



# **GVI Chiang Mai Annual Report 2019**

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# 1 | Introduction

What a year! In the last 12 months, GVI Chiang Mai have experienced an explosion of growth in both the vigor and reach of our programme. Our dedicated team has expanded to include 8 full-time staff, 2 community liaisons and a talented group of interns, all of who bring their own unique flair to the family here. With so many capable hands working to expand the programme, it's no surprise that we've come this far. Here in the village of Huay Pakoot, we've (1) restructured our curriculum to enhance English and environmental learning of the local youth, (2) established stronger scientific training to promote volunteer development and ensure data quality, (3) hosted a legendary assortment of fun-fueled holidays and successful fundraisers, and, perhaps most importantly, (4) fostered a stronger bond with our friends in the local community. While many more opportunities for growth still lay in the path ahead, it's encouraging to reflect upon such a phenomenal year!

## 2 | Objectives and SDGs

Long-term and short-term objectives worked towards this year:

<b>Objective 1</b>	Increase and promote ethical elephant tourism
<b>Objective 2</b>	Create a viable self-sustaining eco-tourism program for the village
<b>Objective 3</b>	Improve standards of living and job opportunities for people in the Huay Pakoot village
<b>Objective 4</b>	Increase awareness with regards to the importance of biodiversity amongst GVI volunteers and local communities
<b>Objective 5</b>	Maintain and build on the existing strong relationship with the Huay Pakoot community

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



We have transformed the way we teach at the primary school by re-writing curriculums, expanding variety of lesson content, and improving teacher training for volunteers.



We have taken on two part-time scholars (now staff) to give the community more ownership of the programme, and are also helping the village in their own community projects such as farming and dam-making.



We encourage our diverse group of volunteers to share their culture with the rest of us, so we can learn from each other. Our staff team includes two local members, and we involve the community in all important decisions regarding the project.



We have improved volunteer involvement and proficiency in collection of elephant data, allowing participants to take more ownership in proving the success of our model. We have also introduced an Environmental Education Programme at the school to cultivate environmental awareness in the younger generation of villagers.

### 3 | Project Focus: Elephant Conservation

In April, we enhanced our Asian elephant data to make it more volunteer-friendly. As many at our hub are not from a scientific background and found the data collection complicated, these changes have bolstered volunteer involvement and learning.

We currently collect three different types of observational data on Asian elephants: Welfare and Health check, Activity Budget, and Behavioural Data. All three types of data are collected once every two weeks for each of the 8 Asian elephants that we have in the forests of Huay Pakoot. As 80-90% of elephant behaviour research is carried out on African elephants, our long-term monitoring data is especially relevant to the scientific community. Additionally, most data collected on Asian elephants is taken from elephants in captivity. Our elephants, however, are semi-wild, meaning they will never be fully reintroduced into the wild but they are free from a captive setting and are able to act naturally in a safe environment. Our data therefore provides rare scientific insight into natural behavior of the Asian elephant.

The Welfare and Health check is our volunteers' favourite type of data, because it is an opportunity to get up close to our elephants and appreciate their size and beauty! We have a policy of no hands-on interaction - purely observational, which means that apart from the health check we keep our distance from the elephants. We start the check by giving the mahouts a bag of bananas to distract the elephant. We then conduct a full external health exam in which volunteers assess both behavioural health indicators and a body scoring system, ensuring that elephants maintain a healthy weight and welfare standard. While our methodology was left unchanged to maintain the integrity of our long-term data set, the wording was edited to decrease volunteer error. Also added to the Welfare and Health check process were 'mini welfare cards' to be given out to volunteers on any hike so they can practice collecting accurate data.

