

MANDALAO ELEPHANT CONSERVATION AND VANTARA LAUNCH ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PROGRAMME IN LAOS

Partnership will expand veterinary capacity, provide retirement and lifelong care for elephants in need, and support conservation of Laos' wild elephant population

Luang Prabang, Laos, 9 September 2026 -- Mandalao Elephant Conservation and Vantara, a global wildlife conservation organisation based in Gujarat, India, today announced a new programme to strengthen elephant welfare, veterinary care, and conservation in Laos, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two organisations.

Supporting Laos' Elephants

Laos, once known as *Lan Xang*, the “Land of a Million Elephants”, is now home to approximately 400 wild elephants and more than 400 elephants in captivity, with both populations facing a continuing decline. Wild elephants face habitat loss, fragmentation, human-elephant conflict and poaching. Many captive elephants continue to work in logging and tourism, with limited access to specialised veterinary care. It is estimated that for every one to two elephants born in Laos each year, around 10 die.

A National Rapid Response for Elephants

As a first step, an Elephant Rapid Response Team has been inaugurated at Mandalao Elephant Conservation in Luang Prabang, in the presence of Lao Government representatives.

Vantara has provided a fully equipped mobile elephant veterinary unit that will enable the team to respond to sick and injured elephants across Laos, including both wild and captive elephants. The collaboration will also establish a specialised hospital for elephants requiring emergency treatment, long-term care and rehabilitation.

A New Beginning for Mae Khamnoy

The launch coincides with the rescue of Mae Khamnoy, a 43-year-old female elephant who spent her entire life working in logging operations. She lost two calves during pregnancy, reportedly as a result of the hardships she endured. More recently, she was being kept alone beside a busy road in Vientiane, where she was ridden by tourists and made to perform tricks.

Mae Khamnoy will now move to Mandalao Elephant Conservation for a well-deserved retirement, where she will receive veterinary care, a natural and balanced diet and the opportunity to live alongside other elephants and experience social interaction. Her rescue highlights some of the welfare challenges facing working elephants, including injuries associated with prolonged work, inappropriate riding equipment and the use of hooks.

Veterinary Care and Local Capacity

Alongside the launch, Vantara and Mandalao veterinary teams carried out a health camp for 12 resident elephants including comprehensive health assessments, diagnostics and specialist consultations. The programme will also provide capacity building training for elephant caregivers and Veterinarians in elephant welfare, husbandry, nutrition and preventive healthcare, helping build long-term veterinary and animal-care capacity in Laos.

Dr Tim Bouts, Elephant Veterinary Specialist at Mandalao Elephant Conservation, said: “Establishing this Elephant Response Team is a major step forward for elephant welfare and veterinary care in Laos. We are proud to offer this service free of charge to elephant owners and Government Departments responsible for elephants across the country. We thank Vantara for its support and look forward to a long-term collaboration.”

Protecting Wild Elephants

Beyond supporting elephants in human care, the partnership will develop long-term, field-based solutions to support the recovery of Laos’ wild elephant population and safeguard its genetic diversity. This will include work on population recovery, habitat stewardship, community engagement and measures to reduce human-elephant conflict and poaching. The work will be developed with Lao authorities, local communities and conservation partners.

Ajit Kulkarni, Special Director, Compliance and Due Diligence, Vantara, said: “We are glad to partner with Mandalao to support the elephants of Laos, in Laos. By combining veterinary care with investment in local expertise and conservation in the wild, we hope to make a lasting contribution to the future of the country’s elephants.”

The partnership brings together Mandalao’s experience in Laos with Vantara’s veterinary, technical and conservation expertise, with the aim of strengthening the country’s long-term capacity to care for and conserve its elephants.

Ends

About Mandalao Elephant Conservation

Mandalao Elephant Conservation is a conservation organisation based in Luang Prabang, Laos, dedicated to the welfare, protection and conservation of Asian elephants. The organisation provides a safe environment for elephants in need, with a focus on veterinary care, responsible elephant management, long-term care and conservation. Mandalao also works with local communities, government authorities and conservation partners to promote sustainable approaches to elephant welfare and the protection of elephants in their natural habitats.

About Vantara

Vantara is a world’s leading, not-for-profit, animal welfare and conservation organisation located in Gujarat, India. Its ex situ programmes (care provided outside the natural habitat) include treatment and long-term animal care (where required), supported by advanced veterinary medicine, species-specific nutrition, specialised infrastructure and multidisciplinary teams. Conservation breeding programmes are also undertaken to support the future restoration of viable populations in suitable natural habitats through rewilding. It’s in situ conservation work (conservation in animals’ natural habitats) supports native species restoration, habitat restoration and human-wildlife conflict mitigation efforts led by government authorities, conservation institutions and other partners in India and internationally.