



Life from Headwaters to the Coast

SAMUNSAM

Wilderness Rediscovered

Edited by

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



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CONTENTS

Foreword	vii	Painted Terrapins.....	57
by Prof. Datuk Dr. Mohamad Kadim Suaidi		by James Bali	
Message	ix	Birds.....	63
by Prof. Dr. Wan Hashim Wan Ibrahim and Oswald Braken Tisen		by Mohamad Fizl Sidq Ramji, Ng Wen Teng, Hilda Jelembei Neilson Ilan, Standley Bawin Bunsu, Isa Sait, Rahah Mohamad Yakup and Nur Nadhirah Izzaty Selamat	
Preface	xi	Small Mammals	83
by Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan, Abang Aimran Arabi and Indraneil Das		by Faisal Ali Anwarali Khan, Julius William Dee, Muhd Amsyari Morni, Nurul Farah Diyana Ahmad Tahir, Sultana Parvin Habeebur Rahman, Qhairil Shyamri Rosli, Norfarhana Mazlan, Roberta Chaya Tawie Tingga, Mohd Ridwan Abd Rahman and Isham Azhar	
Introduction	1	Large Mammals	91
by Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan, Lisa Lok Choy Hong and Indraneil Das		by Jayasilan Mohd Azlan, Sally Soo Kaicheen, Tan Dick Shen, Nurfazlin Shahira binti Mohd Fauzi, Marius Joscha Maiwald, Trevor Allen Nyaseng and Lisa Lok Choy Hong	
History.....	5	Proboscis Monkeys.....	101
by Siali Aban and Oswald Braken Tisen		by Ahmad Fitri Aziz, Lisa Lok Choy Hong and Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan	
Crabs	9	Natural Resource Uses.....	107
by Jongkar Grinang		by Mohamad Suhaidi Salleh, Neilson Ilan Mersat, Kamsiah Ali, Farah Zaini, Haslina Hashim and Regina Garai	
Termites	21	Ecotourism	111
by Wan Nurainie Wan Ismail, Ratnawati Hazali, Norsyarizan Jamil and Siti Shamimi Abidin		by Dayang Affizzah binti Awang Marikan	
Dragonflies and Damselflies	25	List of Contributors.....	117
by Rory Dow			
Fishes	35		
by Fazimah Aziz, Anisa Grace Robert Galang, Nurhanis Hafizah Hanafiah, Radin Azreena Radin Shahrom, Jacqleen Mik and Mohd. Asyaraf Sulaiman			
Amphibians and Reptiles	45		
by Indraneil Das, Wong Jye Wen, Veronica Martin, Veronica Leah, Awang Khairul Ikhwan and Izneil Nashriq			

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

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

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

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 km² 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

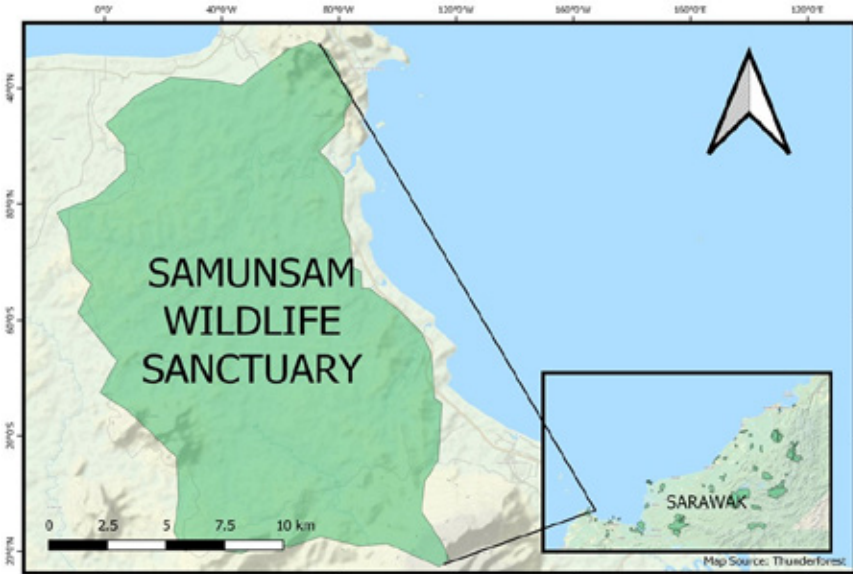


Fig. 1. Map of Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary. Inset, map of Sarawak, showing location of Samunsam.



