

COURSE REPORT

STRENGTHENING ECOTOURISM GROUP CAPACITY IN SUNGAI HITAM

ELTI Training Landscape
Samboja, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
June 11 & 18, 2023

A field course organized by:
The Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI) and Yayasan Hutan Biru (Blue Forests Foundation)



Training participants and Mangrove Center Graha Indah managers.

Background: The proboscis monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*) is a primate species endemic to the island of Borneo that lives along riverbanks that have mangrove forests. The species is protected domestically and internationally due to declining population resulting from habitat destruction and poaching. Sungai Hitam ecotourism area in East Kalimantan contains significant proboscis monkey habitat with a population of 143 monkeys (Atmoko et al., 2013). However, Sungai Hitam is in an area classified as non-forest, so protecting the habitat is challenging due to the risk of conversion for residential, industrial, or agricultural expansion.

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Sungai Hitam participants from women's group PKK, youth group Karang Taruna, and Pokdarwis.

One of proboscis monkey conservation efforts in Sungai Hitam is through ecotourism. The proboscis monkeys' habitat is managed by a community tourism group, Sungai Hitam Lestari Pokdarwis. Pokdarwis has been managing the mangrove area itself with intermittent support from the ELTI-Tropenbos program and other stakeholders in the region. However, there are still many shortcomings in this operation. To help build local capacity, the Blue Forests-ELTI program facilitated a study exchange with the more established Mangrove Center Graha Indah in Balikpapan and conducted a field practice with participants to assess the potential for mangrove restoration in Sungai Hitam.

Course Objectives:

The course was designed to help build the capacity of Sungai Hitam communities to manage sustainable mangrove ecotourism and proboscis monkey conservation through a study exchange with the Mangrove Center Graha Indah. Through field practice, participants assessed potential mangrove restoration areas and learned how to develop a mangrove nursery. Organizers also expanded the roles of PKK, a women's group, and Karang Taruna, a youth group, in supporting mangrove conservation and ecotourism in Sungai Hitam.

Course Format:

The training was held June 11 and 18, 2023, in Sungai Hitam Lestari Ecotourism Area (Samboja District, Kutai Kartanegara Regency) and at the Mangrove Center Graha Indah. The course was facilitated by Ms. Lely Puspitasari and Mr. Sulton Affifudin, ELTI Indonesia program coordinator and program assistant, respectively, with support from Mr. Agus Bei, founder and executive director of the Mangrove Center Graha Indah.



A proboscis monkey in the Sungai Hitam ecotourism area



Mangrove forest in Sungai Hitam



Mr. Agus Bei speaks on ecotourism management practices to participants from Sungai Hitam

Program

Day 1

The event began with opening remarks by the chairman of Pokdarwis, Mr. Aidil Amin. Ms. Lely Puspitasari introduced the Blue Forests-ELTI program and Mr. Sulton Affifudin provided a general orientation and the training schedule. In the first session, Mr. Agus Bei spoke on the principles of sustainable ecotourism management, emphasizing that to attract tourists, innovation and creativity are needed to highlight the uniqueness of a place. In the case of Sungai Hitam, the proboscis monkey is a local icon that needs to be protected along with its habitat, which is home to other animal species as well. The instructor presented a video of his journey in establishing the Mangrove Center Graha Indah that illustrated the processes for establishing an ecotourism site and for restoring and rehabilitating degraded coastal areas.

In the second session, participants learned about planting mangroves, including seed suitability, appropriate planting location, and planting methods. The instructor also emphasized that planted mangroves must be monitored for survival and growth monitoring to determine if replanting is needed. At the end of the day, Mr. Agus Bei, Mr. Aidil Amin, and Ms. Lely Puspitasari visited the Sungai Hitam area to assess potential rehabilitation sites and for Mr. Agus Bei to offer input on the prospects for a sustainable ecotourism program in the area.



Discussion session at the Mangrove Center Graha Indah



Participants plant mangrove propagules in bags.



Boat trip at Mangrove Center Graha Indah

Day 2

Participants visited the Mangrove Center Graha Indah located about 1.5 hours from Sungai Hitam. Ms. Lely Puspitasari and Mr. Agus Bei welcomed participants, and Mr. Sulton Affifudin briefly reviewed materials from the first day's meeting. Participants learned about mangrove plant management in the nurseries, including how to choose seeds, harvest them, store and treat the propagules, collect substrate and fill poly bags, arrange them in seedling beds, and control potential pests and diseases. Participants visited the mangrove nursery and practiced some of these techniques and also planted seedlings. Mr. Agus Bei gave each participant a mangrove seedling to plant in the Sungai Hitam sites. The final activity was a boat trip to the ecotourism areas. Participants were divided into five groups, each group accompanied by a field guide.

Course Participants:

Course participants were twenty-five local community members, including nine members of Pokdarwis, nine members of women's group (PKK), and seven members of youth group (Karang Taruna) from the Kampung Lama Sub-Village in Sungai Hitam.



Participants discuss and develop their action plan for Sungai Hitam ecotourism management.

Follow-up:

By the end of the course, participants had developed a plan to build a mangrove nursery to support restoration and rehabilitation efforts at Sungai Hitam and to sell seedlings for mangrove rehabilitation projects in other areas. They created a WhatsApp group to facilitate discussion of lessons learned in performing the activities planned during the course. The WhatsApp group includes alums of the course and younger community members interested in getting involved. Mr. Agus Bei and members of the Mangrove Center Graha Indah are willing to continue collaborating with Pokdarwis in managing the Sungai Hitam ecotourism area.

This event received the generous support of Arcadia - a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin - and the Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning.