

IN FOCUS

The year 2022 marked the beginning of the challenging journey of Sekar Imej Conservation Area (SICA), against the backdrop of logging operations in the recently degazetted forest reserve bordering SICA, which will result in irreversible land use change. While the SICA team is making efforts to increase awareness amongst local communities on the importance of SICA, the SICA rangers are also racing against time to mark the boundaries of SICA to minimise any potential encroachment, especially in the northern part of SICA. This edition highlights the land use change near SICA, Kg. Kaiboton (one of the important villages), the awareness activities in these villages and the school adjacent to SICA as well as the SICA scientific expedition. We hope to give some perspective of the reality on the ground and the importance of engaging the local communities and science community to safeguard the forest of SICA.

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SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO SICA

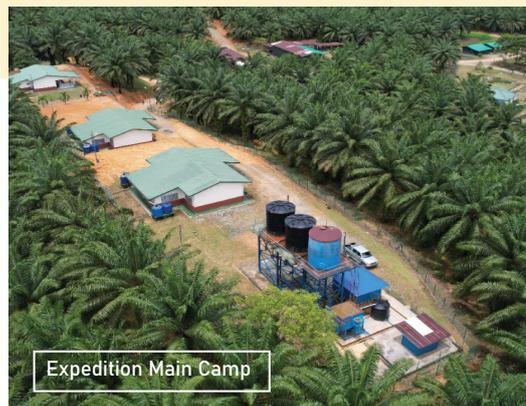


Researchers and rangers in Kibundu basecamp of the expedition

The first-ever scientific expedition in Sekar Imej Conservation Area (SICA), was held from 18 until 30 September 2022. The expedition was a collaboration between Wilmar and the South East Asia Rainforest Research Partnership (SEARRP). As part of the scientific expedition, 49 scientists and researchers from SEARRP, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sabah participated to study and document the flora and fauna found in the area as well as assess forest quality and estimate carbon stocks to provide biodiversity and carbon baselines. These data sets will underpin and form recommendations for future research in order to support SICA's management and restoration plans for the area. In total, more than 70 participants including local communities who acted as field guides participated in the expedition.

The expedition also had the media participating to observe, first-hand, researchers studying and documenting the flora and fauna found in the area, as well as the opportunity to see the joint conservation efforts taking place in a plantation landscape. The scientific expedition revealed the importance of SICA in biodiversity conservation in the Sugut region, with some exciting discoveries, as well as a record of species. Details of the finding will be covered in the next issue.

The researchers and scientists who were part of the expedition included experts in general biodiversity, biodiversity of aquatic insects, ichthyofauna (study of fish), bats diversity, the study of mammals and primates amongst others.



Expedition Main Camp

SEARRP, established by the Royal Society in 1985, has a long-standing academic presence in Sabah, facilitating world-class scientific research from its base at the Danum Valley Field Centre. Wilmar and SEARRP have been scientific collaborators since 2006, focusing on biodiversity conservation and sustainable management within the oil palm landscape.

Wilmar and SEARRP recently extended a joint commitment to scientific research, with a particular focus on forest rehabilitation, which has been detailed in a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was signed in February 2022. This scientific expedition is part of the joint commitment to advance and support scientific projects in sustainable plantation management, habitat restoration and biodiversity conservation.

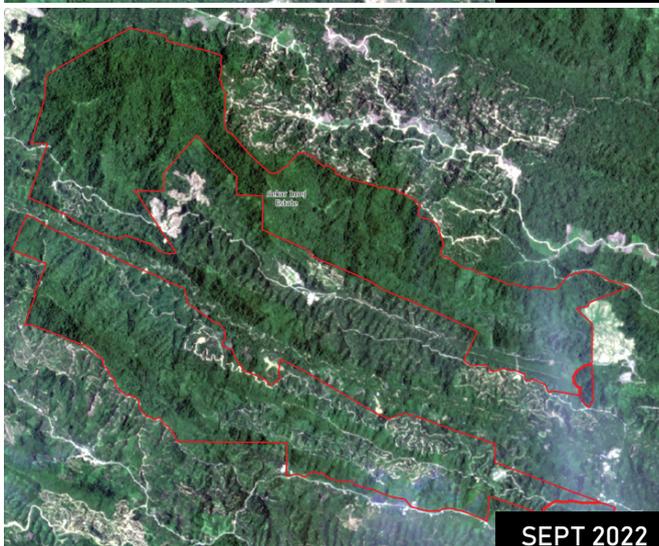
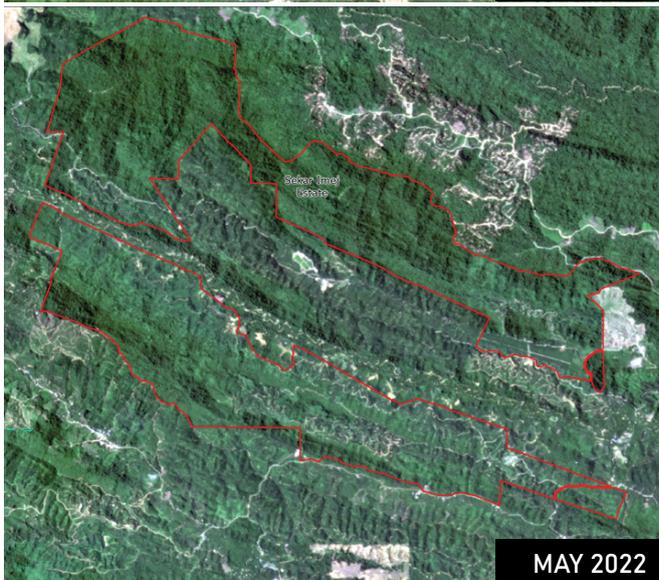
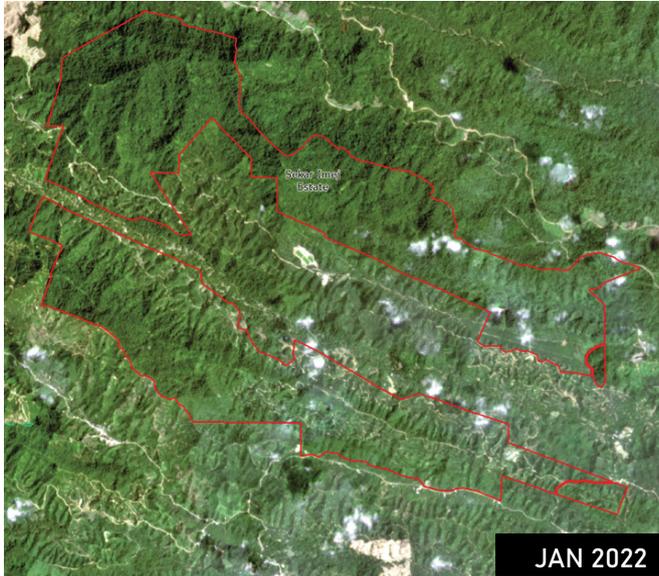
Some of the research activities that were carried out during the scientific expedition included:

- Sampling of aquatic insects, fishes, spiders, herpetofauna, fungi, termites, bats, plants including climbers, orchids etc.
- Sampling of dung beetles at a range of sites within the estate including old-growth forest/HCV areas, degraded forest, riparian reserves and within the plantation mosaic using both baited pitfall and, if possible, canopy traps. Dung beetles are excellent indicators of overall mammal diversity.
- Sampling of dragonflies and butterflies on the wing by hand netting.
- A general collection of night-flying insects using a mercury-vapour lamp at a selection of sites.
- Sampling of fruit and carrion feeding butterflies along line transects in a range of habitat types using suspended canopy traps.
- Assessing and triangulating Gibbon vocalisation; conducting simultaneous surveys to establish the presence of orangutan nests and signs of other primate activity.
- Placement of non-lethal small mammal traps on grids in different habitat types (such as old growth forest and plantation) in combination with camera traps for large mammals.