Our second type of data edited was the Activity Budget. The Activity Budget records a multitude of data, including: activity or behaviour, information on food consumption and preparation, nearest elephant and their distance, mahout



command, terrain slope, habitat type and a notes section for additional observations. This type of design, known as instantaneous sampling, requires that each category of data be recorded every two minutes for a total of ninety minutes on a focal elephant. The ethogram (a comprehensive list of behaviours with correlating codes) was updated with explicit, volunteer-friendly definitions. The layout of the Activity Budget and ethogram were also restructured to flow more intuitively, resulting in fewer volunteer errors.

The final type of data collected is Behavioural Data, and is structured in a format known as sequence sampling. This records specific target behaviours exhibited by a focal elephant. As volunteers often interpret elephant behaviors inconsistently, standardizing this data was a high priority.

Pictures and descriptions were added to the back of the behaviour data sheets and are proving to be helpful in mitigating volunteer and intern error.

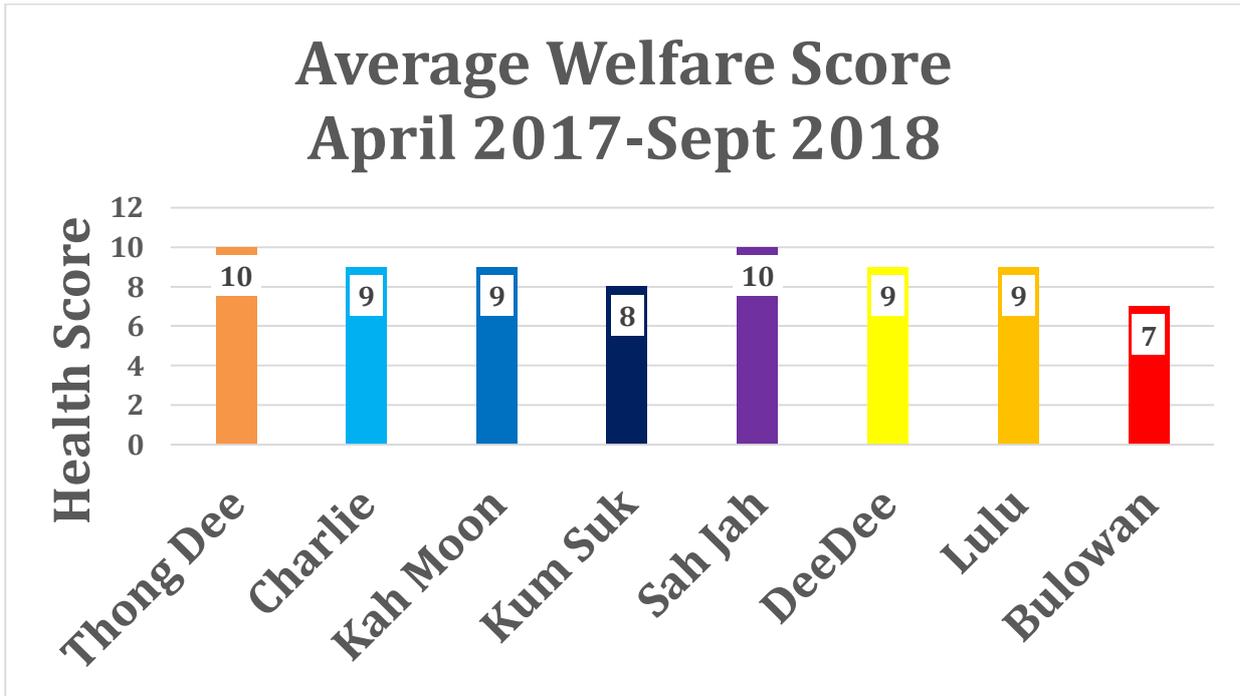
To further improve precision of data collection, both interns and staff are now required to complete and pass a data test before they can start leading hikes. Alison, our Elephant Science Coordinator, also introduced a "Data Collection Certificate" that is given to those who complete a certain number of data collections correctly. Volunteer and intern participation increased as a result of this incentive, and many have expressed interest in the certificate as a way to bolster their employability. Finally, Alison has started observing all the staff on hike to ensure that volunteer training is correct and standardised.

