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GREEN HEART

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GREEN HEART

COVER: Tomato anemonefish. Read how WWF-Malaysia is stepping up marine conservation work in pages 10 to 12.
Photo: ©WWF-Canon/Cat Holloway

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WWF-Malaysia, the national conservation trust, currently runs more than 75 projects covering a diverse range of environmental protection and nature conservation work. Since 1972, WWF-Malaysia has worked on important conservation projects, from saving endangered species such as tigers and turtles, to protecting our highland forests, rivers and seas.

Wild Clips

Their trip into Temengor Forest Reserve was the shortest one yet. Their food and fuel rations, which had been stored in an Orang Asli village a few weeks ago, were depleted by the inhabitants. Their vehicle kept slip-sliding down treacherous muddy roads after heavy downpours. Nevertheless, the four-man team came out of the forest buzzing with excitement – they had video clips of tigers!

WWF-Malaysia "Tigers Alive!" project field biologists Mark and Shariff were in Temengor conducting research on tiger ecology in a logged dipterocarp forest. Along with them were Peninsular Malaysia Forest Species Conservation Manager Reuben Clements and WWF-International's coordinator for Tigers and Asian Big Cats Bivash Pandav.

A 2004 study conducted in Nepal found that tigers were avoiding camera-traps probably due to the flash emitted from camera-traps. The video-trap was installed in Temengor to investigate how tigers react to foreign objects such as camera-traps and document the reaction of tigers when the camera-trap flash is triggered. Camera and video traps operate on a similar principle but instead of a flash, the video camera emits an infrared light, which is not a deterrent to tigers as far as we know. Also, the video-trap is installed inside a larger casing.

Before this, the team, assisted by WWF-Malaysia's Head of Multimedia and Image Bank Stephen Hogg, used a video-trap with a white halogen light that scared away the first wild Malayan tiger on video. The three-second clip recorded in Jeli, Kelantan, motivated the team to try video-trapping using infra-red light. Within two months, the second clip was captured – this time for a whole nine seconds! The tiger didn't even appear to notice the video whirring.

On this latest expedition, three new clips of the Temengor tigers were recorded, offering a deeper insight into tiger behaviour. Two videos were captured during daytime, and one during night-time. The clips showed two individual female tigers on separate occasions sniffing the camera-trap attached at the opposite side of the video-trap. They were obviously very curious about the foreign object.

Based on the successful acquisition of these new clips, the team plans to set up more video-traps at selected locations in Temengor to gain more information on tiger behaviour as well as document group numbers of tiger prey. Wish them luck! ■

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Mark Rayan

A still image taken from a video clip of the Temengor tigers.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Rayner Bili

WWF-Malaysia rhino patrollers Patrick Jonnes Sading, Jaini Impin and Albert Sitawin excitedly setting up video-traps with hopes of capturing new rhino images in this area.

Rhino Signs Found in Island

It pays to involve local communities in our conservation work. Our connections with local communities in Borneo led to the discovery of more rhino tracks at a new location – an estuarine island* – in Sabah.

The WWF-Malaysia rhino patrol unit identified at least two adult rhinos here, based on the size of their footprints and other marks nearby the village. Tips from the locals also indicated the sightings of illegal hunters and poachers in this estuary.

These latest findings prompted several questions: can these rhinos swim across the main river? Is there a breeding population here since these rhinos have existed in this area for the past 10 to 20 years?

WWF-Malaysia rhino patrol unit will continue to monitor this area to find out more. So watch this space! ■

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Rayner Bili

It takes good eyes to spot this in the field! Even a footprint is a good enough sign that rhinos still exist there.

* Due to the status of the Sumatran rhino as the most endangered species in Malaysia, location of this new discovery is not mentioned in this article.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Michele Lee

From the ground-truthing data collected, researchers are able to identify land-uses or features of a location and compare these to what is shown on maps.

Time for Truth

By Sara Sukor, "Tigers Alive!" Project Communications Officer,
Peninsular Malaysia Forests Programme

Sigmund Freud once said, "From error to error, one discovers the entire truth". He could have been talking about ground-truthing.

On a typical ground-truthing day, Michele Lee of the "Tigers Alive!" project along with Geographic Information System (GIS) officers Emmelia Azli and Wan Norshahida, would first drive to the deepest and furthest site that they have identified; armed with a Global Positioning System (GPS) device, topography maps, satellite images, data sheets, cameras and, not to be forgotten, leech socks. Using GPS, they would take coordinate points on the ground and jot down the features of the areas that they have marked. This exercise would be repeated throughout all the areas of interest and could go on for days.

