

Large Mammals

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Large mammals are often thought of as being conspicuous species. However, in tropical rainforests, they are difficult to observe because they are shy and avoid encounters with humans. Large mammals play important role in the food chain by regulating prey population and performing important task of dispersing tropical seeds. Most large mammal species are at the apex of the food chain or as important keystone species whose presence ensures ecosystem health. With the current rate of forest degeneration and deforestation, the absence of these species may have a top-down cascading effect which in turn may reduce the productivity of the forest ecosystem. Habitat destruction and persecution of large mammals, including carnivores, outside the protected reserves restricts populations to isolated national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

Borneo has more species of endemic large mammals than most of other islands in the world. Nonetheless, over 50% of Borneo's large mammal species are included in the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Additionally many of these species are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Appendices I and II, and receive full protection within its range. However little is known on the basic biology of these cryptic species in the wild because of the scarcity, behaviour and complexity of its habitat association. In most cases the presence of large mammals are recorded through secondary signs such as tracks, calls and scrape marks as most of these animals tend to flee at the first sign of human presence. Some of the large mammals are arboreal or spend substantial time up in the canopy such as binturong and clouded leopard. In addition, the nocturnal behaviour of many large mammals (carnivores, porcupines and pangolin) also reduces the chances of human encounter by day. Here, we used infrared-sensored cameras to understand the distribution and ecology of some of the cryptic large mammals in Tanjung Datu National Park.

Opposite: Fig. 1 (above). A wild boar at a prawn. **Fig. 2** (below). A sambar deer caught off guard.