



Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation

**The Distribution and Ecology of Land Snails (Mollusca: Gastropoda) in
Limestone Habitats of Western Sarawak**

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The Distribution and Ecology of Land Snails (Mollusca: Gastropoda) in
Limestone Habitats of Western Sarawak

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the work is that of the author alone. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.



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ABSTRACT

Species inventories and ecological studies are fundamental tools for assessing the conservation of limestone-associated species such as land snails. Unfortunately, previous inventories of land snail species in the Bau-Serian limestone area lack a systematic checklist with corresponding illustrations for each species. This study aims to investigate the species composition of land snails in the Bau limestone hill clusters in Sarawak, to measure the estimated species richness and sampling effectiveness between live-caught snails and empty snail shells, and finally to investigate the relationships between land snail species and microhabitats. To fill this knowledge gap, systematic and random sampling for land snails were carried out at eight limestone outcrops. All specimens were sorted, identified to species level, and catalogued. Sampling effectiveness between live snails and empty snail shells was determined using cluster-scale completeness ratios for 135 plots. Species completeness analyses were conducted to extrapolate species richness and inventory for different spatial scales. Cluster analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between the species community and assemblages based on the presence, absence, and abundance data of 17 live-caught land snail species. Associations between land snail species and microhabitats sampled were described using the bipartite weighted network. A total of 122 land snail species, of which 18 are new to science, from 58 genera and 24 families, with photographs of each species. The inventory revealed high completeness of sampling for both empty shells and live-taken snails (> 90%) but species diversity is very low for live snails compared to empty snail shells at hill and cluster scales suggesting that some species may have expired locally. Cluster analysis showed that the land snails assemblages do not correspond to different microhabitats, but rather to locality. The limestone area in Bau has a very high degree of endemism due to the low dispersal ability of the land snails. The soil sample appears to have

very high species richness, but the species composition contains species from different niches and microhabitats. As the limestone hills in Sarawak are threatened by various habitat degradation activities, further inventories are needed to assess the species richness of land snails in limestone hill clusters to identify and conserve high-priority areas for snail conservation in Sarawak.

Keywords: Limestone forest, land snail, inventory, sampling effectiveness, ecology

Taburan dan Ekologi Siput Darat (Mollusca: Gastropoda) dalam Habitat Batu Kapur di Barat Sarawak

ABSTRAK

Inventori spesies dan kajian ekologi adalah alat asas untuk menilai pemuliharaan spesies yang berkaitan dengan batu kapur seperti siput darat. Malangnya, inventori sebelumnya spesies siput darat di kawasan batu kapur Bau-Serian tidak mempunyai senarai semak yang sistematik dengan ilustrasi yang sepadan untuk setiap spesies. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat komposisi spesies siput darat di gugusan bukit batu kapur Bau di Sarawak, untuk mengukur anggaran kekayaan spesies dan keberkesanan pensampelan antara siput yang ditangkap hidup dan cengkerang kosong, dan akhirnya untuk menyiasat hubungan antara spesies siput darat dan mikrohabitat. Bagi mengisi jurang pengetahuan ini, persampelan sistematik dan rawak bagi siput darat telah dijalankan di lapan singkapan batu kapur. Semua spesimen telah diisih, dikenal pasti kepada peringkat spesies dan dikatalogkan. Keberkesanan pensampelan antara siput hidup dan cengkerang kosong ditentukan menggunakan nisbah kesempurnaan skala kelompok untuk 135 petak. Analisis kesempurnaan spesies telah dijalankan untuk mengekstrapolasi kekayaan spesies dan inventori untuk skala spatial yang berbeza. Analisis kluster telah dijalankan untuk menentukan hubungan antara komuniti spesies dan himpunan berdasarkan data kehadiran, ketiadaan dan kelimpahan 17 spesies siput darat yang hidup. Hubungan antara spesies siput darat dan mikrohabitat diterangkan menggunakan rangkaian berwajaran dwipartit. Sebanyak 122 spesies siput darat direkod, di mana 18 adalah spesies baharu, daripada 58 genera dan 24 keluarga, dengan gambar bagi setiap spesies. Inventori menunjukkan kesempurnaan pensampelan yang tinggi untuk kedua-dua cengkerang kosong dan siput hidup (>90%) tetapi kepelbagaian spesies adalah sangat rendah untuk siput hidup

berbanding dengan cangkerang kosong di skala bukit dan kluster yang menunjukkan bahawa sesetengah spesies mungkin telah pupus di kawasan tersebut. Analisis kluster menunjukkan bahawa himpunan siput darat tidak sepadan dengan mikrohabitat yang berbeza, tetapi lebih kepada lokaliti. Kawasan batu kapur di Bau mempunyai tahap endemisme yang sangat tinggi kerana keupayaan penyebaran siput darat yang rendah. Sampel tanah kelihatan mempunyai kekayaan spesies yang sangat tinggi, tetapi komposisi siput mengandungi spesies daripada relung dan mikrohabitat yang berbeza. Memandangkan bukit batu kapur di Sarawak diancam oleh pelbagai aktiviti degradasi habitat, inventori selanjutnya diperlukan untuk menilai kekayaan spesies siput darat dalam gugusan bukit batu kapur untuk mengenal pasti dan memulihara kawasan keutamaan tinggi untuk pemuliharaan siput di Sarawak.

Kata kunci: *Hutan batu kapur, siput darat, inventori, keberkesanan pensampelan, ekologi*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Study Background	1
1.2 Problem Statement	3
1.3 Objectives	4
1.4 Chapter Summary	5
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Biodiversity in limestone hill	7
2.1.1 Bornean land snail's diversity	7
2.1.2 Flora and fauna endemism on limestone hill forest	10
2.2 Biogeography of Sarawak	11

2.3	Limestone hills of Borneo	12
2.4	Land snail ecological study in Borneo	13
CHAPTER 3 MATERIALS AND METHODS		17
3.1	Location of study	17
3.2	Microhabitats	19
3.3	Data Sampling	21
3.4	Data analysis	22
3.4.1	The land snail species composition in Bau, Sarawak	22
3.4.2	The species richness estimates and sampling effectiveness between live-taken snail versus empty shell	23
3.4.3	The associations between land snail species and microhabitats	24
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS		26
4.1	Land snail inventory in Bau limestone hills	26
4.1.1	Land snail taxa checklist from Bau limestone hill cluster	27
4.2	The species richness estimates and sampling effectiveness: live-taken snail versus empty shell	156
4.3	The associations between land snail species and microhabitats	160
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION		166
5.1	Land snail species composition in Bau limestone hill clusters and implication to species conservation	166
5.1.1	Land snail species diversity and composition	166

5.1.2	Implication to species conservation and taxonomy	172
5.2	The species richness estimates and sampling effectiveness: live-taken snail versus empty shell	173
5.3	The associations between land snail species and microhabitats	175
	CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	178
6.1	Conclusions	178
6.2	Recommendations	178
	REFERENCES	180
	APPENDICES	207

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 3.1 The sampling locations in this study; A. Map of Malaysian Borneo showing the Bau limestone hill cluster in Western Sarawak, and B. The eight (8) limestone hills sampled in and around Bau limestone hill cluster.	17
Figure 3.2 Subplots (2 m x 2 m, 4 m ²) that represent all the major microhabitats of land snail, A. near the limestone wall, B. around the small collapsed rock, C. around the tree, D. around the rotten log, and E. among small scrubs.	21
Figure 4.1 A. <i>Chamalycaeus specus</i> (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 9046 Gunung Kapor B. <i>Pincerna globosa</i> (H. Adams, 1870) ME 6979 Lobang Angin C. <i>Stomacosmethis hosei</i> (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 1010 Gunung Batu D. <i>Stomacosmethis sadongensis</i> (Smith, 1895) ME 8761 Gunung Kapor.	102
Figure 4.2 A. <i>Leprocochlias cingulatus textrinum</i> Vermeulen, Marzuki & Khalik, ms. ME 839 Gunung Batu B. <i>Cyclophorus perdis borneensis</i> (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8921 Gunung Doya C. <i>Ditropopsis everetti</i> (E. A. Smith, 1895) ME 835 Gunung Kapor.	103
Figure 4.3 A. <i>Japonia barbata</i> (L. Pfeiffer, 1855) ME 833 Kampung Bunga Rampai B. <i>Japonia barbata</i> (L. Pfeiffer, 1855) ME 2141 Lobang Angin. C. <i>Japonia bauensis</i> Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021, ME 7231 PARATYPE Gunung Kapor D. <i>Japonia bauensis</i> Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021, MZU.MOL.20.03 HOLOTYPE Gunung Doya	104
Figure 4.4 <i>Japonia bauensis</i> Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021, ME 7231 PARATYPE. Enlargement of the body whorl showing the shell sculpture.	105
Figure 4.5 A. <i>Japonia metcalfei</i> (Issel, 1874) ME 2916 Gunung Batu B. <i>Japonia mundyana</i> (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 0838 Gunung Batu C. <i>Japonia rabongensis</i> (E. A. Smith, 1895) ME 9080 Gunung Kapor D. <i>Leptopoma sericatum</i> (Pfeiffer, 1851) ME 5900 Gunung Stulang E. <i>Leptopoma undatum</i> (Metcalf, 1851) ME 2684 Gunung Batu.	106
Figure 4.6 A. <i>Opisthophorus biciliatus</i> (Mousson, 1849) ME 8754 Gunung Kapor B. <i>Opisthophorus birostris</i> (L. Pfeiffer, 1854) ME 8758 Gunung Kapor C. <i>Opisthophorus cavernae</i> (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 8904 Gunung Doya D. <i>Opisthophorus euryomphalus</i> (L. Pfeiffer, 1856) ME 8779 Gunung Kapor E. <i>Platyrhaphe linita</i> (Godwin-	

