

Malaysia announces sweeping new protections for orangutans

20 August 2015



Orangutan with baby. Credit: Daniel Kong

The Chief Minister of the Malaysian state of Sarawak, Tan Sri Haji Adenan Bin Satem, issued a video statement which highlights his intention protect orangutans and other fauna and flora located in this biodiverse-rich region in Malaysia.

In his video message, the Minister announced a series of actions to protect Sarawak's 1,800-2,500 orangutans, which are threatened by clearing of forests for new [oil palm plantations](#), [illegal logging](#) and other threats.

In the announcement, the minister welcomed and encouraged assistance from the scientific and conservation community to ensure the protection of Sarawak's great natural heritage.

Today, to help achieve that goal, WCS signed an agreement with the Government of Sarawak to promote and implement conservation projects and activities in various protected areas through scientific research, education, information sharing and capacity building.

In 2014, after coming into office, the Chief Minister

declared a war on illegal logging, and there has been serious action to implement this and protect Sarawak's forests since then. As of July, 2015, several hundred bank accounts of logging companies have been frozen. So far this year, the Government of Sarawak has conducted 240 raids on timber camps and companies believed to be linked to illegal logging activities. The Sarawak Forest Department's Director recently indicated that the department had submitted 122 investigation papers to the State Attorney-General's office for further action. In addition, a new law recently passed making it easier to combat illegal logging.

The video was first shown last month in Kota Kinabalu at the United Nations Great Ape Survival Partnership (UN-GRASP) meeting, which was attended by orangutan specialists and delegates to the conference. In addition, it was shown during the opening session of a communal workshop in Sri Aman, Sarawak, attended by officers from various government agencies, the private sector, and villagers from the Ulu Sungai Menyang landscape. The Sri Aman workshop was organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources Planning and Environment and Sarawak and Forest Department with a conceptual planning exercise facilitated by WCS Malaysia.

Melvin Gumal, Director of the WCS Malaysia Program praised the Chief Minister saying, "The message by the Chief Minister is powerful and sends a clear message that orangutans and other wildlife are a priority in Sarawak. This statement gives conservation much hope especially at a time when a lot of wildlife across the region face doom and gloom as forests are cleared in a wanton, needless, and greedy manner. The sight of orangutans being killed or struggling in a sea of cleared lands is extremely distressing and the hope that the Minister's message conveys is therefore extremely powerful."

Sarawak is considered one of the 12 most

biodiverse places in the world. It has also been subject to logging since the 1950s and clearance for oil palm plantations since the late 1980s. In later years, illegal logging was seen as a threat to the environmental security of the state. WCS Malaysia's first efforts to protect orangutans in Sarawak began in 1959 with the work of George Schaller. Since then WCS Malaysia has worked in Batang Ai National Park and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary Landscape beginning in the early 1990s to the present. In addition to orangutan conservation, WCS works to protect tigers, elephants, and other wildlife, as well as to address logging issues in Peninsular Malaysia.

A new orangutan population was discovered in 2013 through a combined Forest Department Sarawak, Sarawak Forestry Corporation, WCS, and Borneo Adventure collaborative survey of the area.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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