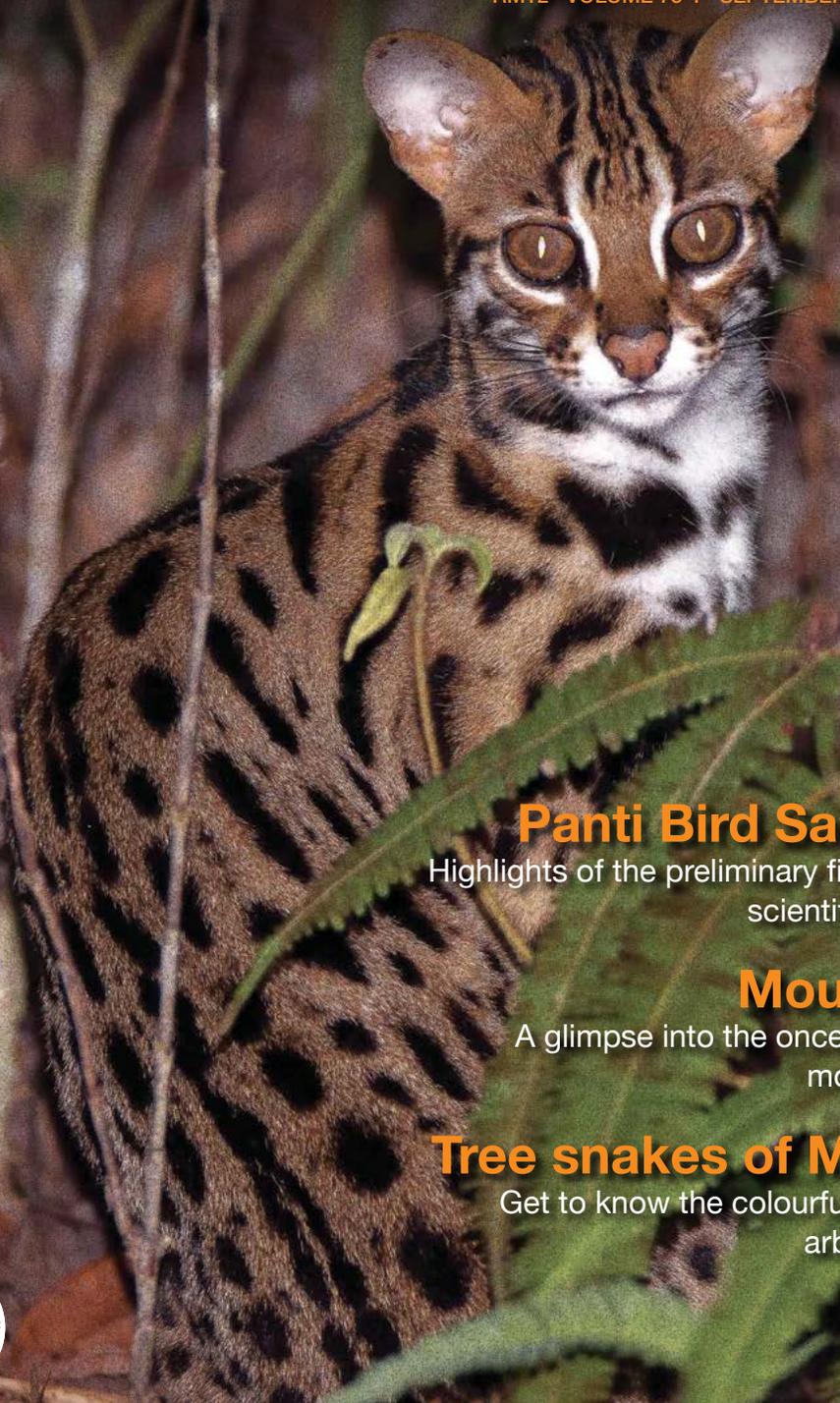


BIODIVERSITY

MALAYSIAN **Naturalist**

RM12 VOLUME 73-1 SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 2019



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PUBLICATION OF THE
MALAYSIAN NATURE SOCIETY (MNS)
PP5527/09/2012(031178)



The International Bornean Frog Race

BY INDRANEIL DAS, PANG SING TYAN AND PUI YONG MIN



Of the nearly 190 species now known from Borneo, about three-quarters are endemic to the island. Recent assessment of the world's amphibians paints a bleak picture for the Bornean amphibian fauna, with about half were classified as threatened. For these and others, insufficiency of current knowledge and therefore, further research on a diverse series of disciplines, from taxonomy and systematics, to ecology, ethology, physiology and distribution, are needed.