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.

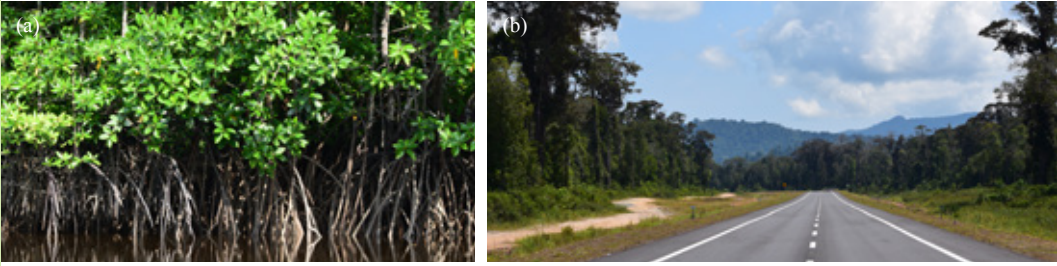


Fig. 4. (a) Mangrove habitats in Samunsam offer breeding habitats for many species; (b) Recent road access has the potential to improve socioeconomic growth, as well as promote ecotourism.

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*, *Tristaniopsis*, *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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HISTORY

Siali Aban and Oswald Braken Tisen

Samunsam (Fig. 1) was gazetted as a Wildlife Sanctuary on 1 July 1978. Initially, the Sanctuary comprised the northernmost regions of the Gunung Pueh Forest Reserve, and cover an area ca. 6,092 hectares on both sides of Sungei Samunsam, the western boundary meeting the international border with Kalimantan, Indonesia and extended eastward towards around two kilometres from the sea coast. Over two decades later, on 29 May 2000, the Sanctuary was officially extended as Samunsam Wild Life Sanctuary Extension I, with an additional area of around 16,706 hectares. This covers the entire watershed of the Gunung Pueh Forest Reserve that adjoins Gunung Pueh National Park, and was gazetted on 15 January 2015, covering a total of 5,831 hectares. With a total area of 22,798 hectares and inclusive of Gunung Pueh National Park, the Protected Area is currently about 23,629 hectares, following the Pueh Range, to ensure the effective conservation of the watershed of Sungei Samunsam. This initiative is to support the survival of the Proboscis monkeys (*Nasalis larvatus*) in the State, the primary reason for the establishment of Samunsam. Other totally protected species that have benefitted include the Black banded langur (*Presbytis melalophos chrysomelas*), Silvered langur (*Presbytis cristata*) and the Bornean gibbon (*Hylobates abbotti*). The area also provides an excellent habitat for many of Borneo's hornbill species, including the Rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*), Sarawak's state bird, and other avian species, such as the Black-napped tern (*Sterna sumatrana*), the White-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and the Argus pheasant (*Argusianus argus*).

The coastal area of Samunsam is a favoured landing zone for the Painted terrapin (*Batagur borneoensis*) and Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and Sungei Samunsam provides habitat for the Saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*).

The extended area of Samunsam has undergone several commercial logging activities that have led to the development of secondary forest gaps. These are recovering slowly after being gazetted as a protected area, and are now attracting species such as the Bearded Pig (*Sus barbatus*) and Barking deer (*Muntiacus* spp.).

Originally, the forest immediately adjacent to the coast, the upper region of Samunsam River, its tributaries and water catchment area were not included in

