



SEKAR IMEJ CONSERVATION AREA (SICA)

NEWSLETTER

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Orsinome vethi
Jungle Stream Orb Weaver

FEATURED CONTENTS

	page
Environment: Spiders (Scientific Expedition Series 5)	2
Social: Kaamatan	5
Sustainability Insight	7
SICA Project Activities	8
SICA Star: Erickstin Laitin	10
Other Wilmar Conservation Activities	11

In Focus

The Sekar Imej Conservation Area (SICA) project continues to take root and grow in the right direction. To date, two key workshops have been held. The first workshop focused on tree identification to sharpen our rangers' conservation skills, especially for managing and protecting High Conservation Value (HCV) areas. The second introduced stingless bee farming as a practical and sustainable alternative livelihood for local communities. Together, these sessions are key foundational blocks in building stronger, more resilient ranger teams and communities.

Crawling into the spotlight of this issue are our web architects—the spiders! As our eight-legged friends are sensitive to environmental changes, their presence and diversity can signal the health of ecosystems, hence making them valuable indicators in conservation biology.

Just as a spider weaves its home with precision, cultural celebrations weave a sense of belonging and togetherness for all our Sabahans. The annual Harvest Festival, locally known as *Kaamatan*, is celebrated with great enthusiasm by the indigenous communities. The festival is a yearly phenomenon that ignites vibrant expressions of culture, tradition and unity.

This issue also shines the spotlight on two inspiring team members: our new SICA Project Manager, Mr. Callixtus, and a dedicated honorary Wildlife Warden, Mr. Erickstin.

Get to know them as you read on and discover how they are helping our roots grow deeper!



SPIDERS

Scientific Expedition - Series 5

In this fifth series of SICA Scientific Expedition, we focus on spiders



Harmochirus brachiatus of Salticidae family.

Spiders play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance with their remarkable diversity in both biology and behaviour. In a preliminary survey conducted within the SICA region, researchers observed 99 spiders, representing 30 different species and 15 distinct families across four study trails.

These trails include Monjok Trail and Gerowong Trail, as well as two riverside paths, Sungai Opal and Sungai Sinalaan 2. Among these, Monjok Trail stood out for its impressive spider population, accounting for 30.4% of the total observed.

This abundance is likely due to the trail's unique environment. As a secondary forest with a history of logging, it receives more sunlight than other areas, creating an environment for flowering plants and low-lying vegetation to thrive along the walkway.

Researchers employed a straightforward hand-picking method combined with visual sightings to collect data. The river trail along **Sungai Sinalaan 2** boasted the highest concentration of spider species diversity, achieving a Menhinick's Index of 2.294. In contrast, the nearby **Sungai Opal** trail recorded a Menhinick's Index of 1.746, suggesting less species variety.

One huntsman spider species, *Hippasa holmerae*, was found in significant numbers, with 10 individuals observed. This agile spider is also an active hunter that pounces on unsuspecting prey with remarkable speed and precision. It constructs a sheet-like web close to the ground, patiently waiting for insects to wander by before striking its prey swiftly.

SPIDERS

Environment



Gasteracantha sp.

This yellow morph of *Gasteracantha sp.* can be found at the fringes of the forest.

Master of Mimicry

Phrynarachne decipiens, commonly known as the bird-dropping spider, is a species of tropical crab spider found in Malaysia and Indonesia. It mimics bird droppings both in appearance and behaviour as a form of camouflage. This clever strategy has been adapted by several groups of spiders that have independently evolved to resemble unappetising bird droppings, which is an effective defence against day-active predators such as birds and wasps.

Vertical orb web

In the Araneidae family, spiny spiders of the genus *Gasteracantha* are known for building vertical orb webs. These striking spiders, distinguished by spiky extensions that can exceed the length of their bodies, boldly sit at the centre of their webs during the day. Their unpalatable taste and vivid warning coloration help deter potential predators.



Phrynarachne decipiens

Female *Phrynarachne decipiens* camouflage level: excrement—this is not waste, it is survival in disguise.



Corinnoma rapax

This yellow morph of *Gasteracantha sp.* can be found at the fringes of the forest.

