



*Life from Headwaters to the Coast*

# **SAMUNSAM**

**Wilderness Rediscovered**

*Edited by*

**Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan,  
Abang Arabi Abang Aimran and Indraneil Das**



*Natural History  
Publications (Borneo)*

2022

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*Published by* *in cooperation with*

**UNIMAS Publisher**  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
94300 Kota Samarahan  
Sarawak, Malaysia.

**Sarawak Forestry Corporation**  
Lot 218, KCLD, Jalan Tapang  
Kota Sentosa  
93250 Kuching  
Sarawak, Malaysia.

and

**Natural History Publications (Borneo) Sdn. Bhd. (216807-X)**  
A913, 9th Floor, Wisma Merdeka Phase 1  
P.O. Box 15566, 88864 Kota Kinabalu  
Sabah, Malaysia.

Samunsam: Wilderness Rediscovered  
Mohd-Azlan Jayasilan, Abang Arabi Abang Aimran and Indraneil Das  
ISBN 978-967-2298-81-6  
First published 2022.

Front cover: Proboscis Monkey. Photo: Chien C. Lee.  
Half-title page: Examples of lowland rainforest trees.  
Photo: Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan.  
Frontispiece: Representations of canopy and emergent trees at Samunsam.  
Photo: Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan.

Printed in Taiwan

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Life from Headwaters to the Coast Samunsam : SAMUNSAM : Wilderness Rediscovered /  
Edited by Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan, Abang Arabi Abang Aimran and Indraneil Das  
ISBN 978-967-2298-81-6

1. Wildlife refuges—Malaysia—Sarawak. 2. Biodiversity—Malaysia—Sarawak. 3. Wildlife management areas—Malaysia—Sarawak. 4. Government Publication—Malaysia. I. Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan. II. Abang Arabi Abang Aimran. III. Indraneil Das. IV. Title.

639.90959522

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# FOREWORD

Malaysia's largest State, Sarawak, on the island of Borneo, is home to some of the world's richest biodiversity, including endemics, economically valuable species, as well as species of conservation importance. Some of the best examples of such plants and animals can be found in Sarawak's extensive network of protected areas. Many of us here in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak continue to explore Sarawak's biodiversity, with the hopes of generating critical knowledge at these sites. This book represents but a subset of work done by our academics in the realm of biodiversity research. I would like to commend the efforts by Sarawak Forestry Corporation Sdn. Bhd. who supported us in this task, by providing a research grant. The work is expected to be important for local communities, to aid them better understand, appreciate and perhaps use their resources sustainably, such as an interpretation tool to guide ecotourists and naturalists in Samunsam.



As will be evident to the readership, a variety of approaches have been taken by the authors of this volume. J. Mohd-Azlan, Lisa Lok and Indraneil Das provide the backdrop to the project, including introductory information on Samunsam. Siali and Tisen from SFC provides a brief account of the development of the site as a Wildlife Sanctuary. Subsequent chapters deal with the zoological components of the Sanctuary's biodiversity, including crabs (Jongkar Grinang), termites (Wan Nurainie Wan Ismail and colleagues), dragonflies and damselflies (Rory Dow), fishes (Fazimah Aziz and colleagues), amphibians and reptiles (Indraneil Das and his team), a separate chapter on the Painted Terrapin (James Bali), investigations on the bird diversity (Mohamad Fizl Sidq Ramji and colleagues); small mammal community (Faisal Ali and colleagues); a separate chapter focussed on the Proboscis Monkey (Ahmad Fitri Aziz and colleagues) and the larger mammals (Mohd-Azlan Jayasilan and his team). The book wraps up with chapters on related social elements, such as use of natural resources (Mohamad Suhaidi and his team), and finally, the ecotourism and entrepreneurial potential of Samunsam (Dayang Affizah).

It is my hope that this book will contribute in at least a small way of encouraging more people to work in the field, publish more articles of this

## FOREWORD

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kind and new sponsors would emerge to provide support. I anticipate that this volume will be useful to stakeholders to whom we remain connected through our common views on biodiversity conservation for future generations.

*Prof. Datuk Dr. Mohamad Kadim Suaidi*  
*Vice Chancellor*  
*Universiti Malaysia Sarawak*



# MESSAGE

The State of Sarawak boasts one of the most extensive networks of protected areas in Malaysia. The western tip of Sarawak is an important area for biodiversity conservation where iconic protected areas, such as Tanjung Datu National Park and Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary are located.

Biodiversity is one of the top State agendas, whereby the State of Sarawak, with the establishment of Sarawak Forestry Corporation (Park and Wildlife) is determined to conserve and protect its wildlife and natural landscapes. This project sits in line with the University's niche area of biodiversity and environmental conservation and sustainable community transformation. This book, based on research collections by the staff of our two institutes, brings together information on species, their habitats and other aspects of natural history, and the perceptions of the human community on conservation and sustainable use.