One of our main aims at this hub is to promote ethical elephant tourism throughout Thailand by encouraging people to move away from the current riding camp-based tourism models.

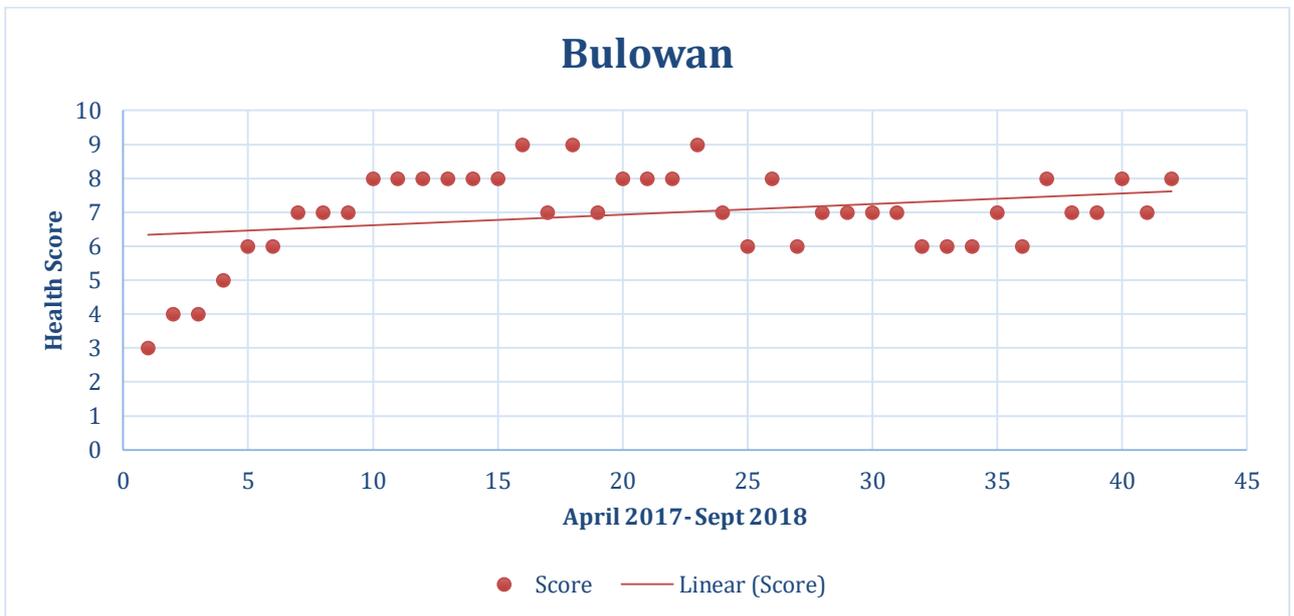
The importance of maintaining a long-term data set moving forward is of paramount for this project's success, and we are taking action to obtain the elusive Thai Research permit which will allow for publication. Our long-term monitoring



data set has been continually collected since April 2017. With increased volunteer precision and involvement, we plan to continue our study for years to come and provide the world with insight into a more sustainable model of Asian elephant ecotourism.



**Figure 1.**



**Figure 2.**

The welfare and health check data we collect is originally based on the paper “Assessment of Body Condition in Asian Elephants” (Wemmer et al. 2006). A body scoring system is used to assess the general health and condition. Anything below a score of 6 is considered unhealthy and anything between a score of 7-11 is considered normal. From April 2017-September 2018 we were able to establish the average health score of our elephants (see figure 1). Kum Suk is our oldest elephant at over 65 years old, so a score of 8 is a positive sign to see.

Bulowan, our bull elephant, was a score of 3 when he first arrived (see figure 2), but quickly achieved (and has since maintained) a score of 7 after just months after being reintroduced to the forest.

