

Media Statement

25 October 2018

Deforestation for durian plantations poses serious long-term risks to industry's productivity and profitability

We refer to the recent news report by The Star's Sim Leoi Leoi and Ong Han Sean: ['Jungle's goodness gone – and it's legal'](#), on 23 October 2018. We are concerned that the durian, Southeast Asia's beloved 'king of fruits' and such a culturally significant element of this region, is turning into the next new monoculture crop driving yet more deforestation and biodiversity loss in Malaysia.

This not only causes the destruction of critical habitat for wide-ranging animals such as tigers, elephants, primates, and hornbills – it also reduces the numbers of the very pollinators that are necessary for durian fruit production, and which the durian industry therefore heavily relies on for profit.



Musang King durians for sale in Peninsular Malaysia. COPYRIGHT: PIERRE-MICHEL FORGET



Because we NEED a jungle out there.

Rimba, 22-3A Casa Kiara II, Jalan Kiara 5, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<http://rimbaresearch.org>

Unlike other monoculture crops such as oil palm and rubber, the *Durio zibethinus* durian tree is native to Malaysia, a natural component of our unique tropical ecosystem. As it cannot self-pollinate, it requires a specific native pollination system that has evolved over millennia, which involves a unique, complex, and specialised set of interactions between the tree and the wild animal pollinators that it depends on. Research has shown that the only truly efficient natural pollinators of the durian trees are the plant-visiting bats of the family Pteropodidae (see <https://rimbaresearch.org/2017/09/19/publication-update-21-project-pteropus-press-release-durian-industry-may-suffer-without-endangered-fruit-bats/> for further information).

Commonly referred to as ‘fruit bats’, this vitally important animal group is the most effective at performing natural durian pollination, providing an essential and irreplaceable service to the durian industry for free. Yet Malaysia’s long-distance durian pollinators, the giant fruit bats known as flying foxes (*Pteropus hypomelanus* and *Pteropus vampyrus*), are already severely threatened by hunting. Any further removal of their forest habitat and food resources will continue to reduce the effectiveness of their role in durian fruit production. On top of this, the durian-pollinating Cave Nectar Bat (*Eonycteris spelaea*) is threatened by uncontrolled limestone quarrying. Any removal of forest around or near limestone karsts will reduce the habitat suitability of these caves, and will also prevent the bats from travelling further to the durian farms that are in need of pollination.



© Rimba
Video-trap footage showing a flying fox pollinating durian flowers. COPYRIGHT: RIMBA

Although there is some preliminary research suggesting that the Asian Giant Honeybee (*Apis dorsata*) can also serve as a secondary pollinator in areas with no bat pollinators, it is restricted to a strictly supporting role with greatly reduced fruit production – and this threatened insect group is also highly dependent on pristine rainforest habitat for its survival.

Therefore, destroying pollinator habitats and food resources in order to establish durian monoculture simply does not make good business sense. Companies that engage in this practice are prematurely destroying the very future profits that they hope to derive from their durian business in the first place. In the absence of our native, natural pollinators of durian trees, farmers would have to invest extra time, labour, and money to hand-pollinate their trees.



Giant honeybee (*Apis dorsata*) feeding on pollen of durian. COPYRIGHT: SHEEMA AZIZ / RIMBA

Other serious impacts of deforestation, such as carbon emissions, soil erosion, sedimentation, loss of water supply, increased flood risks, etc., are already well documented and have been repeatedly highlighted. Moreover, planting of durian in inappropriate locations such as hillsides could potentially cause landslides ('Residents scoff at proposal to plant durian trees at Gunung Panjang', Malay Mail, 5 December 2017). On top of this, Musang King plantations are now also encroaching on the rights of indigenous Orang Asli communities, and threatening their livelihoods and traditions ('Musang King durian plantation owners blockade jungle roads of orang asli', The Star, 31 July 2018).



Because we NEED a jungle out there.

Rimba, 22-3A Casa Kiara II, Jalan Kiara 5, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<http://rimbaresearch.org>

We therefore wish to highlight, reiterate, and emphasise this very serious impact of durian-driven deforestation to all relevant parties. We call on the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry, the Department of Agriculture, the wider durian industry, and individual durian farmers to think long-term and pursue good agricultural practices for growing durian that is sustainable, contributes to healthy ecosystems, and provides a future for the Malaysian durian industry and Malaysian durian lovers.

