

# SUSTAINABILITY BRIEF

## WILMAR'S WILDLIFE WARDENS *OUR FRONTLINERS IN CONSERVATION*



*A wildlife roadblock and check in progress near Wilmar's Sabahmas estate*

As an organisation with conservation at the heart of its operations, and over 30,000 ha of conservation set aside globally – which is about equivalent to the size of Penang or Malta - Wilmar has established its own wildlife monitoring and enforcement team. Wilmar is proud to be among the few oil palm plantations in Malaysia with a team of Honorary Wildlife Wardens (HWW) and Wildlife Rangers appointed by the government. Wilmar currently has 78 HWW in total, comprising of 69 men and 9 women.

Our HWW and Wildlife Wardens, who are based in our operations in Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysian Borneo), are our frontliners who are empowered to take action against poachers and illegal wildlife-related activities. The team also have the authority to stop and inspect any suspected vehicles, even aircrafts.

Our HWW were first appointed in 2011 with 25 personnel being stationed in our Sabahmas estate near Lahad Datu, Sabah to protect wildlife in our estate and in the adjacent Tabin Wildlife Reserve from illegal hunting and encroachers, in accordance to the Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 (WCE 1997).

However, the role of a HWW as an educator is just as important as that of an enforcement officer, according to James Wong, Sustainability Manager for Wilmar. “The Honorary Wildlife Warden programme was also established to educate the general public on the importance of conservation and negative impact from poaching. This can be challenging at times, given that rural communities are at times dependent on wild meat for their protein source. Therefore, as educators, we also need to deploy a diplomatic approach to help raise awareness while ensuring there is a win-win situation”.

James, who is also the Chairman for the Wildlife Rangers for Wilmar’s operations in Sarawak, further added, “Our key responsibilities and annual activities also include organising awareness talks as well as educational and outreach programs with schools and local communities, among others. This is on top of our monitoring, inspections and roadblocks to halt any illegal activities related to wildlife”.

“I strongly believe that people and nature should co-exist in harmony. I also advocate the strength in the spirit of volunteerism. These are among my main motivating factors in being a wildlife warden. More importantly, conservation needs time, patience and commitment”.



*James (seated, first from left) together with Wilmar’s Honorary Wildlife Rangers in Sarawak after a refresher course in 2018*



## Wilmar's Women Wildlife Rangers – Breaking stereotypes

The women in Wilmar continue to push boundaries by pursuing roles in what is traditionally perceived to be male-dominated fields, including in wildlife protection and enforcement.

Marcie Elene, our Assistant Manager of Conservation also doubles up as a HWW after being appointed in 2018 to further enforce the prohibition of illegal hunting and possession of wildlife.



*Marcie (first row standing, second from right) together with her Wilmar colleagues who first attended the Honorary Wildlife Warden course in September 2017*

“It was a challenging job in the beginning, when I started working in the plantation environment. Most people had the perception that conservation efforts were a waste of time and money. The pursuit of conservation or enforcing laws to protect wildlife was challenging”, said Marcie, who once dreamed of working as a zoologist or a veterinarian stemming from her love for animals. Fate however had different plans for her, but her determination saw her eventually working with wildlife by carving a niche in conservation.

She further added, “Things have certainly improved over time, with perspectives and priorities related to conservation becoming more positive shifting. Most of the oil palm sector and its stakeholders, from top management level down to plantation workers, are much more aware of conservation and now channel significant resources towards it”.

According to Marcie, HWW played a significant role in turning the tide in favour of conservation. “The presence of HWW representatives from each plantation helped to create the awareness of the Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 and the need to abide by its stipulations”.



*Wilmar's HWW and Sabah Wildlife Department officers conducting a vehicle inspection*

Marcie continued, “We often come across animal parts such as animal skins and horns hidden beneath vehicle seats”. Personnel from the Wildlife Department are present during these inspections or roadblocks. The HWW on duty will then proceed to photograph and document any evidence found.

Among the challenging incidents they have encountered include poachers pretending to be sick or, worse still, turning aggressive when confronted at spotchecks or roadblocks. “We would need to fall back on our basic training when managing such situations. It is crucial to remain calm and rationale despite any provocation”, she shared.

Working alongside Marcie is Jukini Gamius, or better known as Juk, who was appointed as a HWW since 2017. Hailing from Sabah, Juk grew up surrounded by lush forests in Kota Belud, which cultivated her interest in nature and wildlife. Her interest further intensified when she started working in Wilmar, where she had the opportunity to learn about endangered wildlife such as orangutans, rhinoceroses and pygmy elephants. This motivated her to take up the role of becoming the only female wildlife warden in Wilmar's Sugut region estates.

Juk has not waived from her commitment to HWW and from participating in wildlife protection activities, despite experiences that have pushed her beyond her comfort zone, including being bitten by leeches.

Marcie, Juk and other women in the HWW team are testaments to how there are no limitations to a person's potential in Wilmar.



*Jukini (second from right) with the rest of the HWW team in Wilmar's Sekar Imej plantation*