Another success with the elephants this year was the signing of new elephant contracts back in June. This signing involved negotiations with all eight of our elephant owners and mahouts to agree on a rental price for the elephants. All eight owners were satisfied with GVI and happy to extend, even agreeing on a 2-year contract, meaning the elephants are in the forest safely until 2020!

*Written by Alison Brady (Elephant Science Coordinator) and Liane Fulford (Base Manager)*

## 4 | **Project Focus: Community Education**

At GVI Chiang Mai, we are extremely fortunate to be welcomed by such a friendly and inviting village. For this reason, GVI Chiang Mai has taken steps to become more involved in the community of Huay Pakoot over the last year. Dee and Don,



our community liaisons, lead staff and volunteers every other Friday to join forces with the villagers to provide extra hands for construction, planting and other needed projects. This year, we assisted in building a dam for the elephants to mud-bathe in, helped construct the foundations for a new temple, created much needed fire lines during dry season, and assisted with planting and harvesting of corn. By helping the villagers on these various projects, we have strengthened ties

within the community and created a bridge for volunteers to become more involved with their homestays.

Children from surrounding villages flock to Huay Pakoot on weekdays to attend school. While volunteers, interns and staff teach English to these children twice a week, school broke up for 6 weeks during the dry season. We used this opportunity to revamp the school curriculum such that the children could start their English learning from an improved structured programme in April,

which will benefit them both now and in the future. The curriculum matches and builds on the existing Thai curriculum that the children must understand and pass before progressing to the next year. With this revamp, it is compulsory for all teachers to complete a feedback form online to explain what was taught during each lesson and how the children responded to the subject, highlighting key points to work on during revision sessions. This has greatly benefited the teaching programme, as new teachers can view what has been taught previously and build on that rather than repeating lessons.



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To form stronger connections with the school, GVI Chiang Mai has collaborated with local school teachers to incorporate a conservation curriculum immediately following classes on Tuesday. This curriculum aims to teach young people about environmental issues and demonstrates how they can avoid pollution and waste in their own community. Lessons this year have revolved primarily around recyclable materials, showing the children how waste can be reused and made into something new. Children constructed plant pots for sunflower seeds and birdfeeders for their playground using old water bottles, made windchimes using bottlecaps and string, and explored their environment using recycled paper and crayons to make rubbings of leaves, revealing the intricate textures of their natural surroundings. The children have thoroughly enjoyed the

additional hour of creative activities, and the volunteers and have had fun teaching about alternative methods to waste management.

Upon receiving additional requests from both villagers and volunteers, we have expanded the number of evening classes that we offer to local families. This has been greatly received by the volunteers, with some actively approaching their homestays to offer 1-on-1 teaching. As Mahouts leave school at an early age to care for their elephant, the opportunities to learn English are often reduced. To meet this need, GVI Chiang Mai

have brought back Mahout English, a semi-weekly evening gathering where Mahouts learn how to communicate effectively with GVI personnel on hike and even help to explain some of the elephants' behaviours. Staff have also begun teaching English to a young



paralysed man, NeeWeh, as his disability has prevented him from attending school at the top of the village. In addition to providing him with the opportunity to learn English, these classes also allow him to speak with individuals outside of his family.

*Written by Charlotte Green (Field Staff)*

## 5 | Project Focus: Community Engagement

### Thanksgiving

At GVI Chiang Mai we try to ensure that volunteers feel at home, especially on celebratory days where they may be missing their families. Therefore, as well as participating in all the

celebrations that the Thai and Karen culture has to offer, we also bring our own cultural celebrations to the village. During Thanksgiving, everyone on project was asked whether they would like to cook a dish from their home country to share, buying ingredients in Chiang Mai the weekend before.

On the afternoon of the day itself, all project personnel gathered to help cook using our basic kitchen facilities. It was several hours of a diverse set of people working together that led to the creation of a multicultural Thanksgiving feast for all. In the evening, everyone sat down to dinner to celebrate and share what they were thankful for. The mahouts were also invited - cautious at first with all the new and strange food on offer, they soon realised how tasty it all was!