What actually is ground-truthing?
Maps or satellite images are known to be a bit confusing to the untrained eye and inaccurate from time to time. Ground-truthing is the best way to confirm "what is what" on the map.

Ground-truthing refers to information collected "on the ground" and this will help in the verification and analysis of a particular spot in a specific satellite image. Taking geographic coordinates on the ground assists in relating an image data to the features and materials in reality. From the data collected, researchers are able to identify land-uses or features of a location and compare these to what is shown on maps.

It might sound like a simple task but it can be exhausting work. At the end of each day, these three would be snoozing soundly in their beds, only waking for a late dinner and then dozing off halfway through!

Ground-truthing is best done twice; before and after the classification of a satellite image. In the first round, GPS points would be taken based on the features or land-use types that you see on ground, for example oil palm plantations. Back in the office, classification of each feature would be carried out. The data gathered would be uploaded into image processing software that will identify all the corresponding pixels on the satellite image and map out all the same land-cover types, classifying each into different groups. Using the example of oil palm plantations, the software will map out all the oil palm plantations in the area by categorising it in one colour. Then the second round of ground-truthing would be carried out to verify the accuracy of this classification, which usually is 65-70% accurate as compared to the 85% accuracy suggested for land-use maps utilised for earth resource management. A land-use map would be the end product of all their hard work.

"All this trouble just for a map?" you might wonder. Well, these maps are actually important in analysing the land-use trends at priority conservation areas through the years. These maps enable researchers to predict areas that could potentially be important for conservation of flora and fauna in future, such as corridors for wildlife movements. This analysis could also assist authorities in influencing policy decisions on land-use planning as well as provide secondary spatial information for future local and structural plans.

The National Physical Plan (NPP), a document prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's Town and Country Planning Department, contains long-term strategic plans in determining the physical developments and conservation of Peninsular Malaysia. The NPP has identified four major forest complexes that need to be connected in order to restore the integrity of forests in Peninsular Malaysia: Banjaran Titiwangsa-Banjaran Bintang-Banjaran Nakawan; Taman Negara-Banjaran Timur; Southeast Pahang-Chini and Bera Wetlands as well as Endau-Rompin Park-Kluang Wildlife Reserve.

These forest complexes, each of them huge, are far apart and isolated from each other. If connected, they would strengthen the Central Forest Spine (CFS), a backbone for the conservation and maintenance of biodiversity.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Michele Lee

Ground-truthing involves negotiating tricky terrain.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Michele Lee

Ground-truthing is exhausting and the large land areas to be covered can seem overwhelming. Nonetheless WWF-Malaysia officers persevere; understanding that ground-truthing is critical for effective nature conservation.

Corridors are needed to connect each of these forest complexes and to facilitate the continuity of ecological processes, especially those associated with animal movements. Animals that are stuck in a forest block will face inbreeding, which reduces their genetic diversity and could result in increased offspring mortality and other genetic consequences, ultimately wiping out their entire population.

It might sound like an exaggeration, but that was what happened to the mountain lions *(Puma concolor)* in California's Santa Ana Mountains. They become extinct in a 75km^2 habitat fragment and are expected to become extinct in another 150km^2 of habitat should housing projects sever possible connections with other habitat fragments.

To prevent this from happening to the tigers of Peninsular Malaysia, the "Tigers Alive!" project's "Linking Landscapes" is looking into identifying criteria and potential linkages within the CFS in collaboration with partners and authorities. Subsequently, corridor types will be chosen based on these criteria and discussions will be held with local authorities on methods to best develop these corridors.

Threats of future development within the CFS can also be mitigated by utilisation of land-use analysis. Areas with high density of wildlife, especially migration routes of large mammals, need to be well-managed to avoid human-wildlife conflict. By predicting land opening patterns, human-wildlife conflict incidences can be anticipated, and therefore mitigated, by authorities, through proper management guidelines.

Meanwhile, ground-truthing work will continue. Local communities at the selected areas have been helping to speed up these efforts by providing information on wildlife sightings and the types of conflict that they face in the area.

Although most sites were easily accessible, the real challenge was driving on uneven and unpredictable logging roads, especially as two of the three of them were automatic-drivers; manual driving would almost be like a roller coaster ride. Driving on such roads took the three to unexpected places too. A wrong turning on a logging road somewhere brought them to a suspected illegal logging site where clear-felling was being carried out. They were pursued by the contractors, who thought they were the authorities checking up on them. The contractors were only satisfied after a shaky, lengthy explanation from them and drove away.

