



The Sumatran Ranger Project Quarterly Report 1

April 2021 Leuser Ecosystem, North Sumatra

Note from program leader



Measuring Sumatran elephant footprints

Our Vision

To ensure long term protection of the forest edge within the Leuser Ecosystem in North Sumatra

Our Mission

To halt activities that damage the forest edge environment and are a threat to wildlife, and to support forest edge communities living within the Leuser Ecosystem.

The first quarter of 2021 has focused largely on Sumatran elephant monitoring and assisting communities with human-wildlife conflict mitigation with species including siamang, tiger, orangutan and elephant. We have recently purchased a chainsaw to try and prevent orangutan conflict, by removing smaller rubber trees surrounding large durian trees (an important cash crop) and installing non-climbable collars around the base of these. It is coming into durian season when we expect to see an increase in orangutans in community gardens.

Covid-19 continues to affect communities in North Sumatra and so community engagement between our rangers and forest

edge communities remains limited to key issues.

Recently our camera traps have been on loan to the National Park authority (TNGL) and now these have been returned we will resume our camera trapping programme, monitoring the biodiversity utilising the forest edge and plantations between pockets of forest.

The past two months have been a time to refine our human-elephant conflict mitigation strategy with help from the International Elephant Project and the Sumatran Elephant Project in order to ensure we are maximising our combined efforts in monitoring and ultimately protecting an important population of Sumatran elephants.

Amy Robbins



Elephants

Throughout March and April there has been extensive monitoring of the herd of Sumatran elephants our team follows. They have responded to all instances of human-elephant conflict within the community of Sumber Waras, largely destruction of community owned oil palms.



A bull elephant feeding on an oil palm tree

Human-elephant conflict (HEC) is widely perceived as one of the main threats to Asian elephants across their range and therefore, their future will be

determined by the attitudes of the people towards elephants and their conservation. The Leuser Ecosystem is believed to support the largest remaining population of elephants in Sumatra, although actual estimates of numbers are lacking due to insufficient study. Covid has delayed the population census we are assisting Sumatran Elephant Project with, but preliminary data collection has commenced, with a specially trained SRP team collecting demographic data by analysing dung samples and measuring footprints, as well as direct sightings.

SRP continues to monitor and collect demographic data on the resident herd/s and provide reliable conflict support to the communities affected. We aim to gain the full support of the forest edge communities affected by HEC in order to give the resident elephant population the best chance

of survival long term and work towards a peaceful co-existence between the communities and the elephants.



Crop damage caused by elephants



Initial community engagement in Sumber Waras and Pancasila villages has shown locals are mistrustful of government organisations that respond to HEC events in their communities, as these organisations tend to collect information and leave, without any further support and only respond to conflict reports if there is a reported death of an elephant or person. Therefore, crop raiding events are largely left unaided. Our objective is to attend every HEC event that occurs in these communities, even if the elephants have left. This way the communities will feel supported and compelled to help with solutions and ultimately the long-term protection of these elephants.

Between September and October 2020, a semi-structured questionnaire was conducted with community members from both Sumber Waras and Pancasila. These were conducted to obtain people's perceptions towards elephants, levels and areas of conflict and opinions on the importance of species and forest conservation. As well as gaining this information, many people who suffer conflict want to discuss their cases and this helps the SRP team to form alliances with the communities.

In order to further solidify our relationship with the community and demonstrate our commitment to their involvement in mitigating human-wildlife conflict events, we have employed three locals from Sumber Waras to form part of the monitoring team and train them effectively in mitigation techniques.



Taking GPS coordinates of fresh elephant footprints

Tigers



Sumatran tiger pugmark at the site of multiple livestock losses in January

To date in 2021 the SRP team have responded to two events involving livestock loss to Sumatran tigers. One in January close to the tourist village of Bukit Lawang and the other in the small nearby village of Batu Kapal in April. After community consultation it has been agreed we will help locals construct a predator proof corral at least 2km from the National Park. This will be the third we have constructed in forest edge communities over the past

seven months. The January incident involved five cows being killed in one event, most likely by two tigers. SRP worked together with government authorities to attempt to capture the tiger/s for relocation but this was unsuccessful.



Also in January the team completed another predator proof corral in the

village of Porli after ongoing livestock losses. This was fundraised for by Sumatra Community and Conservation Trust and constructed by locals together with the SRP team, using SRP's design.



Corral construction

Patrols

In the first three months of 2021 a total of nine snares were removed whilst on patrol along the forest edge. All were active and all were destroyed.



5 snares removed in March

Up to March, data was collected from a total of 13 different vertebrate species including footprints, dung, nests, direct sightings, scratchings, wallows and crop damage. The majority of the findings were from Sumatran elephant dung and crop damage.



Felled rubber trees near a durian tree



Indonesia is coming into durian season when sightings of orangutans (both direct and nest sightings) increase, as well as human-orangutan conflict with orangutans crop raiding this preferred fruit. Our team are trialling a new prevention method of removing small rubber trees that surround larger durian trees to reduce the likelihood of orangutans using the rubber trees as a bridge. This will be monitored closely and larger trees will eventually have a metal collar installed around the trunk. The team is now carrying a chainsaw to assist farmers in this manner, and we'll keep you updated on how this method initiated by the rangers themselves, works to reduce orangutans eating durian which is a good income source for many forest edge communities.



Siamang gibbon rescue

On April 14 our rangers were called to the village of Porli in North Sumatra where a siamang gibbon was found crop raiding a local farmer's garden. The gibbon had come into the farmer's house and showed no signs of fear of people. The rangers were able to safely restrain the siamang by tying a small rope around its arm as it attempted to play with them. The siamang was put into a cage to ensure its safety from dogs and held overnight at the SRP office. The following day the team was able to safely hand the animal over to BKSDA (Natural Resources and Ecosystem Conservation Agency) where it received a health check before being taken for rehabilitation and it is hoped, eventual release. The siamang was obviously an ex-pet and locals have given information saying it had recently been released into the forest but had been spending time on the border where communities have established crops. We are grateful locals trust us to call upon when they need assistance with human-wildlife conflict, and not take matters into their own hands where they risk their own as well as the animals' safety.

Special mention must go to SRP team member Jasson Kacaribu (pictured second from right) who led this rescue

and successfully handed the animal over to the authorities.



Supporters



Thank you



Contact

sumatranrangers@gmail.com

Instagram: @sumatranrangerproject

Facebook: facebook.com/sumatranrangerproject