Master of Mimicry

Corinnoma rapax belongs to the Corinnidae family. It is an ant-mimicking jumping spider that has evolved to resemble ants—a strategy known as Batesian mimicry. By imitating the body shape, coloration, and even the leg movements of ants, it avoids predators that tend to steer clear of ants due to their aggressive behaviour and chemical defences.

Found in its burrow on an oil palm tree, it belongs to the Theraphosidae family. Based on its small size, it has been identified as *Phlogiellus sp.*, also known as a dwarf tarantula (Raven, 2005). According to the World Spider Catalogue (2022), there are only four known species in this genus. What makes this sighting especially noteworthy is that it marks the first recorded instance of *Phlogiellus sp.* on an oil palm tree. Until now, they were only found in soil burrows.



Phlogiellus sp.

During the survey, one interesting discovery was a tarantula spotted near the campsite.

SPIDERS

Environment

No	Family	Species	Monjok Trail	Gerowong Trail	Sungai Opal	Sungai Sinalaan 2	Total	Percentage (%)
1	Araneidae	Gasteracantha sp. Nephilengys	1 2	3		4	1 9	10.1
2	Clubionidae	<i>Pristidia viridissima</i>		2			2	2.0
3	Corinnidae	<i>Corinnoma rapax</i> <i>Medmassa insignis</i>	1	1		1	2 1	3.0
4	Ctenidae	<i>Ctenus hosei</i>	1			1	2	2.0
5	Lycosidae	<i>Hippasa holmerae</i> <i>Pardosa pusiola</i> <i>Pardosa pseudoanulata</i>	4 2	2	3 4 2	1 1	10 9 2	
6	Oxyopidae	<i>Hamadruas superba</i>		1			1	1.0
7	Pisauridae	<i>Sphedanus quadrimaculatus</i> <i>Hygropoda sp.</i>	1 1		3	3	7 1	8.1
8	Psechridae	<i>Psechrus sp.</i>		3	2	1	6	6.1
9	Salticidae	<i>Phintella sp.</i> <i>Menemerus bivittatus</i> <i>Agorius sp.</i> <i>Phintella vitata</i> <i>Harmochirus brachiatus</i> <i>Portia labiata</i> <i>Plexippus paykulli</i>	1 1 1 3	 1 1	 1 1	 1 1 1	1 2 1 4 1 1 3	12.1
10	Scytodidae	<i>Scytodes pallida</i>	2		1	1	4	4.1
11	Sparassidae	<i>Heteropoda venatoria</i> <i>Heteropoda sp. A</i> <i>Heteropoda sp. B</i>	4	4 1 1	1	1	10 1 1	12.1
12	Tetragnathidae	<i>Leucauge celebesiana</i> <i>Mesida sp.</i> <i>Orsinome vethi</i>	1	1	1 1		2 1 1	4.0
13	Theraphosidae	<i>*Phlogiellus sp.</i>					6	6.1
14	Thomisidae	<i>*Phrynarache decipiens</i>					1	1.0
15	Zodariidae	<i>Mallinella sp.</i>	2	1	1	2	6	6.1
TOTAL		Sp: 30	28	24	21	19	99	

KAAMATAN | HARVEST

Local community involvement is crucial in natural resource management. In every newsletter, we feature a key village or town near SICA to highlight its history, the culture of its people and its socioeconomic status to foster a better understanding and a closer collaboration with stakeholders.



The word *Kaamatan* (pronounced 'KAH-ah-mah-tan') means "harvest" in the Kadazan-Dusun languages. Celebrated annually on 30 - 31 May, Pesta *Kaamatan* - or Harvest Festival - is a vibrant showcase of the rich cultural heritage of Malaysian Borneo. In the Land Below the Wind, the celebration comes alive across Wilmar's oil palm plantations, filled with warmth, laughter, and a strong spirit of unity.

WHILE KAAMATAN TRADITIONALLY CENTRES AROUND THE RICE CROP, ITS ESSENCE LIES IN HONOURING ALL FORMS OF AGRICULTURAL HARVEST - BE IT PADDY, FRUITS, VEGETABLES, OR ANY PRODUCE VITAL TO THE COMMUNITY'S LIVELIHOOD.