HISTORY

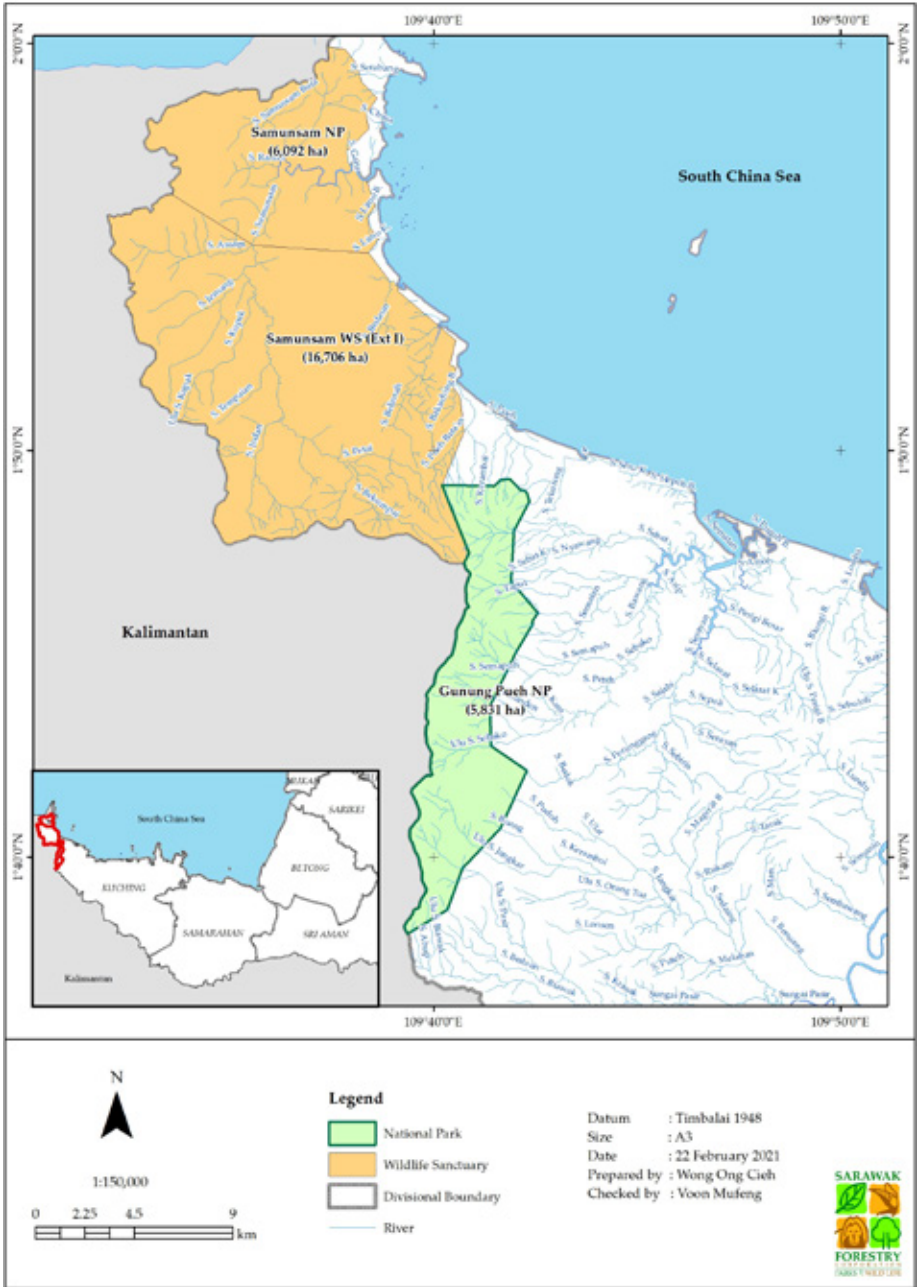


Fig. 1. Locality map of Samunsam and Extension I, with Gunung Pueh.

the Sanctuary. Comprehensive protection of these areas and their biodiversity is incomplete unless the entire watershed, including the rest of Gunung Pueh Forest Reserve, is protected. The logged-over extension area protects the watershed and reduces pollution and siltation, which would otherwise threaten the rest of the area downstream and the surrounding beaches of Tanjung Datu, Telok Melano, Telok Serabang, as far as the town of Sematan. It is also vital to the future of Samunsam as a Wildlife Sanctuary that fulfils a fundamental role of sustaining the protection of the biodiversity as a whole. Part of the extended area serves as a buffer to regulate and administer the rights and privileges of local communities to collect minor forest produce within prescribed areas at Telok Melano, Telok Serabang, Kampung Pueh and Kampung Bedaun. These people are currently given such rights and the entry of others and generally all other rights would be prohibited in the buffer zone.

Current demands under rural development initiatives, in connecting the coastal villages with road network throughout the State, resulted in Samunsam Wild Life Sanctuary being fragmented by the construction of the new Pan-Borneo Highway at the coastal part, ending up at Kampung Telok Melano, being the last fishing village situated at the western-tip of Sarawak. The Highway was officially opened to the public on 26 January 2019.

