

## Indian Autorickshaws Ride Into Britain's Palace Grounds

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Britain's Prince Charles and wife Camilla Parker Bowles launched the Travels to My Elephant auto rickshaw race fundraiser event to save the Indian elephant at their Clarence House palace in London on Thursday. (PTI Photo)

**LONDON:** Two Bajaj Auto autorickshaws formed the centrepiece of the gardens of Prince Charles Clarence House palace in London as he flagged off a unique race across India to save the Asian elephant.

The 'Travels To My Elephant' fundraising drive has been described as a once-in-a-lifetime rickshaw race which will take place in November 2015 to protect the Asian elephant from extinction.

It is being organised in memory of Mark Shand, the founder of the Elephant Family charity and brother of Camilla Parker-Bowles who died suddenly in April 2014.

"When this terrible tragedy occurred, both my wife and I said we must keep his legacy going," said Prince Charles, who hosted a reception today to mark the official launch of the project attended by the Indian high commissioner to the UK, Ranjan Mathai, among other supporters and donors of the charity.

It aims to raise a total of 1 million pounds towards one of Elephant Family's focus areas of creating safe corridors for the wild elephants.

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"This is an enormously important cause, particularly because of its human-animal dimension. The establishment of corridors has the ability to transform the lives of the local farmers. If we can just complete the Assam corridor, it would make a fantastic difference in that part of India."

"I can only wish all of you every possible success in driving these machines on rather bumpy roads," said the Prince of Wales, who is the joint president of the Elephant Family along with Camilla.

The event is inspired by Shand's own rescue of an Asian elephant, Tara, which is recorded in his best-selling book 'Travels on my Elephant'.

'Travels To My Elephant' will see a fleet of 30 rickshaws race 500 km in an epic Indian adventure across Madhya Pradesh to Tara's home at Kipling Camp.

"Journeying through some of the country's most colourful and awe-inspiring countryside, from the erotic sculptures at Khajuraho to the tiger reserves of Bandhavgarh National Park, teams of two from all corners of the globe will take on the unique challenge," the Elephant Family said in a statement.

Hollywood actress Susan Sarandon, models Yasmin and Amber Le Bon, and Quintessentially Foundation principal Ben Elliot are among some of the many racers taking part.

"This is a rallying cry to preserve the Asian elephant."

On April 23 last year, the Asian elephant lost its greatest champion [Shand]. He is looking down on us and will be enormously proud of us today. The eccentric adventure that we are all going to depart on together would have been right up his street," said Elliot, who also took the royal couple on taster ride around their garden of Clarence House today.

As part of a series of launch events for 'Travels To My Elephant' in the UK, 20 rickshaws will be transformed into extraordinary pieces of mobile art individually designed by a host of international artists, milliners and fashion houses including Manish Arora, Diane von Furstenberg, Carolina Herrera, Philip Colbert and The Rodnik Band and Nicky Haslam.

From June 1, this beautiful collection of rickshaws will be seen across the streets of London, offering the public a unique chance to join the conservation journey and contribute to the charity campaign by riding the rickshaws in tours of the city.

With the fine art logistics expert Cadogan Tate providing support throughout the event, the rickshaws will then be auctioned by Sotheby's at Lancaster House on June 30.

"The No 1 threat to the Asian elephant is the massive, colossal habitat loss. Their jungles are disappearing. If there is one animal big enough and intelligent enough to take on the humans, it is the Asian elephant," said Ruth Powys, chief executive of the Elephant Family.

Elephant Family was founded by Shand as a means to create a world where wild Asian elephants thrive in their natural habitat and live in harmony with humans.

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