The three of them have since mastered the art of manual driving, except for one incident when the road was slippery. But that's another story altogether…The team faced and overcame these challenges, undeterred in their commitment to ground-truthing – an important element in land-use planning as well as wildlife and natural resource conservation. ■

Read more about the adventures of the "Tigers Alive!" project team members in future issues of Green Heart.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/David James

The recent elephant satellite tagging.

Elephant Conservation Efforts

By Raymond Alfred, Borneo Species Programme Manager

In 2003, it was reported in the international media that Asian elephants in Borneo are a genetically distinct population that may have separated from the elephants of mainland Asia up to 300,000 years ago. The smallest form of elephant, they have been dubbed the "Borneo pygmy elephant" in popular WWF literature. With less than 1,000 individual elephants in Borneo, and some of their remaining forest habitat threatened by conversion to plantations and fragmentation, it is crucial to ascertain the precise habitat needs of these elephants and secure their habitat from forest conversion.

WWF-Malaysia's Borneo Species Programme has been active in Sabah since 2000. The programme team strives to ensure that wild breeding populations of the Asian elephant, Sumatran rhinos and orang-utans found in Borneo are protected by conserving existing areas in Sabah with suitable habitat that support these species. WWF-Malaysia works closely with government agencies such as the Wildlife Department, Sabah Forestry Department and Sabah Foundation to undertake wildlife field investigations and environmental awareness activities for local communities. We also assist the agencies in developing wildlife conservation strategies.

From 2005 to 2007, the team focused on placing satellite tracking devices on 11 mature elephants to ascertain their overall movement patterns and delineate areas critical to elephants for their long term survival. Each satellite-collared elephant represented a group of elephants. The latest elephant collaring was carried out in October 2007, when two elephants were trans-located due to human and elephant conflict issues in industrial tree plantations (ITPs). After six months, the satellite tracking has demonstrated something that was previously assumed but which could not be proven: groups of elephants range over a gross area of tens of thousands of hectares, almost entirely confined to lowlands and main river valleys. They very rarely cross hill ranges but occasionally walk long distances along logging roads between valleys.

Exploitation of natural forests for timber production by selective removal of large trees is not likely to significantly affect elephant

survival in the long term. In terms of food supply, Sabah elephants thrive in the logged forest of the forest management units (FMUs). There is no need to establish new protected areas to save the elephants but there is a need to identify and secure the critical habitat corridor within the FMU areas, through which the elephants move to feed and breed. The idea is to prevent critical corridor areas from being converted for other land use. Therefore, what is needed is to carry out activities and put in place measures that will keep the timber production forests under sustainable natural forest management over the long term.

Retention of this whole range under managed natural forests, with long-term licenses and sustainable forest management plans, is to be supported strongly. Significant emerging issues are the possibilities of conversion of natural forests to plantations. If conversion of forest to oil palm or ITPs is inevitable, areas with low or no usage by elephants should be chosen.

Most of the commercial forest reserves in Sabah have been extensively damaged by past logging and need long periods to regenerate; several decades are needed before substantial new timber harvesting can occur. The Central Forest Reserves of Sabah are increasingly threatened by conversion to ITPs. With increased forest exploitation, the timber tree resources in Sabah are likely to face depletion, most likely leading to the fragmentation of elephant, rhino and orang-utan habitat. Hence, adequate steps must be taken to conserve different habitats and vegetation types so that the tree flora can continue to survive. Toward this purpose, an unbroken forest stretching from the interior of Sabah to the border with Kalimantan needs to be identified to provide a contiguous network of protected and managed areas for large mammals such as elephants and rhinos. The elephant tracking results will be used to support recommendations to restore or conserve particular patches of forest, ultimately aimed at creating a contiguous wildlife conservation area. This will mean better protection for Borneo's elephants and potentially a reduction in incidences of human-elephant conflict. ■

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Raymond Alfred

A harvested industrial tea plantation.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Raymond Alfred

An industrial tree plantation.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Raymond Alfred

Aerial view of Bario.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Raynei Bili

Women in traditional Kelabit dress.

Field Visit to Bario

By Raymond Alfred, Borneo Species Programme Manager and Rayner Bili, Programme Trainee, Borneo Species Programme.