Suggested practices are to prioritise converting previously tended agricultural land to durian orchards rather than clearing native forest for durian farming, establishing new durian plantings in appropriately situated areas, avoiding pure monocrops by intercropping with other fruit trees, and integrating low-impact and organic practices into pest and tree management. Such methods will ensure the preservation of the pollinator habitat and food resources that will help attract the necessary animal pollinators to durian farms. By ensuring the survival of these crucial pollinator communities, this will also help to guarantee the long-term longevity and viability of our local durian industry.

Such conservation and sustainable use of Malaysia's wild durian pollinators is in line with the Principles and Goals of our country's National Policy on Biological Diversity (2016-2025), which falls under the purview of the Ministry of Water, Land and Natural Resources (KATS). Also, as Malaysia is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and a member of the Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC), such a progressive move would also demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to the CBD's explicitly identified priority on the 'Conservation and Sustainable Use of Pollinators'. Indeed, the CBD states (see <https://www.cbd.int/agro/pollinator.shtml> and <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/ca37/8073/bcc8bf627c0d00bdb6f4ab9a/sbstta-22-10-en.pdf>):

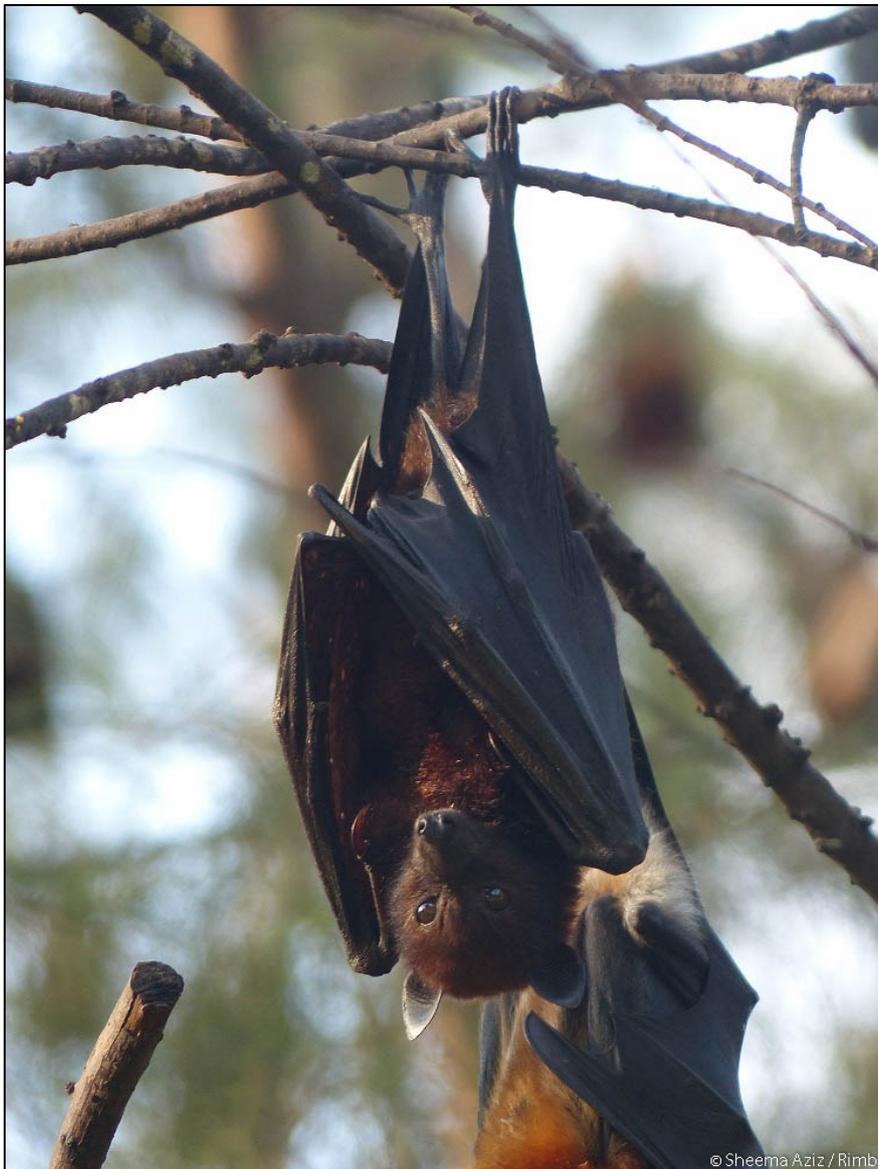
“The overall objective of this plan of action is to promote coordinated action worldwide to safeguard wild and managed **pollinators** and promote the **sustainable use of pollination** services, which is a recognized vital ecosystem service for agriculture and for the functioning and health of ecosystems.”

