2023, TNC partnered with the Madhya Pradesh Tiger Foundation Society to reduce these risks, while still allowing elephants the space to roam and resume their role in shaping this terrain.

The approach is practical and locally led, using simple, affordable tools that are safe for elephants. Trip-wire rope alarms along field edges alert villagers when elephants approach. Flickering lights disrupt night raids. Smoke from burning chili irritates sensitive trunks and turns herds away. Training builds community capacity to respond to

and safely manage elephant encounters, while innovative solutions such as solar-powered fences guide elephants toward safer habitats and further reduce conflict with people.



Building on this success, the program received state-level recognition in 2025. **Communities are feeling real relief as crop and property losses decline and daily life becomes safer.** Signs of recovery are emerging across the wider landscape too. Restored habitat corridors are knitting together once-fragmented forests, giving elephants safer routes through central India and reducing the pressure that once pushed them into fields and homes.

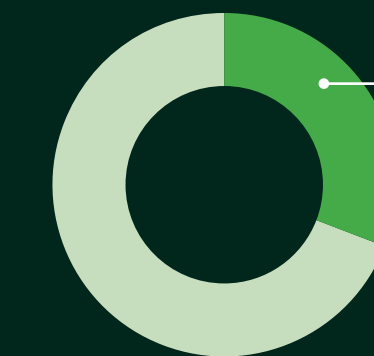
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Last year, elephants destroyed my crops and caused heavy losses. This year, things were different. An elephant came near my fields, but it did not enter. The reason was clear: the rope alarm system was in place. Because of this, my harvest was safe.

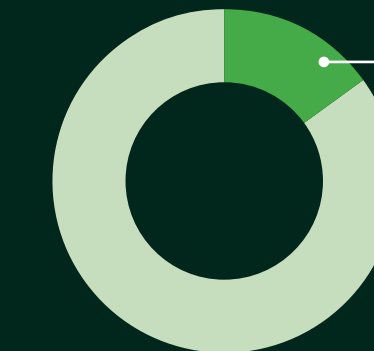
Dhyan Singh
Farmer, Madhya Pradesh

Impact

2030 Goals: Strengthen local resource management capacity for **170,000 people** and improve **300,000 hectares** of landscapes across India.



Community capacity strengthened
Progress to date (thru 2025):
53,969 people



Landscapes under improved management
Progress to date (thru 2025):
44,250 hectares



Left to right: A family of elephants walks down a road © Jimmy Kamballur; Training with the Madhya Pradesh Tiger Foundation Society on elephant-safe deterring techniques © TNC; Release of the publication on Bandhavgarh's wild elephants by Madhya Pradesh's Chief Minister, on International Tiger Day in July 2025 © TNC