- Austen, 1889) ME 0881 Gunung Batu F. *Pterocyclos tenuilabiatatus* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 5910 Gunung Batu. 107
- Figure 4.7 A. *Diplommatina adversa* (H. Adams & A. Adams, 1851) ME 8799 Gunung Batu B. *Diplommatina busanensis* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 8991 Gunung Doya C. *Diplommatina concinna* H. Adams, 1872 ME 8745 Lobang Angin D. *Moussonia isseli* (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 2869 Gunung Batu. 108
- Figure 4.8 A. *Diplommatina maduana maduana* Laidlaw, 1949 ME 9030 Gunung Doya B. *Diplommatina onyx* Fulton, 1901 ME 9102 Gunung Doya C. *Diplommatina spinosa* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 8801 Gunung Batu D. *Diplommatina toretos* Vermeulen, 1993 ME 0536 Gunung Batu. 109
- Figure 4.9 A. *Opisthostoma ballorum* Vermeulen, 1991 ME 9002 Gunung Kapor B. *Opisthostoma brachyacrum brachyacrum* Thompson, 1978 ME 0353 Gunung Batu C. *Opisthostoma brachyacrum lambi* (Vermeulen, 1991) ME 9003 Gunung Kapor D. *Opisthostoma cryptodon* Vermeulen, 1991 ME 9084 Gunung Doya. 110
- Figure 4.10 A. *Opisthostoma planiapex* Vermeulen, 1991 ME 9250 Gunung Kapor B. *Opisthostoma simile* Vermeulen, 1991 ME 11471 Gunung Kapor C. *Opisthostoma tridens* Vermeulen, 1991 ME 0333 Gunung Kapor. 111
- Figure 4.11 A. *Plectostoma austeni* (E. A. Smith, 1894) ME 8734 Lobang Angin B. *Plectostoma everetti* (E. A. Smith, 1893) ME 8793 Gunung Batu C. *Plectostoma margarethanae* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021, MZU.MOL.20.06 PARATYPE Gunung Batu D. *Plectostoma wallacei busauense* (E. A. Smith, 1893) ME 9495 Gunung Doya E. *Plectostoma wallacei teinostoma* (Vermeulen, 1994) ME 8899 Gunung Doya F. *Plectostoma wallacei wallacei* Ancey, 1887 ME 5898 Gunung Stulang. 112
- Figure 4.12 *Plectostoma margarethanae* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021, A-C. MZU.MOL.20.05 HOLOTYPE. A. Basal view, B. Apertural view, C. Abapertural view, D-F. ME 0227, PARATYPES. D. Basal view, E-F. Apertural view. 113
- Figure 4.13 A. *Pupina doriae* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 8946 Gunung Doya B. *Pupina evansi* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 9053 Lobang Angin C. *Pupina hosei* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 1132 Gunung Batu D. *Rhaphaulus bombycinus* (L. Pfeiffer, 1855) ME 9556 Lobang Angin E *Rhaphaulus pfeifferi* (Issel, 1874) ME 8741 Lobang Angin. 114
- Figure 4.14 A. *Acmella bauensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021, MZU.MOL.20.01 HOLOTYPE Gunung Kapor B. *Acmella cyrtoglyphe* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 8960 Gunung Doya [not in natural colour, shell surface coated with platinum for