For our proud indigenous employees, whose hands and hearts nurture the orderly rows of oil palms, the festival is a sacred tribute to life's cycles and Mother Earth's bounty. Like rice paddies, oil palms require patience, perseverance and a harmonious relationship with nature. While these crops differ in appearance, they share a sacred rhythm—planted with hope, tended to with dedication and harvested as a cherished bounty.

This deep connection to land and heritage came to life as Wilmar employees wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of *Kaamatan* through joyful feasting, traditional music, lively dancing, and captivating cultural performances. It was a celebration not only of the harvest, but of the rich cultural tapestry that binds generations. Most significantly, it brought employees together, strengthening bonds and fostering unity across staff of different backgrounds and roles within the company.



KAAMATAN | HARVEST



Adding to the festive cheer, our SICA Rangers participated in a spirited *sulap*-building competition, working under the tropical sun to construct rustic shelters from bamboo and palm leaves with remarkable skill and craftsmanship. The *sulap*, a traditional hut, is more than just a structure - it is a living expression of Kadazan-Dusun heritage. Its careful artistry reflects generations of knowledge, preserving a way of life rooted in harmony with both nature and community.

The highlight of Wilmar's *Pesta Kaamatan* celebration was the Unduk Ngadau, a traditional beauty pageant honouring Huminodun, the legendary Kadazan-Dusun heroine. According to Kadazan-Dusun folklore, Huminodun sacrificed herself to end a devastating famine, and from her body grew the rice that nourished her people.

It was a heartfelt experience to witness our Sabahan plantation employees take centre stage as contestants adorned in traditional attire, showcasing not only the strength and spirit of Huminodun, but their deep cultural heritage, pride and wisdom.

In this beautiful union of tradition and toil, the heart of Kaamatan remains unchanged: a celebration of life, harvest, and heritage. It is a powerful reminder that whether rice or palm, the harvest is a sacred gift - manifesting as an offering of gratitude from the land to those who nurture it with love.





MR. CALLIXTUX KAMILUS



Exclusive Interview with the New Manager of SICA

In this issue, we spotlight the journey and vision of a nature-loving leader, **Callixtus Kamilus**. Recently appointed as the Manager of Sekar Imej and Sapi Sugut Plantation, Callixtus now spearheads conservation efforts throughout SICA. With a deep-rooted passion for sustainability and community engagement, he shares his aspirations for making SICA a model of conservation in the palm oil industry.

Born in the 1970s in the lush, biodiversity-rich village of Tambunan, Callixtus is a proud Kadazan native who grew up deeply connected to nature. His educational journey began at Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan St. Theresa, continued at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan St. Martin and later graduated from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), a national university renowned for its agricultural credentials.

Callixtus' career in the palm oil industry began with the IPAS (2004) training programme under Wilmar, where his leadership potential quickly stood out. Now serving as the new Manager of the Sekar Imej estate, he is also one of the key architects behind SICA—a strategic initiative to protect biodiversity while maintaining plantation productivity.

Empowering Conservation, Leading with Charisma

1. How does SICA contribute to the sustainability of palm oil plantations and the environment?

"SICA plays a vital role in protecting natural habitats while practising sustainable plantation management. This reduces negative environmental impacts and helps preserve biodiversity, which is essential for a healthy ecosystem."

2. What technologies or innovations are used to monitor biodiversity in SICA?

"We use drone technology and camera traps to monitor wildlife, forest areas, and detect intrusions. Drones allow us to conduct aerial surveillance without disturbing habitats, while camera traps provide close-up insights into animal activities."

3. How does community involvement support the success of SICA?

"The local community is our key partner. With training and collaboration, they help monitor forest conditions and report threats such as illegal logging. Their role ensures conservation efforts are both smooth and effective."

4. What challenges do you face in balancing plantation operations with conservation efforts?

"The main challenge lies in managing economic pressure while protecting natural habitats. We need to constantly seek innovative solutions that boost productivity without compromising the environment."

5. What is your vision for the future of SICA in promoting sustainability and conservation?

"My vision is to make SICA a reference centre for conservation and sustainable development, supported by active community engagement and ongoing scientific research. I believe this will set a benchmark for responsible oil palm plantations."