Identifying the distribution, densities and habitat use of animals in tropical rainforest are essential for understanding their ecology, and in facilitating management of our biodiversity-rich protected areas. This book attempts to enumerate these species, many of which remain undetected in the dense tropical rainforest. The faunal studies include inventories of crabs, termites, dragonflies and damselflies, fishes, frogs, reptiles, birds and mammals of the area, a critical first step towards understanding our natural heritage. The work also highlights how the local communities interact with biodiversity, and their deep dependence with such natural resources in Samunsam.

This book is written for local stakeholders, management authorities, naturalists, researchers and for the general public. An understanding of our biodiversity may influence the support of the complex needs of conservation in this ever-challenging environment. It is hoped that nature enthusiasts and those who are interested in tropical biodiversity will find this book beneficial.



## MESSAGE

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Acknowledgement is here made to the authors who have gathered these data, substantially increasing our knowledge and awareness of an important part of our national heritage.

***Prof. Dr. Wan Hashim Wan Ibrahim***  
*Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation)*  
*Universiti Malaysia Sarawak*

***Mr. Oswald Braken Tisen***  
*Deputy CEO*  
*Sarawak Forestry Corporation (Park and Wildlife)*



# PREFACE

The Expedition to Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary, located near the western tip of Sarawak State, approximately 100 km from Kuching city, was held over the years 2019–2020. It was undertaken by the staff and students of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, in collaboration with the Sarawak Forestry Corporation, the latter agency providing funding and on-the-ground support, besides joining forces in some of the field data collection.

The diversity of forest types (necessitating different sampling protocols) and eventually, the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, were major challenges on the ground, leading to reduced resources available for sampling. Despite these shortcomings, the multidisciplinary team from our two agencies could satisfactorily conduct what is essentially a rapid biodiversity survey, and bring the results out for our stakeholders in time.

Promotion of protected areas as tourist attraction and for research activities has been high on the State's agenda, being seen as an important driver of socioeconomic growth. It can also help governmental agencies such as ours remain engaged with the public for conservation, network with researchers locally and globally and incorporate new knowledge into conservation management plans.

The project was funded by Sarawak Forestry Corporation (GL/F07/SAMUNSAM/2019). We are especially thankful to Paschal Dagang and Taha Wahap for their assistance in the project. We also extend our gratitude to the staff of Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary, namely, Mohamad Khalid B. Mohamad Zakeria, Mr. Japri and Mr. Shukur for their help. We would also like to thank Research, Innovation and Enterprise Centre, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Economics and Business, the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation and the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, UNIMAS for logistical and administrative support.

The following colleagues helped with reviews of manuscripts: Aaron M. Bauer, Henry Bernard, Kelvin Egay, Melvin Gumal, Jason Hon, David T. Jones, Kelvin K.P. Lim, Lo May Chiun, Suhaili bin Mokhtar, Peter K.L. Ng, Andrew Alek Tuen, Chan Kin Onn, Albert Orr, Pang Sing Tyan, Mustapha Abdul Rahman, Tan Heok Hui and Darren Yeo. We owe a special debt of gratitude to our friends and colleagues, Chien C. Lee, Research Associates of the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, UNIMAS, for providing images of species that we have used in this work.

## PREFACE

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Finally, we thank Chan Hin Ching for designing the page layout and Datuk Chan Chew Lun, Natural History Publications (Borneo) Sdn Bhd, and Sarawak Forestry Corporation and UNIMAS Publisher for arranging its publication.

If this guide contributes to the enhancement of knowledge and compel readers to think anew about conservation of this important protected area, and inspire local stakeholders to take pride in their biodiversity, we would consider the project a success.

*Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan  
Abang Arabi Abang Aimran  
Indraneil Das*





# INTRODUCTION

*Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan, Lisa Lok Choy Hong and Indraneil Das*

The State of Sarawak has one of the most established networks of protected areas within Malaysia, covering some of the most megadiverse rainforests of the world. Among the protected areas are a total of five wildlife sanctuaries that have been established since 1979, totalling 225,791.4 ha, or 1.8% of land area of the State. Wildlife Sanctuaries in Sarawak have been mainly gazetted to protect Endangered, Rare or Threatened Species (ERTs). Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary (Fig. 1), located near the western tip of Sarawak, was established to conserve the populations of the Proboscis Monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*). Gazetted in 1979, Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary covers an area of 61 km<sup>2</sup> and is located in Sematan District, approximately 100 km from Kuching city.

Unlike National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries in Sarawak are entirely off-limits to the public and entrance is only permitted by the Chief Wildlife Warden. Such measures are to reduce anthropogenic activities that have potential for adverse ecological effects, while enhancing protection to species of conservation importance.

Despite the sizeable coverage of this protected area, Samunsam faces fragmentation and isolation due to road construction, which may affect the persistence of species, especially those that are not tolerant to edge effects and other disturbance. Thus, understanding how species occur and where they are distributed within the protected area is essential for thwarting potential threats and specify conservation strategies that will assist in decision making process for the management of Samunsam.

Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary boasts a variety of forest types- mangroves, nipah, kerangas, riverine and mixed dipterocarp forests (Fig. 2). The mangrove forests line the lower reaches of the Samunsam River, where it forms a broad band near the mouth of the river, and gradually tapers out upstream, terminates around six kilometres upriver. Mangrove plant species, such as *Avicennia* and *Sonneratia* are located near the river mouth, while *Rhizophora* extend 1–3 km from the river mouth, and *Bruguiera* spp and Nipah palms (*Nypa fruticans*) form strands further upriver. The Nipah forest extends at about 4–6 km from the river mouth. Along the upper and middle reaches of the Samunsam River and its tributaries, belts of riverine forest are formed, averaging under 1 km wide. The riverine forest is dominated by trees of the genera *Hopea*, *Knemam*,

# INTRODUCTION

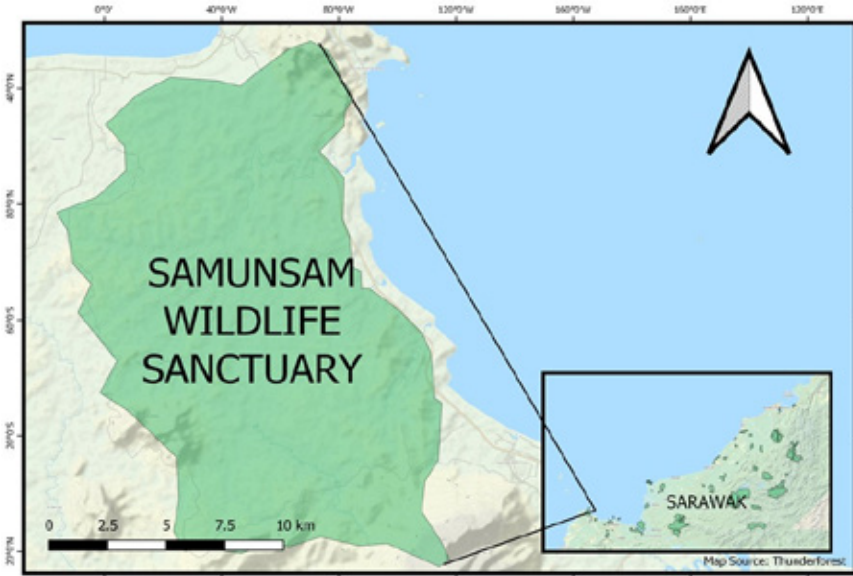


Fig. 1. Map of Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary. Inset, map of Sarawak, showing location of Samunsam.

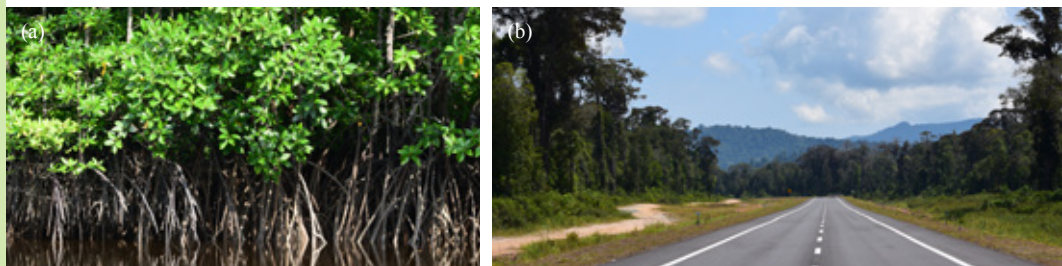


Fig. 2. Map showing the five major vegetation types recorded in SWS (source: Aziz, 2019).

## INTRODUCTION



**Fig. 3.** (a) Aerial view of Sungei Samunsam, showing pristine mangrove habitats; (b) Some of the best examples of Bornean tree flora can be found in protected areas of Sarawak, such as the mangroves of Samunsam.



**Fig. 4.** (a) Mangrove habitats in Samunsam offer breeding habitats for many species; (b) Recent road access has the potential to improve socioeconomic growth, as well as promote ecotourism.

*Sterculia*, *Shorea* and *Syzygium*. The forest features a dense undergrowth and abundant with rattans. The Kerangas forest is the most common forest type in Samunsam and is dominated by genera such as *Gymnostoma*, *Whiteodendron*, *Tristaniopis*, *Vatica* and *Shorea*. Rattan and a dense undergrowth are also common in this forest type, while pitcher plants can be observed in the more open areas. Mixed dipterocarp forests are largely confined to the hills in the north-eastern part of the Sanctuary and on patches of elevated, well-drained terrain elsewhere. Mixed dipterocarp forests have rich flora with tall trees, such as members from *Dipterocarpus*, *Shorea*, *Alstonia*, *Artocarpus*, *Gluta* and *Xanthophyllum*. The understory has climbing and non-climbing palm genera such as *Licuala*, *Caryota* and *Calamus* (Hazebroek and Abang, 2000).

Promoting protected areas as tourist attraction can improve socioeconomic growth as well as engage the public for conservation and maintenance. Local communities can play an essential role in assisting the authorities in detecting changes in the environment and managing the natural resources through traditional ecological knowledge. Therefore the synergy between empirical research and traditional knowledge should be regarded as a cornerstone for biodiversity conservation in the Samunsam area. This modest compilation provides new information on wildlife and species of conservation importance, evidence of ecotourism potential and the response of local communities for future management decisions in the Samunsam area.

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