"LOOK DEEP INTO NATURE, AND THEN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING BETTER" - ALBERT EINSTEIN

ENVIRONMENT - IS SICA IN PERIL?



**“THE EXPOSURE
CREATES A RISK OF
ENCROACHMENT,
POACHING AND FOREST
FRAGMENTATION EDGE
EFFECTS OF HABITAT
DEGRADATION AND
LOSS WILL BE HIGHER”**

SICA plays an important role in the ecosystem in the Sugut region, as forest connectivity to the neighbouring forest reserve is vital to keep SICA intact and sustain its ecological processes and functions. However, land use change outside SICA's boundaries and forest fragmentation are unavoidable due to land development and the area's high poverty rate.

This poses additional challenges in managing SICA, as the exposure creates a risk of encroachment, poaching and forest fragmentation edge effects of habitat degradation and loss will be higher. It is crucial to document land use changes so that we can understand the impact of forest fragmentation and development in preparation for more effective management of the area.

Satellite images show that land use change outside SICA can potentially impact the species composition in SICA and lead to increased threats to the area.

Source of Images: Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) Satellite Data Program

KAMPUNG KAIBOTON



Common Porcupine (*Hystrix brachyura*)
Source of Image: Payne et. al. (1985)
A Field Guide To The Mammals of Borneo

Kaibot Voton- the curse of the porcupine

Kampung Kaiboton or Kaiboton Village is a settlement by the natives from the “Sungai” tribe from the Sugut area, founded by Mr. Raisim Anullah and Mr. Undaliu Mujinah in 1976. The name of the village comes from the phrase “Kaibot Voton”, in the Sungai language means “the curse of the porcupine”. Legend has it that as the natives were hunting for food and they came across an unusually large porcupine. Despite being speared a few times, the porcupine did not die but vanished without a trace into the forest. No porcupine was ever been seen in this area again and villagers believed that it was due to the curse of the porcupine, hence the area was named “Kaiboton”.



Kampung Kaiboton is a village in the interiors of Beluran, about 4 hours away from Beluran town and an hour to Paitan district. It connects to neighbouring villages like Kampung Kinadaan, Kampung Mononod and Kampung Binsulung via interior roads. Located around plantations like Wilmar’s Sekar Imej Plantation and Boustead Plantation, there are approximately 45 households with a total of 190 villagers in Kampung Kaiboton. The village is located on lowlands with a few streams like Sungai Lolow, Sungai Wokou and Sungai Kaiboton that flow through the village causing it to be prone to flooding when it rains.



Undaliu Mujinah (Pak Undaliu), 74
Founder of Kampung Kaiboton

Village head Undaliu Mujinah, 74, also known as Pak Undaliu, is one of the founders of Kampung Kaiboton and has been village head since the 80s until now. Pak Undaliu has been the head villager for a long time, initially from Kampung Matanggal Lama along with 40 families, due to life struggles, they had set out to discover a new settlement area which eventually became Kampung Kaiboton as we know it today.

THEN AND NOW

Forest as an income source

The forest was the main source of income for the community in the past, where one of the most important income sources was resin, locally known as “damar”. According to Pak Undaliu, 100kgs of resin would fetch RM30 and this was considered to be a grand sum back then. As there was no road access at the time, the resin would be loaded into a wooden boat and taken to Kampung Sungai - Sungai to be sold. The river was the main point of access before roads were developed.

The forest also provided the local communities with other sources like building materials to build homes and tools for hunting and fishing. Rattan from the forest is used to bind the wood in building home and to make fish traps known as “bubu” for fishing.

