



# ASIAN TROPICS AT THE

**T**hink of your worst rush-hour commute. Add a thousand bicyclists and motorcycles weaving in and out of the traffic. Add two adult Asian elephants. Holy cow! Yes, even add a cow because we are in the bustling city of Delhi, India. It is the Hindu festival of Shivratri or Lord Shiva's birthday and two elephants are accelerating north under the overpass and headed into downtown for the big celebration.

The clogged and hurried city is not where I expected to see one of Asia's largest land animals wading through potholes and pollution; however, urban elephants seem to be a growing trend. As natural habitats are plowed under for parking lots, crops and development, wild elephants inevitably come out on the losing end. However, many elephant lives are saved through their assimilation into the working human class. Those elephants that manage to escape the steam roller of encroaching civilization slide back into the shadows of diminishing habitat, many times violently colliding with humans who are trying to make a rural living on wilderness edges.

As a result, Denver Zoo has designs for constructing an environmentally-friendly ten-acre *Asian Tropics* habitat with charismatic species including the Asian elephant. With educational messages about the conflict between humans and elephants, Denver Zoo will call many of its 1.5 million annual visitors into action by asking for their support for increasing conservation programs and research projects. The impact of learning and seeing such an amazing and intelligent animal up close and personal in a beautiful setting will go a long way in influencing a change for the future for all animal species.

The designs of *Asian Tropics* will incorporate many environmental as well as cultural aspects of Asian life. Five large animal habitats with mud wallows, water features, sand pits and other enrichment opportunities will be home to rotating species of Asian elephants, Indian rhinos and Malayan tapirs. Animal crossings and island habitats will allow a close up view of animals.

Rural and urban architecture will reflect many of the Asian styles and cultural beliefs. To many Asians, the elephant can represent a god, or appear as a sacred animal or a guardian of temples. Likewise, the depiction of elephants will be dispersed throughout Denver Zoo's *Asian Tropics* in the form of fountains, murals, shrine structures and more. The exhibit will feature elements that demonstrate how Asian elephants are both revered and reviled. Visitors will experience a replica of a rural village with crops and fencing damaged by elephants, a lifelike demonstration of the human-elephant conflict.

The visitor will be immersed in the world of the Asian tropics; they will see the conflicts with nature and yet, see its benefits. They will have the opportunity to see and learn about a wide variety of animal species and why they and their environment are important to protect. Visitors will have the opportunity to look into the eye of an elephant and see they are worth protecting for all future generations to see.

Construction of *Asian Tropics* is projected to begin in 2009. To learn more, visit [www.denverzoo.org](http://www.denverzoo.org).

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DAVE PARSON IS DENVER ZOO'S WEBMASTER/  
PHOTOGRAPHER



# DENVER ZOO

By Dave Parsons