This new rural development project has triggered a new approach to manage the Sanctuary, so as to balance efforts in protecting and conserving the habitats in tandem with the fast growing rural transformation needs by initiating and promoting local communities engagement. The setting of this Sanctuary, with the tranquillity of sea beaches and majestic mountains and forests offers a tourism attraction like few others. Samunsam, being sandwiched by two national parks, Tanjung Datu and Gunung Pueh, is now ready to support the tourism industry of the State. It is being proposed that parts of the Sanctuary be converted into a National Park, so as to provide opportunities that can be tapped by tourism players in creating spin-off economic and tourism industry welfare and bring benefit to the local communities living within the Lundu and Sematan districts.



Mangrove vegetation at Samunsam intergrading with Nipah forests.
Photo: Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan.

NATURAL RESOURCE USES

Mohamad Suhaidi Salleh, Neilson Ilan Mersat, Kamsiah Ali, Farah Zaini, Haslina Hashim and Regina Garai

Samunsam is Sarawak's oldest Wildlife Sanctuary and one of several Important Bird Areas in the State. The site, which was gazetted in 1979, covers an area of about 6,090 ha, and stretches from the border with Kalimantan, Indonesia, to within two kilometres from the coast. In line with State development plan, a number of areas near the Sanctuary have been identified as of economic importance. This has resulted in the construction of a road network that has transformed this once isolated area to an easy place to access. Therefore, the Samunsam area is likely to see significant impacts in the near future. Due to market expansions, national parks and nature reserves have become areas of interest and have vast potential for ecotourism. Areas adjacent to Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary are dominated by villages, orchards and plantations, where most livelihoods currently depend. In view of this, a community's perspective is crucial in decision-making within future development projects in the area. This chapter explores socio-economic impacts and opportunities in and around Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary. Demographics and the dependency on the natural resources by the local community were investigated based on in-depth interview and focus group discussions.



Fig. 1. The starting point of the Pan Borneo Highway at Kampung Telok Melano. Photo: Wong Jye Wen.



Fig. 2. One of several homestays at Kampung Telok Melano, located next to the beach. Photo: Wong Jye Wen.

Telok Melano and Telok Serabang are two villages located at the western end of Sarawak, not far from Tanjung Datu National Park and Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary. They are also close to the Indonesian border, and some community members are related through blood ties.

Historically, Telok Melano is believed to be a place for traders who sailed to seek shelter during the rainy season or from rough seas, especially those who sailed from Sambas and Pontianak to Santubong. Santubong, at the time, was an international port for travelers. As a result, the settlement became a stopover point and permanent settlements arose, and the villages are believed to be in existence for the past 200 years, the current residents being third generation since the establishment of these villages. Many were recorded to have stayed more than 21 years. About 6.9% of the respondents have stayed over 61 years. The age group 46–55 formed the majority (30.4%), while 15–25 (14.7%) formed the smallest.

Telok refers to ‘bay’ and ‘Melano’ is based on the combination ‘mela’ short for ‘Melayu’ – literally translate to ‘Malay’. ‘No’ is the name of a tree that grows around the village.

Telok Serabang or Telok Sabang was believed to have been established in the early 19th century by migrants from Santubong and Latuna Island (also known as Ranai or Dumaran). Telok Serabang, was believed to be more populated compared to Telok Melano, as many inhabitants have emigrated.



Fig. 3. Tourists on the beach at Kampung Telok Melano. Photo: Awang Ikhwan Khairul.

When the political confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia took place in 1965, many residents of Telok Serabang moved to Sematan. Eventually, they settled there as the place provides greater economic opportunities.

The population of Telok Melano is currently 305 as of 2018. In 2000, there were only 60 houses in Telok Melano, and the number almost doubled, to 103 houses by 2019. The population of Telok Serabang is less, with 100 residents living in 40 houses, with some houses uninhabited, their owners having moved to urban areas. Some of these houses have been turned into homestays. On average, a single house is inhabited by between 5 to 6 persons.

Most residents in these areas are self-employed. The three major subsets of self-remuneration activities are related to land economic activity (farmers and gardeners); marine activities (fishing and boat service) and as tourism-related operators (homestays and food stalls). Among farmers, sources of income includes oil palm, rubber and pepper. Most of the respondents are farmers by trade (43.1%), while the second largest group are business-owners (18.6%). An estimated 5.9% of the respondents did not have a job. Prior to the construction of the Pan-Borneo Highway, some boat owners changed their job from boat operator to land transport provider. Some boat operators provide services for tourists traveling to Tanjung Datu National Park. The third economic sector is small business and catering service-related activities.

Public amenities, such as continuous supply of water and electricity, are

available in these villages. The area also has elementary and primary school, SK Telok Melano. Students who have completed primary school will continue to secondary schools in Sematan or Lundu. Most of the local community had primary education (30.4%), and followed by tertiary education (29.4%). About 9.8% of the community sampled did not have any kind of formal education.

A majority of respondents (89.2%) reported that they are not dependent on natural resources from the Samunsam area. The residual 10.8% disclosed that they utilize resources in Samunsam for consumption. Most of the product taken from the area are plant-related. Approximately 84.3% believed that the protected areas near their villages are important to them. Imprecise but close to 70.6% and 71% argued that the Wildlife Sanctuary is significant in the context of its role in economic opportunities and as means for income generation, respectively. The latter refers to its role as a source for natural resources locally. On the other hand, several respondents do not believe that the Sanctuary is an asset to the local communities in the area. However, 22.5% of the respondents believed that the Sanctuary can be an asset in terms of attracting people to visit.

Once the development project have rooted, a shift in the current economic activities can be expected. Therefore, training, skills and education are crucial in regards to alternative livelihood strategies for the local communities.



Fig. 4. Fishing boats off the beach at Kampung Telok Melano. Photo: Awang Ikhwan Khairul.



During moonless nights, the clear skies of Samunsam provides opportunities for skygazers. Photo: Badiozaman bin Sulaiman.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Siali Aban

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

Dayang Affizzah binti Awang Marikan

Faculty of Economics and Business,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300
Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Faisal Ali Anwarali Khan

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia
Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, Malaysia.

Kamsiah Ali

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300
Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Abang Arabi Abang Aimran

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

Isham Azhar

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia
Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, Malaysia.

Ahmad Fitri Aziz

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia
Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, Malaysia.

Fazimah Aziz

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia
Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, Malaysia.

James Bali

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

Standley Bawin Bunsi

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia
Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, Malaysia.

Indraneil Das

Institute of Biodiversity and
Environmental Conservation, Universiti
Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota
Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Julius William Dee

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia
Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan,
Sarawak, Malaysia.

Rory A. Dow**Regina Garai**

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota
Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Jongkar Grinang

Institute of Biodiversity and
Environmental Conservation, Universiti
Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota
Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Anisa Grace Robert Gulang

Faculty of Resource Science and
Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak,
Malaysia.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Nurhanis Hafizah Hanafiah

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Haslina Hashim

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Lisa Lok Choy Hong

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Awang Ikhwan

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Hilda Jelembai Neilson Ilan

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Sally Soo Kaicheen

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Veronica Leah

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Chien C. Lee

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Marius Joscha Maiwald

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Veronica Martin

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Norfarhana Mazlan

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Neilson Ilan Mersat

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Jacqleen Mik

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Jayasilan Mohd-Azlan

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Muhd. Amsyari Morni

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Izneil Nashriq

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Ng Wen Teng

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Norsyarizan Jamil

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Wan Nurainie Wan Ismail

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Trevor Allen Nyaseng

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Mohd. Ridwan Abd. Rahman

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Sultana Parvin Habeebur Rahman

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Ratnawati Hazali

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Qhairil Shyamri Rosli

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Isa Sait

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Nur Nadhirah Izzaty Selamat

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Radin Azreena Radin Shahrom

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Tan Dick Shen

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Mohammad Fizl Sidq Ramji

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Mohamad Suhaidi Salleh

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Nurfazlin Shahira binti Mohd Fauzi

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Siti Shamimi Abidin

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Mohd. Asaraf Sulaiman

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Nurul Farah Diyana Ahmad Tahir

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Roberta Chaya Tawie Tingga

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Wong Jye Wen

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Rahah Mohamad binti Yakup

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Farah Zaini

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