IN NUTSHELL

A charismatic leader, knowledgeable and passionate about nature, Callixtus brings fresh energy to Wilmar's conservation mission while strengthening plantation excellence. His commitment proves that sustainability and productivity can move forward together, shaping a greener and more responsible future.



January & April 2025 RACP TREE TAGGING



As part of Wilmar's Remediation and Compensation Plan (RaCP)'s effort, SICA Rangers conducted two sessions of tree tagging in Hibumas 2 Estate. On 15 January and 23 April, our Rangers managed to identify and tag a total of 1,000 trees. The trees tagged are in the categories of rare fruits trees (wild durian tree, wild rambutan tree, *tarap* tree and Perah tree), softwood (Sentang and Laran) as well as hardwood timber (*Dipterocarpus* spp.).

SICA Project Activities



9-11 April 2025

TREE ID TRAINING: STEPPING UP TREE ID SKILLS

Between 9 and 11 April 2025, a tree identification training session was held at SICA, led by Mr. John Sugau along with five botanists from the Forest Research Centre (FRC) in Sandakan.

The team guided participants through a hands-on tree ID in the field and conducted a classroom-style training. In total, 189 trees representing about 130 species were tagged and tentatively identified. The final confirmation of the tree species was done at the herbarium after the training session.

A total of 24 people joined the training, including SICA rangers, local community members, and estate staff involved in HCV monitoring. Tree ID training is essential for understanding forest biodiversity, monitoring ecosystem health, and guiding effective restoration efforts. It also supports HCV monitoring and empowers local communities with conservation skills.



14-16 April 2025

MEDIA TRIP TO SICA

Highlighting Wilmar's Conservation Commitment

From 14 to 16 April, reporters from Eco-Business and The Edge visited SICA to explore Wilmar's ongoing conservation initiatives. The visit included presentations on SICA's role in protecting endangered species, restoring carbon-rich forests, and supporting biodiversity aligned with Wilmar's NDPE Policy. The reporters also trekked up Laimong Peak with the SICA Rangers, learning about its biodiversity, and cultural and historical significance while spotting various flora and fauna.

Wilmar's management also highlighted the improved SICA Research Centre and held a demonstration with advanced supplementary conservation tools such as camera traps and drones.

The trip also featured a visit to the seedling nursery and interviews with our Rangers to understand their work and backgrounds.



Throughout the visit, Wilmar's collaborations with various local universities and organisations were showcased, underscoring the company's commitment to biodiversity preservation and research partnerships at SICA.

16-17 April 2025

TRAINING ON STINGLESS BEE FARMING



Stingless bee farming has been introduced as a community-based conservation livelihood option under the SICA project to support local communities involved in protecting the area. A two-day training session was successfully held on 16 and 17 April in Kg. Mononood, led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suzan Benedick from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and entrepreneur Mr. Nasir Abdul Majid. The training combined theory, practical sessions and hive installation, and was attended by 22 participants, including SICA Rangers and local village representatives.

During the practical segment, four hive boxes and three bee traps were installed featuring two stingless bee species, *Heterotrigona itama* and *Tetragonula laeviceps*.



Participants expressed enthusiasm to establish their own hives, recognising the dual benefits of stingless bee farming: boosting the local economy through high-value bee products and enhancing environmental conservation by promoting biodiversity via effective pollination of native and endangered plants.

SICA STAR

SICA Star

In every organisation, there are individuals whose dedication and character not only inspire but also uplift those around them. For this 9th edition of the SICA newsletter, we proudly present [Erickstin Laitin](#) as our SICA Star—a team member who brings heart, leadership and spirit to every responsibility he carries.

ERICKSTIN LAITIN

*A Friendly Leader, Nature Lover,
and Forest Hero*



GETTING TO KNOW ERICK

Born in 1995, Erick is from the Rungus ethnic group, one of Sabah's proud native communities. He is well-known for his engaging personality, helpfulness, and friendly nature. It is no surprise that he is well-liked by colleagues and the community but beyond that, Erick also possesses a natural sense of leadership as he is calm, reliable and always supportive of those around him.