What made this event such a success was that it helped to build the familial atmosphere that the Chiang Mai hub typically enjoys. It also served an educational purpose, in that, not only did people learn about popular dishes from other cultures, but they also gained key cooking skills. For those younger volunteers, where this may be their first time away from home, this would have been a useful experience and possibly would have cultivated their own culinary flair.

*Written by Tom Mitchell (Field Staff)*

### **Christmas**



With volunteers/interns/staff being away from their families for Christmas, this was an opportunity for the Chiang Mai hub to bring everyone together as our own family. The day still

began with an elephant hike, as taking our data will always be the priority; however, everyone ventured out in their Santa hats and brought the festive spirit along with them!

The rest of the morning and early afternoon was spent preparing for the day's school session (with Christmas music playing in the background), but today it would be with a difference - a Christmas extravaganza. School prep involved maximum effort from everyone involved, with exciting plans coming together. The idea that made the most impact, was from staff member Matt Mangan dressing up as Santa Claus. He visited each classroom to give out gifts for each child. Around the playground, we played music, had board games, face painting, and arts and crafts to get the children in the Christmas spirit. A heartwarming experience that everyone will find hard to forget.

To encapsulate the spirit of Christmas close to many people's hearts, the staff decided to try to have as close to a traditional Christmas dinner for everyone as possible - despite our basic cooking facilities. With ingredients purchased in Chiang Mai the weekend prior, everyone pitched in to help create an impressive feast for our Christmas Day meal. This was enjoyed merrily by all, including the mahouts who came along after a hard day's work watching their elephants!



The evening activities began with a post-dinner carol concert for the villagers. With sheets of Christmas songs in hand, Christmas cheer was spread to various Huay Pakoot families who each responded with broad (if somewhat confused) smiles. The subsequent evening's festivities at base were fun for all, with games, singing and music providing a raucous end to a special day for everyone at GVI Chiang Mai.

*Written by Toby Craze (Field Staff) and Tom Mitchell (Field Staff)*

## 6 | GVI Trust Fundraising

### Huay Pakoot - Mae Chaem Walk and Run

Back in July, our group of volunteers, interns and staff undertook a grueling journey to hike from our hill tribe base Huay Pakoot to the nearest town of Mae Chaem. This journey was a historic trading route for the elephants before the days of the easily accessible combustion engine. Stretching 57 km from door to door, the road twists numerous times through the Western Nongchai Range and past a multitude of rice paddy fields.

Our group was more than twenty strong, everyone carrying their own water and snack supplies. Three music speakers were tactically positioned amongst the pockets of people. Dee, our Community Liaison, organised a support vehicle to transport 20L water coolers to wait at every 5km checkpoint, offering refills and lifts for any that were suffering. At each checkpoint, the group revived itself with a 15-20 minute break before setting off again. With only minor blisters and fatigue creeping in to claim a couple of casualties, we all crossed the finish line together in Mae Chaem and rightfully celebrated with pizza, pasta and a swimming pool! There were far too many success stories amongst our group to name them all, but it was a undeniably awesome achievement that raised over our goal of £2000 for the GVI Trust to keep our elephants Sah-Jah, Khum Suk and Lulu in the forest.

After the success of the group walk to Mae Chaem, staff members Liane Fulford (Base Manager), Myles Davis (Assistant Base Manager) and Olly Jenner (Field Staff) vowed to attempt to run the same distance. Starting the run at 3.30pm on a Friday



afternoon whilst the sun was waning, the run was broken into two pieces. The first leg from Huay Pakoot to Na Hon was 22km long; the length of a half marathon. The trio finished confidently within 2.5 hours, rested for the night, and

started promptly at 6.30am to complete the following 35km by 10am on Saturday morning. Rather touchingly, a few of the volunteers had arranged to congratulate the runners at the finishing line and enjoyed watching them hobble awkwardly into the pool to nurse their sore muscles. Another successful fundraiser that raised £450 which went towards a football tournament held in our village, incorporating 20 villages from the nearby area.

