

## DNA Solutions quest to preserve the Asian Elephant

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DNA Solutions based in London, UK, is pleased to announce that it has agreed to work together with Fauna & Flora International, the world's oldest conservation organisation, in using DNA fingerprinting to monitor elephant populations in Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains with the help of our scientists. Elephant dung is being collected by field biologists and trackers, and transported to DNA Solutions, an accredited DNA testing laboratory, where the DNA will be extracted and analysed. Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains are blanketed by virtually undisturbed forest stretching over 10,000 square kilometres. Field biologists can spend weeks searching for elephants to record the vital data needed to properly monitor elephant populations. DNA analysis can yield this vital information much more quickly and efficiently. Estimating the size of elephant populations in Cambodia is extremely difficult, due to their habits and the size of their habitat. They are also extremely secretive animals. Joe Heffernan, an elephant biologist with Fauna & Flora International, has been playing hide and seek with the largest of all land mammals for years. "This is the first time a closed population has been surveyed, so the results stand to be the most sophisticated ever recorded. "In addition to the difficulties of observing elephants in the wild, their tracks and feeding signs can only reveal so much. DNA from their dung, however, can reveal the age, sex and health of the individual that produced it. Because each fingerprint is unique, the size of the population can be accurately estimated."

Vern Muir, director of DNA Solutions, said: "DNA Solutions is essentially a big team of biologists, so I can speak for everyone when I say we are all feeling proud to be able to help the cause of elephant conservation.

"It is extremely rewarding to be able to use genetic techniques that for so many years have been used to solve other people's paternity issues, for something that instead gives all of us greater personal satisfaction." The information will be used to refine long-term elephant management strategies and identify future protected areas. The Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) also plans to use the data to monitor illegal elephant killing and forecast trends.

Cambodia is critical to Asian elephant conservation, but work is hampered by the scarcity of field data. Fauna & Flora International is leading surveys of remote forest areas and working with the Cambodian Wildlife Protection Office and Ministry of the Environment to ensure that these elephant strongholds are protected. Fauna & Flora International is also working with communities within the Cardamoms to understand their needs so that they do not harm elephants that stray close to their villages.

The first batch of samples will arrive with DNA Solutions next month, with initial data projected to be processed by November.

DNA SOLUTIONS  
145-157 ST JOHN STREET  
LONDON  
EC1V 4PY  
T: 0845 4500004  
F: 0871 661 5505  
W: [www.dnasolutions.co.uk](http://www.dnasolutions.co.uk)  
E: [d.leigh@dnasolutions.com](mailto:d.leigh@dnasolutions.com)  
PRESS CONTACT: DAN LEIGH

DNA Solutions was established in January 1997. It is focused on providing reliable and confidential global DNA products, including 'peace of mind' testing for consumers and legal testing for courts and legal disputes. Services include paternity/maternity testing; sibling verification; DNA storage & preservation, ancestry, and profiling. As the first pioneering company to offer home testing kits it has established itself with over 30 offices worldwide, DNA Solutions is synonymous with advanced accuracy DNA analysis

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