- examination under scanning electron microscope] *C. Acmeilla nana* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 8497 Gunung Kapor D. *Acmeilla ovoidea* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 2215 Gunung Batu E. *Anaglyphula sauroderma* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 6910 Gunung Doya F. *Solenomphala scalaris* (Heude, 1882) ME 8810 Gunung Batu. 115
- Figure 4.15 *Acmeilla bauensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.01 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Basal view, C. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, D. Enlargement of the body whorl showing the shell sculpture, E. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 116
- Figure 4.16 *Acmeilla bauensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-C. ME0002340 PARATYPE. A. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, B. Enlargement of the body whorl (abapertural side) showing the shell sculpture, C. Enlargement of the body whorl (apertural side) showing the shell sculpture. *Acmeilla nana* Vermeulen, Liew, & Schilthuizen, 2015. D-E. ME0009091 SPECIMEN. D. Apertural view, E. Enlargement of the body whorl (apertural side) showing the shell sculpture. 117
- Figure 4.17 A. *Georissa bauensis* Khalik, Hendricks, Vermeulen & Schilthuizen, 2018 ME 8731 Lobang Angin B. *Georissa everetti* E. A. Smith, 1895 ME 0906 Gunung Batu [not in natural colour, shell surface coated with platinum for examination under scanning electron microscope] C. *Georissa hosei* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 8498 Gunung Kapor D. *Georissa hungerfordi* Godwin-Austen, 1889, ME 11472 Gunung Kapor E. *Georissa leucococca* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 9496 Gunung Doya. 118
- Figure 4.18 A. *Elasmias sundanum* (Möllendorff, 1897) ME 8982 Lobang Angin B. *Lissachatina fulica* (Bowdich, 1822) ME 9241 Gunung Kapor. 119
- Figure 4.19 A. *Allopeas clavulinum* (Potiez & Michaud, 1838) ME 0753 Gunung Kapor B. *Allopeas gracile* (T. Hutton, 1834) ME 2942 Gunung Kapor C. *Opeas hannense* (Rang, 1831) ME 9096 Gunung Kapor D. *Paropeas achatinaceum* (L. Pfeiffer, 1846) ME 5977 Gunung Kapor. 120
- Figure 4.20 A. *Platycochlium sarawakense* Laidlaw, 1950 ME 8993 Gunung Doya B. *Gulella bicolor* (T. Hutton, 1834) ME 9095 Gunung Kapor C. *Succinea obesa* Martens, 1867 ME 2903 Gunung Batu. 121
- Figure 4.21 A. *Damayantia carinata* Collinge, 1901 ME 9054 Lobang Angin B. *Hemiplecta densa* (A. Adams & Reeve, 1850) ME 9241 Gunung Doya C. *Macrochlamys infans* (L. Pfeiffer, 1854) ME 2854 Gunung Batu D. *Macrochlamys sanctijohni* (Godwin-Austen, 1891) ME 9900 Gunung Kapor E. *Macrochlamys tersa* (Issel, 1874) ME 9620 Gunung Kapor F. *Vitrinula glutinosa* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8782 Gunung Kapor. 122

- Figure 4.22 A. *Microcystina arabii* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.06 HOLOTYPE Gunung Batu B. *Microcystina atoni* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.11 PARATYPE Gunung Batu C. *Microcystina kilat* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.19 PARATYPE Gunung Batu D. *Microcystina lirata* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.15 PARATYPE Gunung Kapor. 123
- Figure 4.23 *Microcystina arabii* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.07 PARATYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the body whorl showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 124
- Figure 4.24 *Microcystina atoni* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.10 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 125
- Figure 4.25 *Microcystina kilat* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.18 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the body whorl showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 126
- Figure 4.26 *Microcystina lirata* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.14 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the body whorl showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 127
- Figure 4.27 A. *Microcystina oswaldrakeni* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.17 PARATYPE Gunung Batu B. *Microcystina paripari* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 ME 1746 PARATYPE Gunung Batu C. *Microcystina physotrochus* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 9072 Gunung Kapor D. *Microcystina seclusa* Godwin-Austen, 1891 ME 8153 Gunung Kapor. 128
- Figure 4.28 *Microcystina oswaldrakeni* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.16 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 129
- Figure 4.29 *Microcystina paripari* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.12 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E.

- Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 130
- Figure 4.30 A. *Bradybaena similaris* (Férussac, 1821) ME 4906 Gunung Batu B. *Chloritis tomentosa* (L. Pfeiffer, 1854) ME 8917 Gunung Doya C. *Landouria winteriana* (L. Pfeiffer, 1842) ME 8078 Gunung Kapor D. *Ganesella acris* (Benson, 1859) ME 8963 Gunung Kapor E. *Amphidromus angulatus* Fulton, 1896 ME 4632 Gunung Kapor F. *Amphidromus epidemiae* Wang, 2021 ME 8756 Gunung Kapor. 131
- Figure 4.31 A. *Kaliella barrakporensis* (L. Pfeiffer, 1852) ME 9009 Gunung Kapor B. *Kaliella busauensis* (E. A. Smith, 1895) ME 1892 Gunung C. *Kaliella calculosa* (Gould, 1852) ME 1863 Gunung Kapor D. *Kaliella doliolum* (L. Pfeiffer, 1846) ME 9074 Gunung Kapor. 132
- Figure 4.32 A. *Kaliella microconus* (Mousson, 1865) ME 1855 Gunung Batu B. *Kaliella micula* (Mousson, 1857) ME 9650 Gunung Kapor C. *Kaliella platyconus* (Möllendorff, 1897) ME 8814 Gunung Batu D. *Kaliella scandens* (Cox, 1871) ME 1928 Gunung Kapor. 133
- Figure 4.33 A. *Beilania philippinensis* (C. Semper, 1874) ME 10290 Gunung Batu B. *Philalanka jambusanensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 ME 1879 PARATYPE Gunung Batu C. *Philalanka kusana* (Aldrich, 1889) ME 5897 Gunung Batu D. *Philalanka moluensis* (Smith, 1893) ME 0443 Gunung Doya [not in natural colour, shell surface coated with platinum for examination under scanning electron microscope]. 134
- Figure 4.34 *Philalanka jambusanensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-E. MZU.MOL.20.20 HOLOTYPE. A. Apical view, B. Basal view, C. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, D. Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, E. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 135
- Figure 4.35 A. *Paralaoma angusta* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 9641 Gunung Kapor B. *Paralaoma sarawakensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 ME 2269 PARATYPE Gunung Doya C. *Sundacharopa argos* Vermeulen & Liew, 2022 ME 8593 Gunung Doya. 136
- Figure 4.36 *Paralaoma angusta* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015. A-F. ME 1763. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the body whorl showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 137
- Figure 4.37 *Paralaoma sarawakensis* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.21 HOLOTYPE. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E.

- Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 138
- Figure 4.38 *Sundacharopa argos* Vermeulen & Liew, 2022. A-F. MZU.MOL.20.08. A. Apertural view, B. Apical view, C. Basal view, D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 139
- Figure 4.39 A. *Dyakia busanensis* Godwin-Austen, 1891 ME 9015 Gunung Doya B. *Dyakia subdebilis* E. A. Smith, 1895 ME 1602 Gunung Kapor C. *Rhinocochlis nasuta* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8740 Lobang Angin D. *Elaphroconcha striata* (Gray, 1834) ME 8792 Gunung Kapor. 140
- Figure 4.40 A. *Everettia cutteri* (H. Adams, 1870) ME 8968 Gunung Doya Kapor B. *Everettia microrhytida* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.25 HOLOTYPE Gunung Batu C. *Everettia minuta* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.23 HOLOTYPE Gunung. 141
- Figure 4.41 *Everettia* spp. A-C. *Everettia minuta* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.24 PARATYPE. A. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, B. Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, C. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. D-F. *Everettia microrhytida* Marzuki, Liew & Mohd-Azlan, 2021 MZU.MOL.20.26 PARATYPE. D. Enlargement of the apical side showing the apex, E. Enlargement of the teleoconch showing the shell sculpture, F. Enlargement of the basal side of the shell. 142
- Figure 4.42 A. *Geotrochus conicoides* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8911 Gunung Doya B. *Geotrochus subscalaris* Vermeulen, Liew & Schilthuizen, 2015 ME 1636 Gunung Kapor C. *Videna bicolor* (Martens, 1864) ME 8732 Lobang Angin D. *Videna nepiadelphos* Vermeulen & Liew, 2022 ME 8972 Gunung Kapor E. *Exrhysota brookei* (A. Adams & Reeve, 1848) ME 8790 Gunung Kapor. 143
- Figure 4.43 A. *Helicarion dyakanum* (Godwin-Austen, 1891) ME 8770 Gunung Kapor B. *Rahula raricostulata* (E. A. Smith, 1893) ME 8938 Lobang Angin C. *Phaedusa borneensis* (Pfeiffer, 1854) ME 8784 Gunung Kapor. 144
- Figure 4.44 A. *Ptychopatula dioscoricola* (C. B. Adams, 1845) ME 9070 Gunung Kapor B. *Ptychopatula orcella* (Stoliczka, 1873) ME 8925 Gunung Doya D. *Pupisoma moleculina* (van Benthem-Jutting, 1940) ME 9051 Gunung Kapor C. *Pupisoma pulvisculum* (Issel, 1874) ME 9055 Gunung Kapor E. *Boysidia salpinx* F. G. Thompson & Dance, 1983 ME 8781 Gunung Kapor. 145

- Figure 4.45 Living snails from Bau. A. *Japonia barbata* (L. Pfeiffer, 1855) ME 8768 Gunung Kapor B. *Opisthophorus euryomphalus* (L. Pfeiffer, 1856) ME 8779 Gunung Kapor C. *Opisthophorus biciliatus* Mousson, 1849 ME 8754 Gunung Kapor D. *Opisthophorus birostris* (L. Pfeiffer, 1854) ME 8755 Gunung Kapor. All not to scale. 146
- Figure 4.46 Living snails from Bau. A. *Cyclophorus perdix borneensis* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8753 Gunung Kapor B. *Platyrhappe linita* (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 9700 Gunung Doya C. *Stomacosmethis sadongensis* (E. A. Smith, 1895) ME 8761 Gunung Kapor D. *Pincerna globosa* (H. Adams, 1870) ME 8749 Lobang Angin. All not to scale. 147
- Figure 4.47 Living snails from Bau. A. *Chamalycaeus specus* (Godwin-Austen, 1889) ME 11867 Lobang Angin B. *Plectostoma wallacei wallacei* Ancy, 1887 ME 8767 Gunung Kapor C. *Plectostoma austeni* (E. A. Smith, 1894) ME 8794 Gunung Batu D. *Plectostoma everetti* (E. A. Smith, 1893) ME 8793 Gunung Batu. All not to scale. 148
- Figure 4.48 Living snails from Bau. A. *Diplommatina adversa* (H. Adams & A. Adams, 1851) ME 8766 Gunung Kapor B. *Diplommatina concinna* H. Adams, 1872 ME 9137 Gunung Kapor C. *Diplommatina spinosa* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 8801 Gunung Batu D. *Pupina evansi* Godwin-Austen, 1889 ME 9053 Lobang Angin. All not to scale. 149
- Figure 4.49 Living snails from Bau. A. *Georissa bauensis* Khalik, Hendricks, Vermeulen & Schilthuizen, 2018 ME 8731 Lobang Angin B. *Boysidia salpinx* Thompson & Dance, 1983 ME 8781 Gunung Kapor C. *Phaedusa borneensis* (L. Pfeiffer, 1854) ME 8784 Gunung Kapor D. *Valiguna flava* (Heynemann, 1885) Uncat. Gunung Kapor. All not to scale. 150
- Figure 4.50 Living snails from Bau. A. *Damayantia carinata* Collinge, 1901 Uncat. Gunung Kapor B. *Macrochlamys tersa* (Issel, 1874) ME 8966 Gunung Kapor C. *Hemiplecta densa* (A. Adams & Reeve, 1850) ME 4724 Gunung Kapor D. *Vitrinula glutinosa* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8750 Lobang Angin. All not to scale. 151
- Figure 4.51 Living snails from Bau. A. *Videna nepiadelphos* Vermeulen & Liew, 2022 ME 8984 Lobang Angin B. *Videna bicolor* (Martens, 1864) ME 8732 Lobang Angin C. *Kaliella barrakporensis* (L. Pfeiffer, 1852) ME 9026 Gunung Kapor D. *Helicarion dyakanum* (Godwin-Austen, 1891) ME 8969 Gunung Kapor. All not to scale. 152
- Figure 4.52 Living snails from Bau. A. *Amphidromus epidemiae* Wang, 2021 ME 8756 Gunung Kapor B. *Ganesella acris* (Benson, 1859) ME 8977 Lobang Angin C. *Rhinocochlis nasuta* (Metcalf, 1851) ME 8885 Lobang Angin. All not to scale. 153