*Written by Oliver Jenner (Intern Coordinator)*

### **Intern Halloween Fundraiser**

Our whole Halloween fundraiser was organised completely by interns - even staff had no idea what was going on! Whilst everyone went for their dinners at the homestays, base was completely transformed with spooky decorations and face-painting stations, as well as snacks. A pleasant surprise was the children turning up to have their faces painted! Scary hikes were organised where volunteers and staff had to follow clues to reach the end of the walk. Mahouts Atit, Wynn, Don, Patti Sayee, and Duh Lur jumped out to terrify the passing participants. Even some brave children took part in these scary hikes!



An incredible evening of fun that involved both volunteers and the community, with a grand total of £250 being raised for the GVI Trust in just one night! This money funds our GVI Trust elephants Khum Suk, Sah Jah, and Lulu, to keep them in the surrounding forests of Huay Pakoot, and to keep their mahouts here in the village with their families.



*Written by Toby Craze (Field Staff)*

## Wilderness Campout Fundraiser



On the weekend of November 30, GVI Chiang Mai camped out in the nearby conservation forest and held team wilderness challenges to raise money for our three GVI trust elephants: Sah Jah, Lulu, and Khum Suk. Competition was fierce across the different events. On Friday night, local

mahouts helped volunteers to craft fine cuisine in a forest cooking competition that was judged by field staff. Saturday morning kicked off with deadly precision in the form of a slingshot competition, followed by a riddle-filled resource gathering hike, heated tug-of-war, an obstacle course, and many other team-building challenges. The evening events tested each team's creativity, and included an art competition (using natural materials) and a variety show! By the time the winner was crowned at the end of Saturday, our fundraising teams had raised over £2000, enough to keep our GVI trust elephants in the forest for over a month!



*Written by Matt Mangan (Field Staff)*

## 7 | Project Staff Update

We are privileged to have such a great staff team, with many different personalities and skill sets present. New members in 2018, Liane, Olly and Ali, have now become part of the core team and will be staying around for the majority of 2019. Myles also remains, and will soon be celebrating his 2-year anniversary of being in the village. In addition to several interns that have moved up to staff positions throughout the year, our local NSP members, Dee and Don, have also become full-fledged staff. These two are an integral part of the team and have served as an important bridge between us and the

village. The volunteers enjoy their Karen lessons with Dee and Don, as well as their jokes and presence on base.

Dee's strawberry field was his main source of income before coming on the NSP, but he now no longer needs to rely on this. Like many families in the village, Dee also owns some elephants. Despite their role with GVI, being part-time means they still have enough time to help out in the village. It's not uncommon for Don to aid his family on their farm or do construction work around the village. He used to be a mahout for one of our elephants, Charlie, and still occasionally mahouts for him. He gives us a great insight into the point of view of the mahouts, and because he is firm friends with them, he has helped encourage the mahouts to come to base to socialise with all the volunteers. They are now regularly found engaging in ping-pong tournaments together!



*Written by Liane Fulford (Base Manager)*

## 8 | Looking Forward

We have high hopes for 2019, with an established staff team and a great village on our side. Our aims are to continue expanding our community program. We'd love to continue Mahout English classes and begin teaching them basic first aid. We also hope to teach our local staff members some computer skills so they can take on more admin responsibilities relating to the project. In addition to this, we will continue expanding the biodiversity part of the program, potentially to include campouts in the forest with early morning birding! And of course, we look forward to having our eight elephants with us in the forest for another year, where we can see them being their natural selves. We have recently begun employing camera traps around the elephants during the night when their mahouts are not present to watch them. This provides us a rare opportunity to track natural behavior of Asian elephants after dark. We are excited to see what findings come back from this.