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# SEKAR IMEJ CONSERVATION AREA (SICA) PROJECT NEWSLETTER



## EDITOR'S NOTE

By Marcie Elene

Hello readers! It has been an absolute pleasure to receive positive responses from the first SICA Newsletter. It's already July, which means that we're halfway through 2021. This year has gone by so fast and we're still in the midst of battling this pandemic making it one of the most challenging times for everyone across the globe. Not the easiest of times, but our SICA team is working hard to accomplish something despite the restriction of activities due to the movement control order (MCO) in Malaysia.

In Vol.2 of our SICA Newsletter, we are going to share what the SICA Team has been up to lately; working together to make the best of our efforts to protect SICA. Moreover, in conjunction with World Ranger Day this July, in this issue of our Newsletter, it is our great pleasure to appreciate and recognise our dedicated Honorary Wildlife Warden team who have been working relentlessly in monitoring and ensuring that our wildlife is protected. Last but not least, please enjoy reading our latest newsletter.

We look forward to share more topics in the months ahead. In the meantime, please take care and stay safe!

## FEATURED THIS MONTH:

In conjunction with World Ranger Day, we share a brief article on SICA's Honorary Wildlife Wardens (HWW).







*"Without environmental sustainability, economic stability and social cohesion cannot be achieved" - Phil Harding*

*"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new" - Socrates*

## HELLO FROM PROJECT LEADER

The complexities of managing natural resources and conservation areas, especially in the Sugut region, which is remote and under pressure from rapid development, requires strong commitment, multi-level cooperation and innovative approaches.

One of the key challenges in managing natural resources is the need to strike an appropriate balance between development and conservation, while encouraging integrated management and multi-stakeholder engagement in the management of conservation areas, especially in the plantation landscape. We need pragmatic approaches in conservation management, based upon cross-cutting efforts between environment and socio-economic development.

The SICA project is crucial as a pilot test for best practices, especially involving plantation operation, government agencies, science and local communities, in managing the conservation area to achieve a win-win situation. SICA will only be made possible with the help and support of everyone and the hope is that it will become a conservation area that everyone including local communities in Sugut can be proud of!



**CHIN SING YUN**  
CONSERVATION PROGRAMME  
LEADER- MALAYSIA



# OUR FOREST

The Sekar Imej Conservation Area (SICA) is located in Parcel 4 and Parcel 5 of Sekar Imej, with a total area of 2469 hectares (Ha) and an average altitude of between 50m to 360m above sea level.

The Sekar Imej High Conservation Value (HCV) area is mainly logged-over forests, surrounded with largely Lowland Mixed Dipterocarp Forest and dissected hilly terrain to steep slopes land ( $>25^\circ$ ).

Thus, SICA is important for soil erosion control, providing clean water supply as well as habitats and refugia for mammals and avifauna.



Considering that this area was degraded due to logging activities in the past, this large fragment of forest has remained relatively intact and the vegetation is progressively regenerating. There is a mix of secondary re-growth, low-density forests, logged secondary forest or scrub vegetation, which provides varying forest structures. The tree species diversity is dominated by dipterocarp species as the dominant trees but there are also vines, including epiphytes that grow together in the canopy.

SICA is located adjacent to the Paitan Forest Reserve, which is remote and therefore poses accessibility challenges. Nevertheless, the opportunity to identify new high carbon areas as well as assessing the potential biodiversity value within this area is crucial.



## Fauna in SICA

There are limited surveys that have been carried out in SICA and the Paitan Forest Reserve, which is connected to SICA. Despite the remaining forests being of varying quality, to date, we have about 82 species of fauna recorded in SICA that are listed as protected under the Sabah Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 and IUCN Red List.

Some of the species of interest recorded in the region include the Sunbear (*Helartos malayanus*), Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Antheacoceros albirostris*), Lesser Mousedeer (*Tragulus kanchil*), Bornean Yellow Muntjac (*Muntiacus atherodes*) and Great Argus (*Argusianus argus*). We estimate that there are thousands of animals and plants that are still waiting to be documented in this region.



## Flora in SICA



SICA is a mix of secondary re-growth, low-density forest, pioneer and scrub vegetation which provides various forest structures. Some endemic species and protected species under the IUCN Red list such as Seraya (*Shorea* sp.), Seraya Majau (*Shorea johorensis*), Keruing (*Dipterocarpus* sp.) and Kapur (*Dryobalanops beccarii*) were recorded. This also include species such as kayu Gaharu (*Aquilaria microcarpa*), which is well known for its resin in damar oil production and not only listed under the IUCN red list but also protected under Sabah's Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997.

To further understand the flora composition in SICA, in-house training to distinguish the botanical characteristic of the floral species was carried out in the form of classroom training and practical training in field for the SICA team. The practical training involved distinguishing the physical appearance of the tree and method of measuring the tree growth.



## DISCOVERING TRAILS OF UNKNOWN FORESTS

# THE SINALAAN TRAIL



**Sinalaan 1 Trail**



**Sinalaan 2 Trail**

Sinalaan, which is located Southeast of Parcel 5 of SICA, is a fragmented forest located in between the forest and agricultural landscape. The topography of this forest fragment is relatively flat and two trails were established, Sinalaan 1 and Sinalaan 2. The length of both these trails are 300m, which are short and with easy access to the secondary forest growth as they are located next to the estate road.



Red seraya, 79 cm at diameter over breast height



Keruing, 44.5 cm at diameter over breast height

'Sinalaan' is named after a nearby stream known as Sungai Sinalaan. The word Sinalaan itself originated from a species of fish, known as '*ikan salan*' by the locals. The sharp features on the head of the fish often hurt the locals who catch it for their daily needs. Hence, the locals often say 'Sinalaan', which in the Sungai language literally translates as "the fish's fault". The name stayed and over time, the area became known as Sinalaan.



## DISCOVERING TRAILS OF UNKNOWN FORESTS

# THE GEROWONG TRAIL

The Gerowong Trail was featured in our previous Newsletter, where it is one of the main trails established at SICA. This trail also leads to the peak points of Puncak Laimong and Gerowong Peak, where there are streams flowing nearby and small caves inhabited by bats. Sightings of unique boulders are common along the trails and the height of each boulder can easily reach up 10 to 50 feet in height.



## Unique Features

There are interesting and unique features of the boulders, which are all shaped differently and in various sizes. Here there are also boulders resembling human body parts such as lips and ears. Perhaps nature is reminding us to always appreciate nature with our five senses?





# SICA PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The SICA Team underwent several capacity building activities, from classroom training to hands-on practice in the field to improve their knowledge, enhance their skills and capabilities in preparing them on the actual task, and to increase their productivity.



## MONITORING

The SICA Team were trained on how to conduct monitoring inside the conservation areas while being fully equipped with monitoring forms, phones with GPS software, water and First Aid Kits. Any findings such as encroachment, illegal hunting, any sightings of wildlife or interesting findings were recorded into the monitoring form.



## CONSERVATION SIGNBOARD

Additional conservation signboards were placed surrounding SICA in order to instill awareness, warnings and a way of relaying information. These signboards were placed strategically at poaching hotspots and other main locations such as roadsides, entrance gates, housing sites as well as nearby communities' area.



## BOUNDARY DEMARCATION

Extensive efforts to establish boundary markings around the whole of SICA were carried out in order to minimize the likelihood of encroachments from adjacent properties.



## TRAINING

Several training sessions were conducted for SICA team such as HCV Refresher and HCV Monitoring on topics such as SOP related to conservation, Avenza apps application, mapping, identification of RTE species, boundary marking, tree identification as well as carbon stock training. Besides that, several members from the SICA team attended a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) workshop to help enhance their knowledge and provide guidance on community engagement.



# SICA PROJECT ACTIVITIES

cont.



## TRAIL ESTABLISHMENT

There are seven trails that have been identified and established for HCV Monitoring. These trails have been upgraded progressively to provide information and trail marker for safety purposes.



## TREE PLANTING

The SICA Team conducted tree planting at the riparian area covering 0.46 Ha with 150 seedlings as part of the restoration effort. It comprises of riparian tree species such as Bayor, Selung Apid, Laran, Talisai Paya and Pulai. On top of that, the team also had been briefed and provided with knowledge on the importance and structure of riparian areas.



Forest canopy of SICA.



# OUR GUARDIANS OF WILDLIFE

The Honorary Wildlife Warden (HWW) are qualified volunteers from Wilmar's plantation managers, staff, workers as well as local communities that were appointed by Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD). These HWW are empowered to enforce the Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 (WCE 1997) and to stop any illegal activities related to wildlife as well as to create awareness to public on the importance of protecting the wildlife in Sabah together with SWD.



Currently, there are five (5) SICA team members appointed as HWW, with one of them being a member of the local community surrounding Sekar Imej, in supporting SWD to enforce the law and become the eyes while doing their daily job. Besides creating awareness on protected species, they are empowered and licensed to conduct roadblocks and to confiscate any illegal wildlife as well as to get warrant to do spot checks in order to investigate any illegal activities.

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH SWD

A promotional poster for a webinar. The title is "SEMBANG SANTAI HIDUPAN LIAR: PENGUATKUASAAN ENAKMEN PEMELIHARAAN HIDUPAN LIAR 1997". The date and time are "5 Julai 2021 Isnin 9:00 Pagi". It is a "LIVE 5R Hidupan Liar" event. The poster features five circular portraits of the panelists: Hussein Muhi (Pegawai Hidupan Liar, Jabatan Hidupan Liar Sabah), Mathews Mangi (Wilmar International Ltd), David Tatin (IOI Ladang Sabah Group), Romireshton Kumpul (CERT Coordinator), and Marcia Elaine M. Jopony (Wilmar International Ltd). The moderator is Juhana Johnny, Project Coordinator at Earthworm Foundation. The bottom of the poster has logos for Earthworm, Wilmar, and IOI Group, along with silhouettes of wildlife and a house.

On 5th July 2021, two appointed HWW from the SICA Team were invited to be panelists in a webinar organized by SWD to share their experience and efforts to raise awareness and protect wildlife in and around plantations in Sabah.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Today there are 78 appointed Honorary Wildlife wardens and rangers in Wilmar's Malaysia operations - including 9 appointed women.





# SICA STARS

In every newsletter we will feature a member of the SICA Team as a SICA Star, to share experiences and what makes them special to the team. In this issue, we feature:

## WOMAN POWER: THE ONLY WOMAN HONORARY WILDLIFE WARDEN IN SUGUT

In honour of the international ranger celebration, we are proud to introduce to you our only woman wildlife warden at SICA, Ms Jukini Gamius or better known as Juk. She was born in Ranau and raised in Kota Belud, Sabah. Her appointment as an Honorary Wildlife Warden started in 2017. Even before then, she had a strong interest in wildlife as she grew up in the natural landscape of forests in her early childhood with her parents.

Her interest in wildlife grew as she began working in Wilmar's Sabahmas Estate in Lahad Datu, Sabah in 2007, where she had the opportunity to learn about endangered wildlife such as Orang Utan and the Pygmy Elephant. As her experience increased, so did her passion toward protecting wildlife and other conservation activities in preserving the forest heritage.

There were some ups and downs in becoming a wildlife warden especially as the only woman in the Sugut HWW team. Some of her challenges include being bitten by leeches or being limited by physical strength in certain physical tasks, but this has never stopped her from enjoying and participating in wildlife protection activities.





# THE LEAD INSIGHT

BY MR GURCHARAN SINGH

(PLANTATION HEAD MALAYSIA OPERATIONS)

First of all, we must not forget that for our very existence on this planet is due to what we have been endowed by mother nature, everything that we need to survive and thrive has been provided by the natural world around us. No matter where we are or what we are doing, conserving nature is a universal issue. Having been working 41 years in this industry, protecting the environment and biodiversity conservation must remain as our key commitment towards sustainable business. It is important to note that the oil palm industry is evolving and has taken the lead towards sustainable business for so many years now compared to other sectors.

The palm industry itself is steadfast and highly committed towards biodiversity conservation and is backed by the government. We too are doing our part working closely with government departments and other stakeholders where we operate by taking various initiatives, programs, projects and commitments related to biodiversity conservation. Many plantation companies like us are coming forward in a responsible manner to contribute towards looking after the environment.

We prioritize all these commitments as per our company's policies and continuously strive to be an example for the industry that sustainable business is possible. SICA is a perfect example of our efforts and commitment to excel. As a planter working years in this industry, I could not have imagined that we will be having such a project. I believe that with great support and commitment, nothing is impossible and if we continue to take the right step, we can turn this into something phenomenal. I trust that once this project is fully established, it will be an outstanding example to interested parties and players and will demonstrate how we as an oil palm company is serious in balancing our business with conservation. I'm confident with our highly committed, experienced and skilled team, this project will be a great success and be another remarkable landmark for us as a plantation company.

All kinds of trees especially the dipterocarps which look majestic, tall and beautiful drive my interest. Our rainforests are so full of flora and fauna, this is another great opportunity for us to contribute to protect and maintain our green environment. I am passionate in encouraging people to plant trees although it takes time to grow but this will benefit future generations. I am fascinated by all kinds of birds and animals. My most memorable encounter was seeing a Clouded Leopard on the Tabin Wildlife reserve. This animal is sadly on the IUCN red list. The dipterocarp forest are their hunting grounds and I am hoping that endangered animals such as this will thrive in SICA.



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**“ IF ONE WORD CAN BE USED TO DESCRIBE CONSERVATION, THEN THAT WORD WOULD BE RESPONSIBILITY”- GURCHARAN SINGH**

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If one word can be used to describe conservation, then that word would be responsibility. We are so blessed in Malaysia, our country is a tropical paradise and one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world as identified by Conservation International. As a leader, I am constantly motivating our team and creating awareness amongst the employees to make them understand the importance of conservation and preserving our environment which is in line with the business. Currently we also working on a project to plant trees in all available spaces other than the designated riparian and conservations areas. Our teams from all the operating units both plantations or mills are involved in this reforestation and greening project surrounding the housing complexes, vacant spaces and around palm oil mills to provide green and environmentally friendly working ambience, while helping to creates green belt and habitats for wildlife especially birds and small mammals.



It is important to work together with all the necessary stakeholders as we also need their expertise, support, ideas and feedback to make the SICA project a success. This project is interesting where it will have both conservation and social elements. It is important to involve the local communities in the conservation program as they live adjacent to SICA and some of them are natural resources dependent with good local and traditional knowledge. With this project, I hope we will help and provide a platform and more opportunities for the local communities surrounding SICA to improve on their livelihoods while supporting conservation initiatives together with us.

The greatest challenge for the SICA project will be the momentum to kick start and enhance this project. This is a big project and adequate long-term funding will be one of the issues but this will not be the limiting factor to carry out this project. Another challenge is the remote location and accessibility to the site. Meanwhile we just need to focus on capacity building for our team to produce skilled personnel and provide good facilities for this project. I strongly believe that we all have a responsibility toward protecting and restoring the environment for our children and future generations. In line with that objective, we have taken the first steps to promote SICA to the world as a conservation center and to set an example for the oil palm industry. As quoted by Mattie Stepanek "Unity is strength.. only when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved." The same goes for this project, the teamwork between us together with the other stakeholder and partners with complementary strengths can achieve the objectives of the SICA project.



# PEARL OF WISDOM

BY MR KIAW CHE WENG

( PLANTATION GENERAL MANAGER MALAYSIA OPERATIONS )



World natural resources have been highly depleted in the last 30 years due to increased demand for end users. The key point here is resources. These end users, human kind, will keep increasing in numbers in the years to come, and we will hit the time when the world has reached its maximum capacity. That is why taking care of natural resources now is very important.

The oil palm industry has suffered from negative views worldwide, especially due to the rapid expansion in intact forests and peatland. Our humble SICA project is small and does not pretend to replace all the world's lost forests and to be frank, to be a game changer in the space of conservation is a mountain to climb. However, we will strive with our team of professionals to meet our objective of returning something tangible to the people and nature through this Project, and able to show that in Wilmar International, we care for all living things.

The SICA project aims to achieve large-scale conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems through a model where multiple conservation roles of stakeholders in complex landscapes in the oil palm industry can come together and sustain positive human-environment interactions into the future. The SICA project is also designed to provide support and contribute towards the development and well-being of the surrounding rural indigenous communities. This is one of our initiatives contributing to both people and nature; I believe SICA Project will succeed. We are providing various types of support to communities surrounding the Project, which includes various Corporate Responsibility programmes such as providing medical aid, funding dental procedures and cataract surgeries; infrastructure aid such as building a kindergarten as well as our Water Gravity project to help improve the water supply. Helping the local communities in the outreach program not only aiding the community's personal needs but also bringing the world to them such as Information Technology, better nutrition, renewable energy sources and access to education.

