

COURSE REPORT

CONSERVATION OF BORNEAN GIBBONS (*Hylobates albibarbis*) AND THEIR HABITAT IN HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE (HCV) AREAS OF OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

February 26-28, 2019

Bukit Santuai, Kotawaringin Timur Regency, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

A field training organized by:
Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI),
Tropenbos Indonesia Program (TBI),
Goodhope Asia Holding, Ltd.,
Swaraowa,
IUCN PRIMATE-Section on Small Apes, and
Borneo Nature Foundation (BNF)



Background: In recent decades, vast areas of natural forest have been cleared across the tropics for the establishment of oil palm plantations. This land conversion has reduced biodiversity, degraded ecosystem services, affected local communities and their livelihoods, and exacerbated the effects of climate change. In an attempt to address these problems, a variety of industry and NGO stakeholders established the

ELTI is an initiative of: **Yale SCHOOL OF FORESTRY & ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**



Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in 2004 as a voluntary certification scheme aimed at promoting the production and use of sustainable palm oil. RSPO has since developed a series of criteria and indicators as a way to balance development objectives with social and environmental goals.

One RSPO criterion requires the protection of areas with High Conservation Values, which include (but is not limited to) areas with "concentrations of biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered species, that are significant at global, regional or national levels." In Indonesia, primates, especially gibbons, are often used as a key species indicator of the health of HCV forests. Oil palm plantation managers and other local stakeholders, however, often lack the knowledge and skills needed to monitor gibbons, as well as plan and implement effective conservation and/or restoration in HCV areas.

This training event, which aimed to address that problem, was jointly organized by ELTI, TBI, Swaraowa, IUCN Primate Section on Small Apes, and BNF, in close coordination with Mr. Abrar Ramlan, Assistant Manager of Conservation for Singapore-based Goodhope Asia Holdings, LTD., an oil palm company with vast holdings in Indonesia. Mr. Ramlan, who is currently leading the implementation of a plan to rehabilitate the HCV zones at PT. Agro Wana Lestari (a Goodhope subsidiary in Central Kalimantan) asked for assistance in organizing the training for his staff and those from neighboring plantations. The training was held at the PT. Agro Wana Lestari plantation.

Objectives:

1. To improve the knowledge and skills needed for plantation managers to conduct forest and conservation management of Bornean Gibbons and other primates in HCV areas of oil palm plantations;
2. To provide a practical methodology for developing a conservation program and Bornean Gibbon survey from the planning stage to final analysis of the data;
3. To stimulate and promote oil palm growers to become more active in HCV area management in their concessions; and
4. To set up a collaborative network among oil palm plantations to raise awareness and take action in restoring HCV forest and primate conservation in oil palm plantations.



Mr. Arif Setiawan and participants observing Bornean Gibbons



ELTI alumna Mrs. Evi Indraswati explaining how to collect data for social mapping



Dr. Arbainsyah introducing plant characteristics

Program

Day 1

The training started with Mr. Ramlan providing information on the background and objectives of the training. He also explained how his participation in an earlier ELTI training event and subsequent activities with support from the ELTI Leadership Program had helped him gain a good understanding of forest rehabilitation which he is now helping to implement in Goodhope's plantations. Mr. Asran bin Sutasmin (Plantation Manager at PT. Agro Wana Lestari) also welcomed the participants and provided some opening remarks. The training then continued with several presentations. Mr. Arif Setiawan (CEO of Swaraowa) presented information on the conservation status of Indonesian gibbon species, and the phylogenetic relationship of gibbons to humans and other primates, and briefly introduced a triangular method for conducting gibbon observations. Mrs. Eka Cahyaningrum (Researcher at the BNF) then presented the results of his work on gibbon research and conservation in Central Kalimantan. After the lunch break, Mrs. Evi Indraswati (Researcher at Pusat Informasi Lingkungan Hidup) discussed the importance of local community involvement in forest conservation and restoration programs, techniques for encouraging social engagement / empowerment, and strategies to encourage community-based forest restoration. Dr. Arbainsyah (ELTI Indonesia Program Coordinator) provided information on how to identify plant species in the primate habitat. Mr. Setiawan then expanded on how to use the triangular method to collect and analyze data on the Bornean Gibbon.



ELTI alumna Mrs. Nur Aolia assisting participants in tree planting



ELTI alumni, Mr. Abrar Ramlan, leading a focus group discussion to collect data for social mapping



Mr. Palanisamy Maniyandi, Plantation Manager of PT. Agro Wana Lestari, handing out certificates to participants

Day 2

The second day consisted of a field practicum that started at 5:30 AM. Participants were divided into three groups, each going to a different focal site to observe Bornean Gibbon sounds using the triangular method and collect samples of plant materials that were being consumed by the gibbons. The plants were then identified and characterized. After a shortbreak, all participants moved to Tanah Haluan village, which is the closest village to the HCV area of PT. Agro Wana Lestari, for a focus group discussion and social mapping practicum. Held at the house of the village head, the practicum was designed to collect background data on the local community, including political structure, population size, and use of natural resources. After lunch, Mr. Setiawan, Mrs. Indraswati and Dr. Arbainsyah reemphasized what is important when collecting data in the field and its uses. After dinner, each group prepared a report on the results of the practicum to be presented the following day.

Day 3

The third day started with a tree planting activity on the banks of the Egang River, which is included in the HCV area of the oil palm plantation. Dr. Arbainsyah, assisted by Mr. Ramlan, Mr. Setiawan, Mrs. Indraswati, Mrs. Nur Aolia, and Mrs. Kasih Putri Handayani, evaluated the participants' planting techniques and passed on tips for improvement. After the field activities, all participants returned to the classroom to present the results of their practicum from the previous day. Representatives from each group also gave short presentations explaining what they had learned from the training. Dr. Arbainsyah then provided an introduction to the ELTI Leadership Program, to which course alumni could apply for additional training, professional development, and project support. The training then ended with a course evaluation and closing remarks by Mr. Gnanasegaran Kasiya (General Manager of PT. Agro Wana Lestari).



Mr. Gnanasegaran Kasiya, General Manager of PT. Agro Wana Lestari, giving the closing remarks at the training

Participants:

A total of 19 participants from 11 oil palm companies attended the training. Seven of the companies were subsidiaries of Goodhope Asia Holding, Inc., while the remaining four companies (PT. Unggul Lesatri, PT. Maju Aneka Sawit, PT. Karunia Kencana Permaisejati and PT. Sawit Nabati Agro) are closely located near the Goodhope plantation where the training was held.

Follow-up:

All of the participants were very active throughout the training. A WhatsApp group was established so that participants could easily continue communicating with each other as well as the organizers afterwards. One of the training participants has also requested assistance from ELTI's Leadership Program to conduct a training on Honey Bee conservation within a HCV forest area where he works. This proposed training is currently under consideration.

This event was possible thanks to Arcadia, whose Environmental Conservation grants support programmes that protect and enhance biodiversity, and provide field training and academic research.