

Bringing Back Our Rare Animals...

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.

- Chinese proverb

In January 2023, BORA (www.bringingbackourrareanimals.org; legal name Borneo Rhino Alliance), led by Executive Director Dr John Payne, and Programme Director Dr Zainal Zainuddin, made a site visit to Glenealy Plantations Timora Sabah region complex. Various discussions, studies, planning and groundwork followed in the ensuing months, leading up to a warm morning on 28th April 2023, when Glenealy Plantations' Timora Complex and BORA took the next firm step in their joint effort for biodiversity conservation and riparian restoration.

That morning, the teams from BORA (led by Dr Zainal and Dr Payne) and GPSB (led by Timora Complex AGM Richard Ng and Samling Head of Sustainability Tia Tzee Ling) planted more than 150 plantlings of various 8-month old native Ara (ficus) species. These were planted along the boundary of GPSB's Amalania estate with the Kumambu Forest Reserve (also known as Sungai Simpang Forest Reserve) - a distance of 3.8km along the estate and forest reserve boundary, covering an area of approximately 5 hectares within the Amalania estate. The plantlings were provided by BORA, grown at their nursery in Tabin.

While this exercise took place along the edge of the Amalania estate, it was very much an exercise committed to, and undertaken by, all estates and business operations within Glenealy Plantations' Timora Complex, namely the Amalania Koko, Timora and Pertasa estates, and the Timora Palm Oil Mill. The planting exercise was followed by an in-depth briefing and discussions, led by Dr Zainal. The level of enthusiasm and the commitment was evident, as both the BORA and the Timora Complex teams exchanged views, suggestions and requests.

In a nutshell, this exercise is aimed at restoring and creating an orangutan habitat in forest patches both adjacent to, and within, oil palm estates. This restoration work will help maintain a very sparse wild orangutan population in the mixed forest and oil palm landscape of eastern Sabah, by way of providing a natural food source. Other suitable sites within Timora will also be rehabilitated, including riparian zones where restorative exercises will lead to better maintenance of quality water sources in the area.

The creation of a food source also benefits other wild fruit-eating wildlife, especially birds such as hornbills and pigeons. It is hoped that once the planted trees are more mature and start to produce fruits, more wildlife will be encouraged back to the area, making it a preferred natural habitat, and, hopefully, that wildlife such as orangutans and other primates will stay within the area and need not encroach into oil palm estates.

This exercise is a long-term experiment and only in time - since the trees will only mature over 4 to 5 years - can it be determined if the presence of various ficus genus as food sources will reduce the amount of damage by primates on oil palms. It is an exercise that that GPSB is still keen to proceed with, mainly due to the added benefit that it will hopefully bring back fast-disappearing wildlife.

While there are about 150 known species of Ficus trees and plants in Sabah, for now, the Ficus genus plantlings planted along the Amalania boundary are *Ara Hitam*, *Ara Kuning*, *Tandiran*, *Ara Nunuk*, *Ara Tebiatu*, *Ara Titingan*, *Ara Batang Merah* and *Ara Berbulu*. During this course of time, BORA and Timora Complex will continue to work together to maintain the plantings, including conducting manual weeding, without any use of herbicides as well as look for other areas within the Timora complex which may be suitable for such replanting exercises.

It may be true : if we had planted these trees 20 years ago, we would already see the fruits of our labour today. But today is as good a day as any to plant a tree, especially if it will bring back our wildlife friends and at GPSB, we very much intend to stay the course to make this a success.