By utilizing different strategies and expertise, it is great to have inputs from different stakeholders. There is no reason not to collaborate and with this collaboration; it will provide opportunities as well as space to achieve our conservation objectives. We need a systematic approach where the team must work out long-term practical objectives. From there, we intend to provide continuous support to this Project.



# OTHER CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Sharing our other efforts on conservation throughout our operations in Sabah and Sarawak.

## HCV MONITORING TRAINING

Monitoring training with a total of 40 participants was conducted for all HCV and ESH personnel from each operating unit in May 2021. The objectives of the training were to brush-up monitoring skills and improve the HCV monitoring technique by using application such as Avenza Apps with the new monitoring form. Besides that, issues related to conservation were also discussed during the training.



## REFORESTATION PROGRAM IN SARAWAK

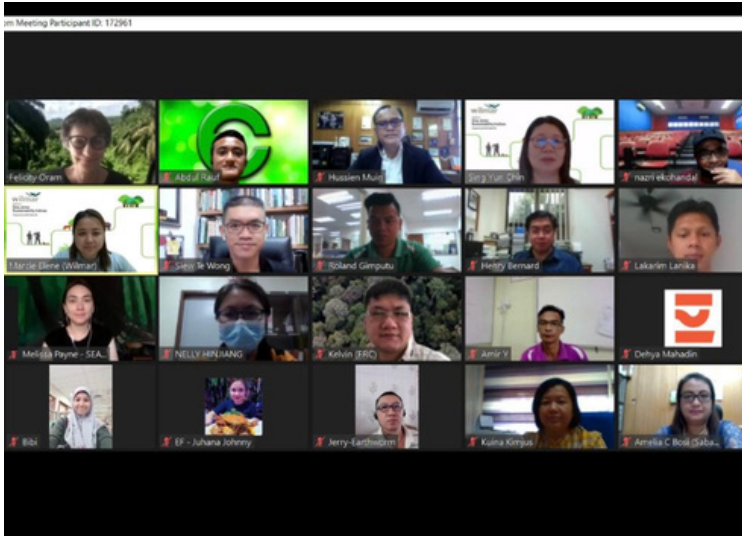
Our Sarawak plantation management together with the Conservation team are actively carrying out enrichment tree planting and reforestation at the riparian areas within our plantation areas. The purpose of this program is to restore all the degraded riparian areas as well as to establish a wildlife corridor connecting from Bukit Durang HCV Area to the plantation. This is a five year program initiative, which covers approximately 400 kilometres of river lengths and involves 29 main rivers and tributaries.





# OTHER CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

## STAKEHOLDER CONSERVATION MEETING



The first Virtual Conservation Stakeholder Meeting was conducted on 25th May 2021 with a total of 30 participants from various parties comprising of government agencies, NGOs, consultants, local universities as well as other oil palm plantations. The meeting aimed to engage and communicate our Conservation Management and Action Plan to the stakeholders and to seek their consultation for improvement. Corresponding to this event, a few inquiries and topics were discussed including potential collaboration as well as further clarifications to the action plan.

## BOUNDARY DEMARICATION

Boundary marking along the conservation areas such as HCV areas, riparian areas or buffer zones to Forest Reserve area has been strengthened in various estates. The ground team conducted another round of repainting of the boundary markings to make it more visible and clear to workers and potential encroachers.





# OTHER CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

## VISIT TO FORESTRY RESEARCH CENTRE (FRC) AND RAINFOREST DISCOVERY CENTRE (RDC)

A group of Wilmar personnel led by Mr Gurcharan Singh – Malaysia Plantation Head and included our Sabah General Manager, Sustainability, and R&D department representatives visited Forestry Research Centre (FRC) and Rainforest Discovery Centre (RDC) on 22nd March 2021.

The objectives of the technical visit were to learn the setup of their tree nursery and to get some pointers on restoration work as well as to get expertise support from Sabah Forestry Department (SFD). Dr Robert Ong, the Deputy Chief Conservator of Forest, together with other Forestry Officers and researchers welcomed the team and shared various experiences with Wilmar's team on their restoration efforts and various conservation initiatives.

The SFD team was very kind and helpful to show Wilmar's team around the Tree Nursery, Seed Laboratory, Insect Museum, Xylarium and lastly the impressive RDC.



**“THE BEST TIME TO PLANT A TREE WAS 20 YEARS AGO. THE SECOND BEST TIME IS NOW.”**