According to Pak Undaliu, in the past, the jungle was cleared for farming purposes to grow tapioca, hill paddy, corn and other crops. But now this is no longer practised as the forest is shrinking. Crops like oil palm have since replaced seasonal crops. Integrated farming where crops like tapioca, hill paddy, sweet potatoes, and fruits are grown for own consumption with extras sold to neighbouring communities and plantation workers.

The community in Kampung Kaiboton have always reared livestock like pigs and poultry traditionally. Now with sufficient fresh water supply, tilapia is farmed as a protein source and to be sold to the local communities.

With the progress of time and just like other Sabahans, the villagers from Kampung Kaiboton grow oil palm and rubber for income. Some have gone into swiftlet nest farming by building birdhouses.



RELIGION IN KAMPUNG KAIBOTON

While some have held on to their traditional beliefs, the majority of the villagers are Christians. There are a few who are Muslims and some who still practise their ancestral paganism beliefs. Pak Undaliu, like others in the village, still practices the ancient tradition called “mugagu”.



THE YOUNGER GENERATION AND THE FOREST

“**Hutan tinggal pulau,**” said Pak Undaliu, depicting the shrinking forest landscape. He added that there is no longer any logging or deforestation. “No more logging or deforestation, we don’t clear the forest anymore. It is against the law, one can get arrested for it,” he said. According to Pak Undaliu, the people in Kaiboton are no longer dependent on the forest for a livelihood. Now, their main source of income is by being smallholders.

“The younger people no longer depend on the forest for their livelihood. Maybe some of them gather resources from the forest, a very small number. Some of them gather things like rotan for bubu. This is not the main income source,” Pak Undaliu added.

He added that many of them preferred to work at the oil palm plantations nearby while others moved to the cities in search of better opportunities. Many have since moved not just to the cities in Sabah but also cities in Peninsular Malaysia like Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru or Penang.

SUSTAINABILITY INSIGHTS

Leader in the Estate

*“The way to get started
is to quit talking and begin doing”*

Mr Fadlee's view on SICA

High Conservation Value (HCV) area in Sekar Imej is not a foreign term as this estate is made up of mostly HCV areas. The SICA project adds more value to the existing HCV area with more involvement of the local community. It is a good initiative from the project to improve the current image of Sekar Imej estate. SICA enables the management to fully utilise the potential the area has to offer for its biodiversity and natural habitats of wildlife, as well as for the surrounding community.

The journey of establishing the SICA project was no doubt challenging, but also it was fun and interesting. This project has created an opportunity for Sekar Imej estate to expand its horizon and bring forth interactions between people from different walks of life like researchers, interested parties and civil societies. Moving forward with this project would have been difficult without the full support from the top management. We have to thank our top management for their support in seeing this project through.

Hope and vision for the SICA project

We hope that this project would be a success and will be well accepted by members of the public as well as the academia and scientific communities. In future, we hope that SICA will be known as a good example of conservation areas managed by oil palm plantations or the private sector.



Fadlee Yunsir

Senior Manager, Sugut Group Estate

Mr Fadlee Yunsir is one of the youngest senior managers leading Wilmar's estates and is currently assigned to manage six estates in the Sugut region, located in the interior of Beluran, bordering Paitan. He started working in oil palm plantations since early September 2004, where his first post was in Sapi 2 estate for five years (2004-2009), his second posting was in Sri Kamusan for seven years (2010-2017), then he had a year in Hibumas 1 (2018- May 2019). Currently, he is the person in-charge at Hibumas 2 and Jebawang, as well as the other estates in the Sugut region. He has worked in oil palm plantations for close to 18 years now, gathering a wealth of experience, especially in oil plantation management.