The International Bornean Frog Race, an event held annually for the past eight years, and organised by students and staff of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, and for the past seven years, jointly organised with the Sarawak Forestry Corporation, aims to draw public attention to the region's rich amphibian fauna. At the same time, it is intended to expose the general public to nature conservation and amphibian protection, while encouraging a healthy lifestyle by venturing outdoors, such as in Sarawak's National Parks, and finally, to promote the state as an ecotourism venue for Malaysians, as well as for overseas visitors.

The race runs for two hours at each site, and winning entries have comprised up to 22 species. These included species which have seldom been recorded before from the respective sites, such as the Mahogany Frog (*Abavorana luctuosa*) and the Variable Sticky Frog (*Kalophrynus heterochirus*). The Broad-striped Caecilian (*Ichthyophis asplenica*) was also found.

The junior programme of the frog race is a half-day event for our junior citizens that encourages a hands-on approach to the subject of amphibian conservation, the multi-station sub-event permitting students to understand the complex life-history of these animals. The programme also encourages them to be involved in monitoring the health of waterbodies where frogs are found, using them as bioindicators of environmental change. It engages school children through art and music, tutored by leading local experts in these fields.

Over the years, we have received strong support for the event from members of the public, with registered participants increasing from around 50 to currently nearing 200. One has to bear in mind

Top:
Racers congregate to download images at the end of the competitive 'Frog Race'.



the limitations set by the organisers on the maximum number of persons that can be accommodated at these events, considering the impact on local vegetation and trail, audience space and other constraints. In recent years, the number of countries represented has grown to 17 at a single event (and over the years, we have received participants from Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Curaçao, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America). The International Bornean Frog Race is now in the calendar of events of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Youth and Sport, Sarawak.

Amphibians, as a group, have a higher than background rate of endangerment that have led to the eradication of some species. Several factors threaten frogs, and mitigation measures are now being practised to stem population declines of some species. Where complex translocation projects or activities requiring habitat restoration are often

complex or long-drawn, activities to sensitise the public is an obvious first step. Frog-watching can, at once, be a source of fun as well as citizen science. One of our frequent (thrice till date) venues, Kubah National Park, is a site of frequent visitations by local naturalists, photographers and others, leading to enhanced revenue generation for the Park, as well as species recording, that can be construed as monitoring, records often being shared. Such activities have led to new records of amphibians from several sites in the state, and in general enhancing public interest in a group of animals that were not considered important.

Plans are now underway for the 9th International Bornean Frog Race. As in previous years, places are limited, so please register early online. We look forward to seeing you in Kuching, Sarawak! 🐸



Top: A participant shooting the world's largest species of *Polypedates*, the File-eared Tree Frog (*P. otilophus*).

Above: Frog-themed pictorial postcards produced for the Frog Race.

The International Bornean Frog Race, from 2012 to 2019

Version	Venue	Date	Participants	Co-organiser	Countries Represented
1 st	Santubong National Park	28 April 2012	30	Camp Permai Resort	4
2 nd	Kubah National Park	27 April 2013	75	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	6
3 rd	Kubah National Park	26 April 2014	175	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	10
4 th	Kubah National Park	25 April 2015	150	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	17
5 th	Lambir Hills National Park	30 April 2016	200	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	11
6 th	Gunung Gading National Park	29–30 April 2017	180	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	15
7 th	Matang Wildlife Centre	28 April 2018	220	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	15
8 th	Kubah National Park, Matang Wildlife Centre, Sama Jaya Nature Reserve	27-28 April 2019	180	Sarawak Forestry Corporation	16

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