- Figure 4.53 Living snails from Bau. A. *Paropeas achatinaceum* (L. Pfeiffer, 1846) ME 8785 Gunung Kapor B. *Allopeas gracile* (T. Hutton, 1834) ME 2942 Gunung Kapor. All not to scale. 154
- Figure 4.54 A. Estimated species richness according to sample coverage using live-taken snail; B. Estimated species richness according to sample coverage using empty shell. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals, and dashed lines represent extrapolated data. 155
- Figure 4.55 A. Species richness estimates for a rarefied and extrapolated sample with respect to the number of sampling units using live-taken snail; B. Species richness estimates for a rarefied and extrapolated sample with respect to the number of sampling units using empty shell. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals, and dashed lines represent extrapolated data. 156
- Figure 4.56 A. Comparison between live-taken snail versus empty shell on estimated species richness according to sample coverage in Bau limestone hill cluster. B. Comparison between live-taken snail versus empty shell on species richness estimates for a rarefied and extrapolated sample with respect to the number of sampling units in Bau limestone hill cluster. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals, and dashed lines represent extrapolated data. 158
- Figure 4.57 A. Cluster analysis of species community and assemblages based on presence-absence data of 17 live-taken land snail species from Bau; B. Cluster analysis of species community and assemblages based on abundance data of 17 live-taken land snail species from Bau. 161
- Figure 4.58 Weighted network of land snail species and microhabitats sampled at Bau limestone hill cluster. The upper level shows the 17 species of live-taken land snail. The lower level indicates the five (5) microhabitat (open ground, around the rubble of stone, around decaying woods, below rock wall and around a large tree) and the relative density of each species is illustrated by the width of its block. 162
- Figure 4.59 A visualisation of the adjacency matrix of land snail species and microhabitats sampled at Bau limestone hill cluster. The x-axis shows the 17 species of live-taken land snail. The y-axis indicates the five (5) microhabitat (open ground, around the rubble of stone, around decaying woods, below rock wall and around a large tree) and the relative density of each species is illustrated by the tone of its cell. 163
- Figure 4.60 Interaction matrix featuring nested modules for the data of land snail species and microhabitats sampled at Bau limestone hill cluster. The x-axis shows the 17 species of live-taken land snail. The y-axis indicates the five (5) microhabitat (open ground, around the rubble of stone, around decaying woods, below rock wall and around a large

tree) and the relative density of each species is illustrated by the tone of its cell.

164

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*	Land snail specimens in ME Collection not collected in the present survey
C1	Bau Limestone Hill Clusters
C1H1	part of mykarst-336 Gunung Doya (= Bukit Sokwang)
C1H2	mykarst-329 Gunung Kapor
C1H3	mykarst-333 Gunung Lobang Angin
CGS	Centre for Graduate Studies
IBEC	Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation
ITBC	Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation
ME	Mohammad Effendi Private Collection
MZU	Zoological Museum of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
S1	Site 1
S2	Site 2
S3	Site 3
UMS	Universiti Malaysia Sabah
UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

Borneo is recognized as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots (Myers et al., 2000). A diverse number species of flora and fauna are found in various types of Malaysian forests, which comprise lowland forests, montane forests, and mangrove forests. In addition to these commonly known forest types, there are also small areas of swamp forest, heath forest, and forest on limestone. Although the total area for several hundreds of limestone hills in Borneo represents less than 0.1% of the land of Peninsular Malaysia (Liew et al., 2021a), the forest on limestone hills supports a significant portion of biodiversity.