One of his memorable accomplishments was during his working experience in Sri Kamusan when he was put in charge of the Empty Fruit Bunch (EFB) recycling project in Sri Kamusan. He was the pioneer in the project, based in the Sri Kamusan mill that involved the locals living in the surrounding area. The main problem with this project is that EFB from the production process of palm oil is always more than needed. The daily production of EFB may even reach 200 tonnes! Usually, the EFB produced would be applied back to the crops as it is an effective fertiliser. However, Sri Kamusan estate has limited area and applying back the EFB would take up manpower. The project was initiated by Mr Simon Siburat, the Plantation Head then, and it was managed by Mr Fadlee where the EFB was applied back to mature crops and to overcome the labour shortage, the local community was hired to apply the EFB inside Sri Kamusan planting block. The project started only with 1 person hired, then expanded to 15 people and ended with at least 74 people hired from the local community. The project did not only resolve the excess EFB issue but also provided job opportunities for the locals. The project was in line with Best Management Practices, where the excess EFB was recycled and the labour shortage issue was resolved as well.

SICA ACTIVITIES

The Signing of MOU with SEARRP



Wilmar renewed the MoU with Southeast Asia Rainforest Research Programme (SEARRP) on 18 Feb 2022 to continue promoting best management practices in the plantation landscape. SEARRP was established by the UK's Royal Society in 1985 and has more than 30 years of experience in facilitating scientific field research in Southeast Asia, primarily in Malaysia.

This year after the Covid pandemic eased off, we have started receiving researchers from SEARRP like Dr Chew Li Yuen under the supervision of Dr Eleanor Slade from Nanyang Technological University Singapore, who are working on the study of Riparian Protection versus Pest and Disease Control in Oil Palm Plantations. It is a long-term research study starting from 3 Jan 2022 to 22 July 2022, separated into 3 consecutive visits.

SOME OF THE KEY FOCUS OF THE MOU WHICH INCLUDES SICA ARE:

1

RESEARCH PLATFORMS

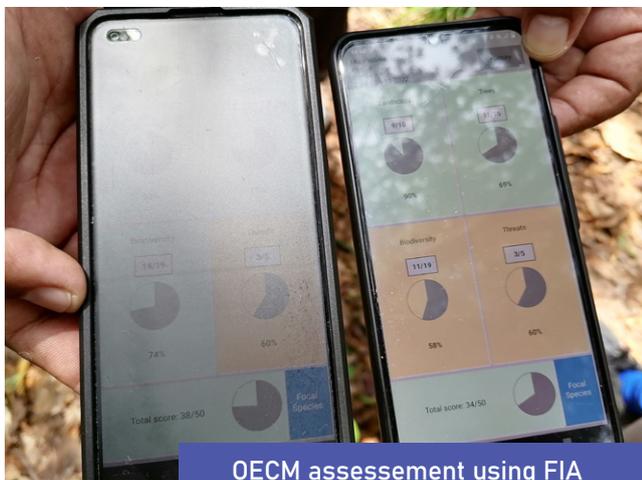
To establish research platforms to advance and support scientific projects and experimental study plots relating to the best management practices of plantation and conservation areas.



2

EXPLORE THE ESTABLISHMENT

To explore the establishment of research-led programs for forest and habitat restoration and rehabilitation.



OECM assesment using FIA

OECM Preliminary Assessment for SICA

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECM) preliminary assessment was conducted by the SEARRP team from 11-14 April. The forest quality in SICA was assessed by using Forest Integrity Assessment (FIA). Initial observation showed the forest conditions in SICA to be in good condition. SEARRP concluded that SICA fulfils the basic criteria of the OECM survey and will present the findings to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (KeTSA).

SICA ACTIVITIES

Conservation Monitoring Using Blockchain

We conducted field testing with the BanQu team involving Mr. Ashish Gadnis and Mr. Gavin Vetten to identify the issues and gaps of the BanQu system in the field testing from 5-7 June 2022. This was part of the pilot testing of forest monitoring using blockchain to record data through community forest patrolling. From the sandbox BanQu pilot test, we moved to the full version of BanQu system with a total number of 12 users.



