

Project Update: December 2017

Population study of plantation rats

We have been continuing the extensive mark and recapture study of oil palm plantation rats within and outside the home range of our macaque focal group that we started in March 2017 (see first project update). We extended the trapping to four study plots and four control plots. All plots will be trapped at least twice throughout the year (March 2017 – March 2018). However, a prolonged and heavy rainy season (early October to now) with several typhoons hitting the region has led to flooding in our study area and many parts of the peninsula. Thus, we had to pause our trapping programme for several months.

The floods in Penang (where the university is located) was so severe in October and again in November 2017 that some people have lost their lives, other their homes and their belongings.

<http://www.straitstimes.com//asia/se-asia/seven-dead-in-worst-floods-to-hit-penang>

Roads from Penang to Perak, where the study site is located, were shut for several weeks and commuting was very difficult by that time.

<https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/25455/>

With the plantations at the study site being waterlogged and the difficulties in commuting, we had to pause the trapping programme since early October and have only resumed in December 2017. We are going to continue the trapping until all rounds are completed, tentatively in April 2018. Data will be analysed using GLMM once all data is collected to test whether pigtail macaques have an influence in diminishing plantation rat populations.



Public talks on pigtaails as possible pest control in oil palm

Since March 2017, I have given several public talks in different regions in Malaysia and also in Singapore, where I presented our project and educated the public about the importance of primates in the forest ecosystem in general, and the role of pigtaails in oil palm plantations in specific. The last talk I gave was at the annual meeting of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia, which was a 3-day symposium that gathered most members of our national wildlife research community. During this talk, I earned overwhelming feedback from local conservationists, scientists, and the oil palm lobby who were stunned to hear about pigtaails consuming large amounts of rats in oil palm plantations. I am currently building up formal collaborations and setting up more meetings based on this feedback.

List of events where I presented this project:

- "Wild Wildlife Talk Series" Malaysian Heritage and History Club, 18.03.2017, Kuala Lumpur.
- Asian Research Node Symposium, 29.03.2017, Penang.
- The Habitat Penang Hill Biodiversity Symposium, 15.04.2017, Penang.
- International Gibbon Day, Sunway University, 01.11.2017, Kuala Lumpur.
- 8th BioDiv Seminar, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, 22.11.2017 Kuala Lumpur.
- Jane Goodall Institute Lecture Series, 25.11.2017, Singapore.



Stakeholder meetings

I have had a fruitful meeting with the Senior Executive of Sime Darby's Sustainability Unit, one of Malaysia's biggest private oil palm companies in November. Together with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia we will organise a biodiversity training for their staff in February 2018. This training will be conducted in several of their plantations across the peninsular that face problems with primates.

I have also talked to few more representatives of the Malaysian Palm Oil Council who are equally interested in the project and I will initiate a formal meeting before February 2018.

Although we have had some setbacks and delays that were beyond our control, we are happy to have created a wide public interest in the project that ultimately benefits the conservation efforts for this species in the wild. More hard work needs to be done to finish our set goals by March but we are confident in achieving them.

