

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN PEAT SWAMP FORESTS

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"..if it is wet and hard to survey, it is a swamp.."

Magnussen (2012)

INTRODUCTION

Peat Swamp Forests (PSF) are important globally in terms of maintaining global carbon balance, providing reservoirs of fresh water, stabilizing water level, and buffering against saline intrusion. They are also reservoirs of biodiversity, and frequently support indigenous knowledge, and many have been declared as RAMSAR sites, especially for the conservation of waterfowl species (Sawal, 2003; Yule, 2010). Peat swamps have historically occupied vast tracks of Borneo (Anderson, 1964). Peat swamp forest in Sarawak faces the South China Sea to the west, with its inland boundaries formed by large and complex river systems. They can be classified into phasic communities, differentiating the forest patch based on species composition and vegetation structure (Anderson, 1961). For example peat swamps in the Ulu Baram region are

considered to have six phasic vegetation communities, ranging from a structurally complex species-rich community around the edge of the peat dome to a species-poor 'padang' community on deep peat. However most peat swamps in Sarawak consist of Mixed Swamp Forest (MSF). Nearly all of the PSF in Sarawak have been extensively logged for their valuable timber (especially for high quality timber, such as ramin, (*Gonystylus bancanus*). Additionally, some of the Totally Protected Areas (TPA) are not free from illegal felling and hunting by local communities (Chai, 2005; Mohd-Azlan, 2004).

At present, only three blocks of Peat Swamp Forests remains, representing approximately 30% of the Totally Protected Areas system in Sarawak. The largest PSF block is in Maludam National Park (MNP). It was established in 2000 and is the most recently proclaimed totally protected peat swamp area in Malaysia. The other two PSF blocks are in Loagan Bunut National Park (LBNP) and in the Sungei Medalam basin. The PSF in LBNP covers about 7,000 hectares out of the total 10,736 hectares area of the Park. The PSF in the Medalam River basin has an area of 52,800 hectares and forms a small part of the Gunung Mulu National Park (Chai, 2005). These two National Parks are both located in the upper Baram basin in Miri Division. Established in 1991, LBNP is located between Sungei Tinjar and Sungei Teru, bordering the eastern and western side of the park, respectively. The lake can reach up to a maximum size of 650 hectares, and the water fluctuation observed throughout the year is in response to the change in water levels of the Tinjar and Baram rivers. The lake is almost dry during the month of June, which lasts up to five weeks. These three National Parks, including the 303,456 hectares declared as PFE, constitute approximately 60% of the protected