

Research Article

Notes on the Wild *Tomistoma* Populations in Western Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo

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Tomistoma schlegelii, the Freshwater Malayan Gharial or Tomistoma (local name: buaya jejulong), is secretive in nature; thus, very limited information is currently available on its wild population, especially in Sarawak. The objective of this study is to describe effort in assessing the Tomistoma wild populations in Ulu Sebuyau, Samarahan, and Serian, western Sarawak. Despite many challenges faced, this research has been successful at different levels. There was no Tomistoma seen during day surveys (2014-2015) in tributary of Samarahan River (Samarahan), Bunga-Baki River (Serian), and Kepyang River (Ulu Sebuyau). However, the research team came across two incidents of Tomistoma captured by the local people: (i) an adult male Tomistoma, captured in February 2015 in peat swamp area of Samarahan River tributary, and (ii) a hatchling, caught in Bunga-Baki River in March 2015. The sightings of Tomistoma in Kepyang River were reported by local people in February 2016; however, no individual was captured. The presence of hatchling in Bunga-Baki River indicates that a breeding population is most likely to occur in the area, and this gives hope for future conservation of Tomistoma in Sarawak. All sampling sites recorded almost similar water quality parameters and landscape of peat swamp areas, which previous studies claimed to be the potential Tomistoma habitats. The findings of this study should help relevant state agencies to step up efforts related to conservation of Tomistoma in Sarawak.

1. Introduction

Tomistoma schlegelii is also known by English common name as Freshwater Malayan Gharial or False Gharial or Tomistoma or Sunda Gharial whereas its local name in Sarawak is “buaya jejulong.” This species is listed under International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List as vulnerable species [1] and listed under Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). In Peninsular Malaysia, it is protected under Wildlife Conservation Act 2010. It is also listed as a Protected Animal in the Sarawak Wild Life Protection Ordinance

(1998); hence, any hunting, killing, or selling of wild Tomistoma in the state is prohibited.

Literatures claimed that Tomistoma inhabits Indonesia, Malaysia, possibly Vietnam, and Thailand [2]. However, very limited information is known about Tomistoma in Sarawak. In previous literature, [3] reported that the status of its population in Sarawak is unclear. Other than that, [4] had produced a brief documentation on the existence of Tomistoma in Sarawak, in which it stated that this species can be found in Ensengai River and Keluh River. Meanwhile, [5] produced reports on status and conservation on Tomistoma in South-east Asia, but it reported very limited information regarding