A devoted husband to his Dusun wife and a proud father of two, a daughter and a son, Erick balances his professional life and family duties with great care. This strong sense of family is also reflected in his deep commitment to environmental conservation, driven by his desire to leave a better world for future generations.



CAREER AND VISION

Armed with a Diploma in Electrical Wiring and Electronics from Management and Science University, Erick brings a wide range of technical skills to his work. Since joining Wilmar as a Ranger in 2022, he has demonstrated versatility. From carpentry, wildlife monitoring, to field operations, Erick is someone you can count on.

In recognition of his growing contributions to the protection of local flora and fauna, Erick was appointed as an Honorary Wildlife Warden in 2024. As a sports enthusiast and a true nature lover, Erick's mission is crystal clear: to see SICA gain global recognition as a leading model of tropical biodiversity conservation.

Erick is more than a member of the field team - he is the soul of our conservation efforts, as are all our Rangers on the ground. With his sincere attitude and incredible drive, he embodies what SICA stands for: commitment, community, and conservation.

*"I want my children to grow up in a world that is still full of forests, rivers, and wildlife. I believe what we do today will shape the world they inherit tomorrow."
— Erickstin Laitin*

CONSERVATION & RECREATIONAL LANDSCAPE PROJECT (CRLP)

Tree Planting

The CRLP tree planting initiative has shown impressive progress across plantations and mills throughout Sabah. From the beginning of January until the end of May this year, a remarkable total of 931 trees have been planted.

The most planted tree was Bunga Tanjung (*Mimusops elengi*), making up almost 40% of the total trees planted. In English, Bunga Tanjung is often called Spanish cherry or Bullet wood. It is a tropical tree famous for its fragrant flowers, attractive dense foliage and ability to provide good shade. It is highly preferred due to its low maintenance and supports local wildlife with its edible fruits.

Other Wilmar Conservation Activities



The second most planted was the Asoka tree (*Saraca indica*). Their vibrant, sweet-scented flowers and lush evergreen foliage make them a beautiful addition to any landscape. Asoka trees are also compact, hardy and adaptable—making them a perfect fit for our CRLP tree planting efforts.

The high numbers of trees planted this year also highlights the dedication of teams on the ground, whose efforts are steadily contributing to Wilmar's CRLP target.

HCV AWARENESS TALK



In January, our conservation officer, Ms. Farahin, conducted a High Conservation Value (HCV) awareness talk for workers at Sri Kamusan Estate during their morning muster call.

The session began with an introduction to the conservation areas and their significance in meeting RSPO and MSPO certification requirements. Ms. Farahin then highlighted the different types of HCVs identified within Sri Kamusan Estate, emphasising the importance of protecting these areas. She also outlined appropriate behaviours to observe within HCV areas, including the Do's and Don'ts to ensure minimal human impact.

Additionally, the talk addressed wildlife sightings and stressed the strict prohibition of poaching and illegal hunting. Workers were reminded that encroachment into HCV and riparian areas is not allowed under any circumstances. Above all, the session reinforced the shared responsibility of management and workers alike to preserve these vital HCVs not just for compliance, but for the hope of a thriving environment where nature and people coexist in harmony for generations to come.



**“The greatest threat to
our planet is the belief
that someone else will
save it.”**

Robert Swan

British explorer and environmental advocate

SICA stands as Wilmar’s largest conservation initiative in Malaysia, encompassing 2,469 hectares of forest fragments deep within Sabah’s Beluran District. Nestled within the company’s plantation concession, the SICA project is a testament to the power of collaboration—uniting Wilmar and key stakeholders, including local communities, in a shared mission to protect the precious Lowland Mixed Dipterocarp Forest.

With a bold vision to transform SICA into a Biodiversity and Carbon Research Centre by 2030, the initiative is driven by three pillars: biodiversity conservation, capacity-building and community-based approaches. From 2022 to 2026, this meaningful effort is partially supported by Wilmar Europe.

This project is a reminder that corporate responsibility, when paired with local stewardship, can lead to lasting environmental impact. Wilmar’s commitment to conservation is a call to action. Let SICA inspire more individuals, organisations, companies and communities to realise that conservation is not a choice, but a shared responsibility.

Together, we can safeguard nature’s legacy for generations to come.

List of Contributors

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