Background on Bario

Bario is located in the Kelabit Highlands, 3280 feet above sea level and this wonderful place is isolated from the rest of the world. The Kelabit Highlands are sited in north eastern Sarawak, very close to the international border between Indonesian Kalimantan and the state. Infrastructure there is good, including an airport, internet access and a computer services centre, schools, churches, a clinic, a police station and shops. Kelabit communities generally speak their language which is called "Kelabit". However most of them have learned to speak English and Bahasa Malaysia. Agriculture is the main economic activity, mainly the growing of Bario rice. A cool climate averaging 20°C enables residents to also cultivate citrus fruits. Bario is also famous for its salt production and juicy pineapples.

The highlands' rugged topography, blanketed by the green dipterocarp highland forest, could well be sheltering a variety of wildlife, especially large mammals. However, human disturbance like timber extraction and poaching within the Pulong Tau National Park may have negatively affected the distribution and population status of certain species. A part of the park is located along the plateau of Tama Abu Range and was popularly known as the last protected area for Sumatran rhinos in Sarawak. A decline in numbers may not essentially indicate that the rhinos have disappeared, rather that they have probably shifted to Indonesia's Kayan Mentarang area.

Existing Documented Information on Wildlife, Socioeconomic and Conservation Issues.

The nearest National Park to Bario is Pulong Tau. The latest information gathered and compiled for Pulong Tau National Park is published by the International Tropical Timber Organisation, Sarawak Forest Department and Sarawak Forestry Corporation as listed below:

(i) Knowledge and use of wildlife by local communities and awareness on conservation by Oswald Braken Tisen, Project Wildlife Specialist, 2007.

(ii) Socioeconomic study of the communities living adjacent to Pulong Tau National Park by Jiram Sidu, Project Sociologist, 2007.

(iii) Big Mammals of Pulong Tau National Park, by Engkamat Lading, 2007.

Scope and Objectives of the Field Visit to Bario (1st to 4th December 2007) are:

(i) To identify opportunities for WWF-Malaysia to support the conservation work in this area, especially rhino conservation issues and other issues related to establishing a wildlife corridor between Pulong Tau National Park and Kayan Mentarang National Park in Kalimantan.

(ii) To identify the existing facilities in Bario. This includes the available logistics such as accommodation, transportation and communications. This information will be useful in planning any future surveys and research activities.

Methodology

Informal interviews with local communities in Bario were carried out to gather information on their perspective and knowledge about wildlife and conservation efforts in and around Bario, including the surrounding areas near the Pulong Tau National Park. However, due to limited time and transportation, groups of people interviewed were selected at random and mainly based on their availability at the time of our visit. Normal observations were also made, including talking to the owners of several resorts, to gather information on the basic facilities such as accommodation and transportation within Bario.

Interviewees are essentially knowledgeable individuals who provide relevant information and ideas. We targeted villagers aged between 25 to 55 years during this visit, including those knowledgeable about hunting activities. The informal interviews took about 45 minutes or more each so the relevant information could be obtained. In most cases, the conversations were conducted in English and local Malay dialects. During the field visit, we also trekked from Bario to Pa' Ukat to observe the forest condition. ■

WWF-Malaysia only recently established a field office in Kuching in May 2007. Look out for news about our conservation efforts in Sarawak in future issues of Green Heart.

Restoring Forests for Orang-utans

By Raymond Alfred, Borneo Species Programme Manager

From 2005 to 2007, a combination of aerial and ground surveys conducted by WWF-Malaysia's Borneo Species Programme showed that the highest density of orang-utans is located at the heart of North Ulu Segama (Compartment No 109, 110 and 111). Although 40 to 60% of this area is already damaged by forest fire, the concentration of orang-utans in this area is very high and consistent due to the fertile soil type in this area, which has a high mineral content for plants, trees and orang-utans. Therefore, the proposed conservation target here is to rehabilitate 2,400 hectares (ha) of land, particularly in Compartments 109, 110 and 111 with the following short term and long term objectives. Previous efforts by WWF-Malaysia include the planting of banana trees in degraded areas covering 13 ha as a temporary solution to increase the food supply for orang-utans in North Ulu Segama.

The objectives of the forest restoration are to ensure long term orang-utan food availability, connect the fragmented forest within the orang-utan habitat and restore species-rich lowland dipterocarp forest in the area.

We have achieved the following:

(i) One nursery measuring 20m by 20m that can keep at least 3,000-5,000 seedlings was established.