The ecological and evolutionary processes that govern the biodiversity patterns and richness of these fragmented, isolated, and majority small patches of limestone forests are similar to the process that acts on oceanic islands' biodiversity. These limestone hills constitute Carbon Carbonate (CaCO_3) and thus the forest on or around the hills grows on alkali soil (high pH). This patchy alkali forest is surrounded by forest that grows on more acidic soils (low pH). The surrounding acidic forest acts as an effective barrier for organism dispersal, especially for some plants and snails because many of these organisms are adapted specifically to live in high-pH limestone forests (Berry, 1963; Vermeulen & Whitten, 1998).

Hence, limestone forest resembles islands, harbouring a large number of endemic species, each with unique evolutionary history in this isolated limestone forest (Schilthuizen, 2004; Clements et al., 2006). This biodiversity importance of limestone forests is often overlooked because of the general impression that it has often had very thin and patchy forest

cover due to the thin soil and has no charismatic vertebrate fauna. The biodiversity of the majority of the limestone hills is still under exploration. To illustrate this, a search in the literature reveals that 22 out of 66 new animal species (33%) that were described in the year 2014 from Peninsular Malaysia were collected from limestone forests (Burseley et al., 2014a; 2014b; Dang et al., 2014; Grismer et al., 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; 2014f; 2014g; Jaloszynski, 2014; Liew et al., 2014; Matzui et al., 2014; Mutafchiev et al., 2014; Ng & Schubart, 2014; Ng et al., 2014; Ochi & Kon, 2014; Onn et al., 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; Schawaller, 2014; Siriboon et al., 2014; Sutcharit et al., 2014; Tanasevitch, 2014; Takaoka et al., 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; Takeuchi, 2014; Turillazzi et al., 2014; Vermeulen & Marzuki, 2014; Victoria & Lin, 2014; Ya'cob et al., 2014; Yoshizawa et al., 2015).

Bornean limestone forests are under threat of degradation of the surrounding forest and irreversible destruction due to quarrying activities (Vermeulen, 1994; Schilthuizen et al., 2005). *Plectostoma scaphilum* (van Benthem-Jutting, 1952), a Diplommatinid snail from Bukit Panching, Kuantan, Pahang has been declared extinct due to habitat destruction (Liew et al., 2014; Liew, 2015). In Borneo, there are at least two karst-dependent species that were probably extinct due to habitat destruction (Vermeulen, 1994; Schilthuizen, 2004). Hence, it is important to protect these hills that support these high-endemic species. However, it is not feasible to protect all limestone hills of Borneo. Thus, certain criteria need to be applied to prioritize the conservation and protection of some of those important limestone forests.

The most conventional criteria in prioritization of conservation areas are to protect the areas with high biodiversity and a high number of endemic species. Although now always been explained explicitly, the high biodiversity and endemic species reflected the unique and rich evolutionary history of the area. Each of the several hundred limestone hills in Borneo

has different physical and geographical characteristics in terms of the degree of isolation, size, and geological history (Hutchison, 2005; Hall, 1998; 2009). Understanding the community ecology and biological evolutionary history of these limestone hills/clusters could help us to prioritize the conservation efforts to protect these small, neglected, and vulnerable limestone hills that have high biodiversity values.

However, it is not possible to study all different taxa groups of organisms to obtain a picture of the evolutionary history of limestone hills. Because of these, calcicole organisms that obligate to limestone hills are a promising surrogate species for other taxa to understand the general biological evolutionary history of limestone hills. In this case, the land snail is known to be a suitable model to understand the role of history and selection in the origins of biodiversity (Davison, 2002).

1.2 Problem Statement

Inventory and ecological studies are crucial for the conservation of limestone-associated species such as land snails to maintain the biodiversity balance in the limestone forest. Species inventories were reported by Vermeulen and Junau (2007) in the Bau-Serian limestone range yielding 148 species. However, these reports lack a systematic checklist with proper illustrations for every species in addition to the provisional species identities in previous reports cannot be used to compare with recently collected specimens.

The land snails in the tropical forest were formerly claimed to be neither abundant nor diverse compared to the temperate forest (Solem, 1984). His statement about the abundance and diversity of the land snails in tropical forests is not completely wrong since the abundance and diversity of land snails in the tropical forests are concentrated only in limestone forests and high altitude forests. The possible reasons behind his claim due to lack