

Biodiversity & Conservation in Plantations 2010

The workshop on biodiversity and conservation in plantations recently held in Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia saw plantations owners and environmental specialists engaging in a discussion on steps towards sustainability. DAVE BAKEWELL gives us the insights of the workshop.

Two horses, tethered together, facing opposite directions, are straining to reach two piles of hay at either end of the picture, both of which are just out of reach. Suddenly, a flash of inspiration occurs. One horse turns around and joins the other to eat the hay on his side, and then both turn together to finish off the hay on the other side.

This was an illustration used in one of the presentations during the one-day workshop, organized by the Integrated Society of Planters (ISP) and the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC), and attended by an estimate of 100 planters and plantation conservation officers. The horses' dilemma aptly illustrates the 'Aha moment' when environmental organizations and plantation companies realized that they could achieve much more by pooling their resources than by working against each other.



The illustration was also a symbolic representation of what happened at the workshop, with presentations from diverse stakeholders such as Sabah Wildlife Department, represented by Director Dr Laurentius Ambu, Sabah Forestry Department (Mr Jeflus S. Sinajin), Wild Asia (Dr Reza Azmi), PPB Oil Palms Berhad (Mr Simon Subarat) and KLK Berhad (Mr Sin Chuan Eng), each giving their own views on biodiversity and conservation issues.

Topics discussed included ways that plantation companies can work together with Forestry and Wildlife Departments, developing collaborations between plantation companies and environmental specialists, as well as some practical insights into some inspiring examples of conservation and biodiversity enhancement programmes already being implemented by some companies.

The highlight of the day's proceedings was the afternoon break-out session, when participants broke into groups to brainstorm ways in which plantation companies can be proactive in improving biodiversity and conservation in oil palm landscapes. It was heartening to hear several well-thought and innovative ideas coming from the various groups. One such idea was for different plantation owners to collaborate with one another and with other stakeholders and specialist groups such as universities, to develop integrated biodiversity management plans for



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entire ecosystems, such as the Lower Kinabatangan river basin. Other ideas included setting yield thresholds, whereby land that falls below these can be allowed to return to natural habitat; and setting aside known elephant migration routes in order to minimize wildlife-human conflict and to facilitate the movement of animals between sub-populations. Many of the ideas put forward are certainly worthy of further follow-ups, and it is to be hoped that biodiversity initiatives will arise from within the industry as a result of the workshop.

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Biodiversity for Busy Managers is an initiative by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council and Wild Asia to develop useful and practical resources for those on the front line of land development. The idea is to inform managers and planners about the key biodiversity issues that apply to oil palm plantation development, and provide practical know-how to mitigate negative impacts on biodiversity in plantations. For more information, visit: www.wildasia.org