SICA ACTIVITIES

Community Engagement with Kg Mononod & Kg Kaiboton



We promoted engagement and encouraged participation from the Kaiboton and Mononod communities in SICA projects from March to June. Engagement and awareness talks were conducted on 16th March and 8th June respectively. This involved a total of 298 participants including Mr. Johan Jiu, the village head of Kg Mononod and Mr. Undaliu Mujinah, the village head of Kg. Kaiboton and 100 children from SK Matanggal, SK Sungai-sungai, SK Binsulung, Pre School of Kg. Mononod and Kindergarden of Kg. Kaiboton. Through this engagement, we managed to create awareness of the importance of the forest and wildlife to the local community and introduced SICA project to the local communities to cultivate interest in forest protection.



“YOU CAN’T FORCE PEOPLE TO CARE ABOUT OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, BUT IF YOU ENCOURAGE THEM TO CONNECT WITH IT, THEY JUST MIGHT.”

JUNNIFER NINI

SICA ACTIVITIES

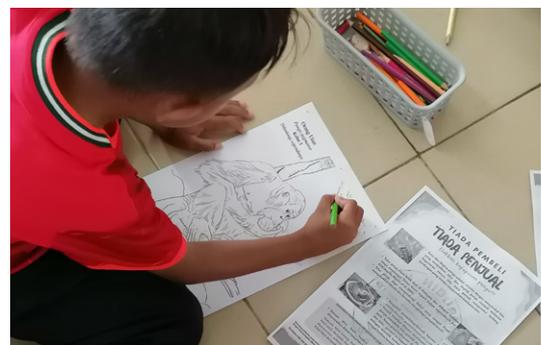
Junior Ranger and Wildlife Awareness Outreach Programme (WAOP) with Students at SK Matanggal



This activity was conducted in collaboration with Sabah Wildlife Department, SK Matanggal and Sekar Imej Estate on 29 June. A total of 137 children and 29 adults including 7 teachers and 22 locals participated in the programme which was to promote conservation and create awareness of wildlife protection.



SICA project was discussed with the local communities to encourage participation. Activities conducted included talks on the importance of the forest to the community, wildlife quizzes, and colouring and drawing competitions. Response from the school was encouraging. Daphne Hameeteman from Wilmar Europe, our great supporter, also participated in the programme.



SICA STARS

FOREST STEWARD JERIAN MAJAUN

We feature a member of the SICA Team in every newsletter to share their experiences and what makes them special to the team.

Jerian Majaun was born in 1988 in Kampung Mampakad, Pitas, Sabah. He remembers his childhood as being surrounded by the sounds of nature like the rustling of leaves as well as birds and insects. Fondly known as Jerry, he is from the Sungai tribe and has lived in Sugut for more than 14 years. He married a partner from the Sungai tribe and now they are proud parents to a boy and a girl.

Jerry has worked in Wilmar's plantations since 2009, and in early 2020 Jerry joined the SICA team. When asked about his tasks in the SICA Project, he quipped, "My job was to go for a walk in the forest, just like taking a stroll in the woods!"

Later he explained, "Our main job was to make sure that the SICA perimeter was not breached by outsiders, the main challenge was the villagers who live close to the area. Many do not know that the forest sits on land that is owned by Wilmar and all hunting and logging activities are prohibited here." His task is not just patrolling the area, but also working with the local communities on providing them to the updates of SICA Project, while creating awareness of the importance of protecting the wildlife and forest around them. As part of the ranger team, he also puts up signboards on hunting prohibition, protected wildlife and notices of HCV classifications."

Jerry is known amongst his colleagues for his friendly nature and helpful attitude. He is also a person to go to when you need assistance with something. As easy-going as

Jerry can be, he can be firm when it comes to work. He especially does not take it lightly when people litter. When going on a hike, rest assured you are with good company when Jerry is along the hike as he makes sure no one is left behind and is more than happy to share his food on the trail.

He is happy to be part of the SICA team and supported with good staff welfare and salary. To him, working on the SICA project, brings back happy childhood memories of the forest environment. "I like working in the forest and being well compensated and appreciated for the work done makes it all worth it," Jerry said when asked how has it been working for Wilmar for all the years.

Jerry hoped that the SICA project would bring about the conservation of the area for the long term.

"The forest sounds which used to wake me up in the morning, like wild peacocks, gibbons have grown largely silent. Although the area has been logged before, there are still sources to forage, the river water is drinkable," he said.

SICA is important as Kampung Kaiboton gets clean water from the river that runs through SICA. The river gives them sufficient clean water for the villager's daily needs. "As we always tell the communities, the forest is a sanctuary for wildlife, a source for healing plants and makes up to be the green lungs," he added.

"My hopes," he after a long silence. "Is for no more logging. It is sad that the area nearby SICA has been degazetted and there is little we can do about it. We need to conserve SICA to the best possible ability."

OTHER WILMAR CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES



General Conservation Meeting at Saremas that involved Sabah and Sarawak Conservation Teams

The Conservation Planning Meeting was held in Saremas from 8-11 February 2022 with members from Sabah and Sarawak joining the meeting. Areas of discussion included issues and challenges of the conservation and HCV team.

Restoration Spatial Planning Workshop by FOR-RESTOR in Kota Kinabalu

The workshop was organized by FOR-RESTOR and facilitated by SEARPP from 22-24 May 2022. Wilmar participated in the discussion which touched on the gaps and challenges of the restoration on the ground based on the experience of the restoration works in Sabahmas and Sapi.

Visit to UPM, Bintulu Reforestation Site and Nursery

The conservation team visited UPM's restoration project site and nursery in UPM Bintulu campus on 28th May 2022. Dr Ong Kiat Huat shared his experience in the forest restoration project and highlighted some key lessons learnt to ensure successful forest restoration on the ground.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES



HCV - HCS Assessment for Suburmas Estate, Sarawak.

HCV-HCS assessment was conducted by the Conservation and Saremas team from 23-28 May 2022. The team conducted sampling at various points and explored some of the remaining forest patches in the Suburmas estate. Also, a conservation stakeholder meeting was conducted at Samalaju Resort on 26th May 2022, with a total of 39 participants. The meeting was held to gather feedback and concern of the proposed HCV areas in Suburmas and seek stakeholder support in protecting the HCV and HCS areas in Suburmas.



EU Ambassador H.E. Michalis Rokas visit to Sabahmas Estate

Wilmar hosted H.E. Michalis Rokas, the Ambassador and head of the EU Delegation to Malaysia, in our Sabahmas Plantation and LDEO Refinery on 19th and 20th May 2022. The Ambassador wanted to have first-hand experience and the opportunity to observe best management practices in the production and supply of sustainable palm oil. Field visits include the site visit to the Sg. Segama riparian area (Block 135) to witness the outcome of the Sabahmas restoration project which was initiated in 2009 where Wilmar expanded the river buffer zone from 20m to 50m. This facilitated the conservation efforts of protected and endangered species like the Proboscis Monkey and Silvered Langur.



Environment is no one's
property to destroy;
it's everyone's
responsibility to protect.

– Mohith Agadi

SICA SUPPORTERS

The Sekar Imej Conservation Area (SICA) is the largest conservation area in Wilmar's operations in Malaysia, spanning a total of 2,469 hectares in the interiors of the Beluran District in Sabah. Located within our plantation's concession boundary, the SICA project is an ongoing joint effort between Wilmar and our stakeholders, including the surrounding local communities, to protect and preserve the largely Lowland Mixed Dipterocarp Forest. The initiative aims to develop SICA as a Biodiversity and Carbon Research Center by 2030. The key components include biodiversity conservation, capacity building and community based conservation approach.

SICA project is partially funded by Wilmar Oleochemicals and Biofuels of Europe from 2022-2024.