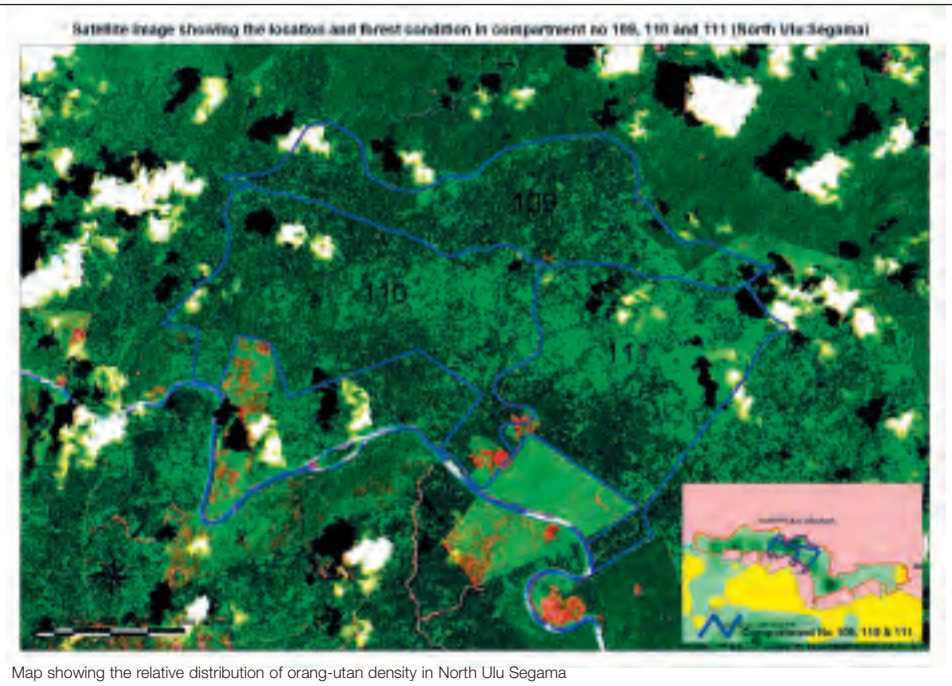

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Borneo Species Programme

Map showing the relative distribution of orang-utan density in North Ulu Segama

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/David James

Raymond Alfred explains about the tree species that are planted to restore degraded orang-utan habitat to Marks & Spencer representatives at the seedling nursery.

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Raymond Alfred

The field office and staff quaters.

(ii) One field camp, which serves as a temporary station of the orang-utan research team as well as the forest assessment and restoration team, was set up.
(iii) One field office cum staff quarters has been constructed.
(iv) Several sites were identified for the orang-utan monitoring programme.
(v) More than 15 ha of degraded forest were re-planted with selected pioneer and dipterocarp tree species, which are preferred by the orang-utans.

The programme team recently hosted visitors from sponsors Addesium Foundation and Marks & Spencer at the project site, enabling them to experience a part of orang-utan conservation and forest restoration work in North Ulu Segama. Other donors for the restoration work in Ulu Segama Malua Forest Reserve include WWF-Germany and WWF-UK. ■

All Aboard For Marine Conservation

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/Marina Aman Sham

Winners of the script-writing competition, students from Bum Bum Island, disembarking the Kahumbu after a short cruise following the awards ceremony.
WWF-Malaysia's new catamaran, flying the traditional Bajau Laut flag known as Sembulayang, will allow the Semporna Priority Conservation Area Project Team to implement the activities focused on managing coral reefs and adjacent ecosystems with Fisheries and Tourism.

Photo: ©Eric Medeja

Assistant District Officer of Semporna Encik Bianus Kontong launching Kahumbu. Looking on are (from left) Dragon Inn owner Dato Sri Panglima Guan Sau Wah JP, Officer-in-Charge of Department of Fisheries Semporna Encik Ibni Hassim bin Abd Rajun and WWF-Malaysia Borneo Programme Chief Technical Officer Dr Rahimatsah Amat.

"Kahumbu", in the local Bajau language, simply means "whale". In Semporna, the word means more than just the name of a marine species. Encik Jamal Samala, a Denawan Island elder, reveals an age-old Bajau belief that spirits, referred to as _"omboh"_, take the form of whales. The Bajau Laut community has immense respect for this magnificent animal, believing that its purpose is to protect the sea it lives in, save lives and punish those who destroy it. Another term used to convey the significance of this species is _"Omboh di Laut"_, which means "Spirit of the Sea".

To call attention to the importance of protecting the sea, the newly acquired catamaran under WWF-Malaysia's Semporna Priority Conservation Area Project was named Kahumbu. Its official launch, held on 15th February 2008, marked the increase in marine conservation efforts in Semporna. Assistant District Officer of Semporna Encik Bianus Kontong said that the region, which is identified as a Tourism and Marine Industry Zone under the Sabah Development Corridor, will receive more emphasis in attracting local and international tourists. He stressed that it is therefore imperative for industries to work together to ensure that marine resources are managed in a sustainable way – not only for tourism, but also for other industries such as fisheries and aquaculture.

WWF-Malaysia Borneo Programme Chief Technical Officer Dr Rahimatsah Amat shares the sentiments of Encik Bianus. He said, "Marine conservation through smart partnerships is crucial, as different key roles are played by individual entities, including the Department of Fisheries, Sabah Parks, the District Office of Semporna, commercial and traditional fishers, as well as tourism players such as dive and resort operators. It is important to understand that economic activities such as tourism, reef fisheries and aquaculture can continue to provide income for many people."

Semporna supports these livelihoods due to its immense wealth of marine resources. However, with dependence comes the threat of over-extraction. This threat, among others, paved the way for the development of the Semporna Priority Conservation Area Project vision, in which the globally important coral reefs and their adjacent marine ecosystems such as seagrass beds and mangrove forests remain healthy because they are the natural base for economic and social development. Well managed marine ecosystems ensure sustainable development.

About Whales

Like other mammals, whales are warm-blooded, breathe air and nurse their young. Like all whales and dolphins, humpback whales belong to the order *Cetacea* that have evolved from terrestrial hoofed mammals and adapted to the aquatic environment 45 million years ago. It is listed under Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in International Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), which prohibits trade for commercial purposes.

This species, reaching up to 19 metres in length and 40 tonnes in weight, feed on krill, plankton and small fish. It is a migratory species, last spotted within the Semporna region in January this year. This highlights the importance of the Semporna Priority Conservation Area as a migratory route, emphasising the need for conservation in this area. ■

Planned activities under this project, which are fully funded by WWF-Netherlands, are in tune with meeting both national and eco-regional marine conservation goals. Since the project kicked off mid-last year, socioeconomic surveys on the four islands of Bum Bum, Omadal, Menampilik and Denawan have been conducted to reveal the lifestyles of communities living there. This includes their use and level of dependence on marine resources as well as their readiness to take responsibility for the sustainability of those resources. Results will help shape future community education and public awareness campaigns. Local dive-masters were given training on how to assess the conditions of reefs using the Reef Check methodology. Ongoing reef assessments are being conducted to gain an overall view of the current status of reefs.

In addition, a public awareness campaign in the form of a script writing competition was held throughout the month of January to engage local youths to adopt conservation causes. High school students enthusiastically wrote 30-second radio scripts encouraging people to protect marine life, specifically coral reefs, turtles and the endangered humphead wrasse. The winning script by Abdul Hamid bin Abdul Fitri and Nakisah binti Sailus was aired in Sabah over Radio FM in April. They were presented with prizes sponsored by local dive operator Uncle Chang during the launch. Before embarking on Kahumbu for a short cruise, Nakisah made a comment which sums up, in simple terms, what needs to be done. She said, "Something needs to be done now. If not, there will be no fish left in the sea to catch; no food on the table. Tourists will stop coming to Semporna. If there are no tourists, many people will be out of work." ■

Borneo Species Workshop 2007

In December 2007, WWF-Malaysia together with Sabah Wildlife Department brought together various government agencies, institutes and other NGOs from all over Borneo to the first ever "Borneo Species Workshop 2007: Large Mammals and their Habitat in Borneo" in Kota Kinabalu. 19 papers were presented in this two-day seminar and workshop which was attended by a total of 60 participants.

Launched by the Director of Sabah Wildlife Department, the workshop was a platform to exchange information and knowledge as well as generate discussion among researchers on large mammal species found in Borneo, such as the Borneo pygmy elephant, Sumatran rhinoceros, orang-utan, clouded leopard, banteng and sun bear.

The main objectives of this workshop were to:

- Determine the current status, distribution and historic range of large mammal populations in Borneo.
- Identify the important habitats for large mammals in Borneo.
- Identify major issues regarding large mammals, forestry and land use.
- Analyse gaps in current conservation strategies.
- Formulate conservation strategies for large mammals in Borneo. ■

Photo: ©WWF-Malaysia/David James

WWF-Malaysia Programme Trainee, Borneo Species Programme, Sharon Koh, receiving her token of appreciation from Sabah Wildlife Department Deputy Director Augustine Tuuga.