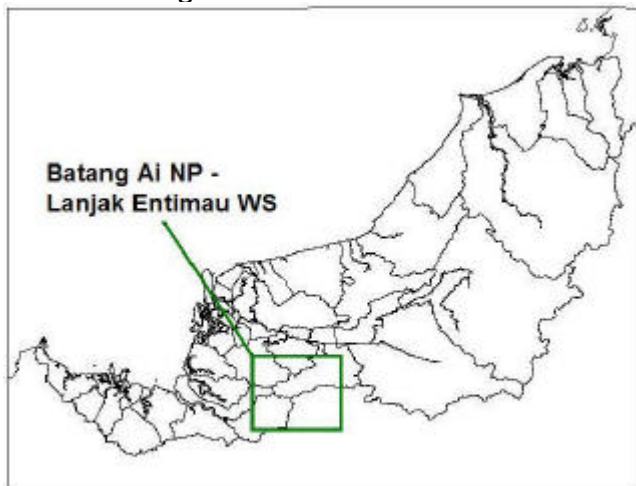


ORANG UTAN CONSERVATION IN SARAWAK

Background



Throughout Sarawak, 90% of the orang utan population is found in the protected area complex of Batang Ai National Park and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary. Reflecting their geographical distribution, these orang utans are recognised as the northwest Bornean orang utan and are grouped under the sub-species *Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*. Together with the Betung Kerihun (Bentuang-Karimun) Nature Reserve across the border in Kalimantan, they form the largest protected area where the Bornean sub-species of orang utan are known to occur.



Location of Batang Ai NP and Lanjak Entimau WS on Map of Sarawak

There have been several short-term surveys of orang utans conducted in Sarawak and also in this particular complex, some of which were done by Schaller (1961)¹, Meredith (1993)², Blouch (2000)³, and Gurmaya & Silang (2002)⁴. Based on these short-term surveys, the combined estimate for orang utan populations in Sarawak is about 1,300 individuals.

Threats

The Bornean orang utans are currently restricted to remote and less accessible areas and scientist have repeatedly stated that their population is threatened with extinction in the near future. The reasons for the decline include poaching, habitat loss and lack of political will to enforce legislation that protects the species. These threats are very severe and have led to predictions that by 2020, less than 10-15% of Borneo's total orang utan population will survive.

On-going WCS Projects

- Nest count surveys commenced in Batang Ai NP in July 2003 and in Lanjak Entimau WS in March 2005. The main objective of the research was to collect nest data to estimate abundance and distribution of orang utans, and assess threats to these animals throughout the habitat complex.
- Tree phenology surveys were also carried out to identify structure and composition of trees along the transects. This information is useful to find the fruit trees used by orang utans to forage and whether they prefer to build nests on common trees or otherwise.
- Conservation education is also a vital part of the orang utan project. WCS with partners including the Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC), engage local communities and schools to raise awareness and to develop a sense of ownership among them. This is carried out with the hope that there will be a change in the current "tragedy-of-the-commons" mentality in the next generation.



Conservation education activity in action

Future Directions

- Improved research methods in estimating densities of the species will be tested. These include retrospective methods to estimate nest decay rate, and reduce survey efforts by manipulating decay time during analysis, occupancy survey methods to estimate relative abundance, and DNA studies using hair and faecal samples in capture-recapture protocol.
- Other conservation efforts include increasing conservation education activities with local communities and other major stakeholders, and working with travel agencies to encourage conservation ethics with regard to habitat and species protection.

References

- ¹Schaller, G.B. (1961). The orang utan in Sarawak. *Zoologica* 46: 73-82.
- ²Meredith, M. (1993). *Draft Management Plan for Batang Ai National Park, 1993-1995*. Wildlife Conservation Society, Kuching, Sarawak.
- ³Blouch, R.A. (2000). Primates. In Soepadmo, E. & Chai, P (Eds.). *Development of Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary as Totally Protected Area: Scientific Report* (pp 150-159). ITTO, Yokohama.
- ⁴Gurmaya, K.K. & Silang, S. (2002). *Development of Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary as a Totally Protected Area. Phase III. A Study of habitat conditions, populations, and distribution of orang utan in Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and Batang Ai National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia*. ITTO, Kuching.