

Elephants in the Hourglass: A Journey of Reckoning and Hope Along the Himalaya

Kim Frank

Pegasus Books (Jan 7, 2025)

Hardcover \$28.99 (288pp)

978-1-63936-795-5

Nuanced, wise, and enthralling, *Elephants in the Hourglass* is Kim Frank's extraordinary memoir about her adventures investigating the plight of Asian elephants in northeast India—inquiries that run alongside accounts of personal healing, letting go of control, humorous self-doubts, and Frank's struggle to balance her calling as a writer abroad with her love for her daughters in Idaho.

Sharp observations fill this powerful book that explains that Asian elephants, including those in the eastern Himalayas, are moving toward extinction at an exponential rate. While traveling the North Bengal region, Frank witnesses the fragmented habitats and other stressors affecting wild elephants that are “harassed, heckled, electrocuted, hit by trains and cars, desperate for fast nutrition and fighting to survive.” She also observes the compromised lives of captive working elephants.

While government and volunteer organizations work to protect Asian elephants, Frank notes, funding is scarce; many efforts are hampered by widespread poverty, political unrest, limited education, and the loss of religious and cultural traditions that fostered reverence for these majestic animals. Development, including social media's “selfie” culture, is indicted for encouraging reckless behaviors around elephants in shrinking habitats, too.

Several courageous women are featured herein. Jody, a “globally savvy adventurer” and *National Geographic* photographer, joins Frank; Parbati Barua, a legendary elephant “whisperer,” leads the charge for Asian elephant protection. And Sonia Jabbar, a feisty, fearless “conservation rock star,” uses her Bengali tea estate as an elephant sanctuary. Descriptions of the mystical mountain views in Darjeeling, the traffic and smog of Siliguri, and monsoon rains, oppressive heat, and stinging ants of the jungle round the book out.

Elephants in the Hourglass is a captivating environmental memoir that addresses global issues related to technology, development, culture change, and gender roles in addition to examining the decline of an endangered species.

KRISTEN RABE (January / February 2025)

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