As such, we invite all relevant and interested parties to work with us on a coordinated and collaborative initiative to identify, encourage, support, and promote durian production practices that are deforestation-free, biodiversity-friendly, and respectful of indigenous rights. This would be a particularly fitting time to start taking action, as the week of 24-31 October this year is the official International Bat Week (<http://batweek.org/>).



Because we NEED a jungle out there.

Rimba, 22-3A Casa Kiara II, Jalan Kiara 5, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<http://rimbaresearch.org>



©Sheema Aziz / Rimba

Island Flying Fox (*Pteropus hypomelanus*) on Tioman Island, Malaysia. COPYRIGHT: SHEEMA AZIZ / RIMBA

Signed,

Dr. Sheema Abdul Aziz
Co-founder & President
Rimba
sheema@rimbaresearch.org

Lindsay Gasik
Durian Tour Organizer
Instagram: @durianwriter
lindsay@yearofthedurian.com



Because we NEED a jungle out there.

Rimba, 22-3A Casa Kiara II, Jalan Kiara 5, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<http://rimbaresearch.org>

Signed in support

1. Miss Ng Wen Qing (Nuvista)
2. Mr. Surin Sukswan (Member, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas)
3. Ms. Justine Vaz (General Manager, The Habitat Foundation)
4. Dr. Yong Kien Thai (University of Malaya)
5. Loo Jey Sern (Student, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus)
6. Mr. Arvind Devadasan (Student, Universiti Sains Malaysia)
7. Mrs. Joanna de Rozario (NTFP-EP – Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme)
8. Dr. Nur Atiqah (MCKC – Malaysia Cave and Karst Conservancy)
9. Mr. Raphe van Zevenbergen (Co-Founder, Lang Tengah Turtle Watch)
10. Ms. Umami Nadiah Rosli (Project Leader, Communications; The Forest Trust)
11. Mr. Mohd Abdul Muin Md Akil (Universiti Sains Malaysia)
12. Mr. Lau Chai Ming (Reef Check Malaysia)
13. Miss Elisa Panjang (Danau Girang Field Centre)
14. Miss Long Seh Ling (Universiti Malaysia Terengganu)
15. Ms. Natasha Zulaikha (Conservation Officer, MYCAT – Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers)
16. Mr. Nicholas Tan Wei Cheng (Universiti Sains Malaysia)
17. Mr. Sim Kee Kong (The Forest Trust)
18. Dr. Jarina Mohd Jani (Universiti Malaysia Terengganu)
19. Dr. Dzaeman Dzulkifli (Tropical Rainforest Conservation and Research Center)
20. Ms. Celine Ch'ng (Independent)
21. Ken Yeong (Innovation Manager, The Forest Trust)
22. Mr. Mohamad Izereen Amat Mukri (Merapoh Rainforest Station, Fuze-Ecoteer)
23. Mr. Prasad Vasudevon (Independent)
24. Ms. Alicia Solana Mena (MEME - Management and Ecology of Malaysian Elephants)
25. Miss Aini Hasanah Abd Mutalib (Malaysian Primatological Society; Universiti Sains Malaysia)
26. Mr. Rushan Abdul Rahman (Data For A Cause)
27. Mr. Daniel Quilter (Merapoh Rainforest Station)
28. Nazirul Amin Azmi (Reef Check Malaysia)
29. Ms. Stephanie Santiago (APE Malaysia)
30. Ms. Ange Tan (Project Coordinator, Wild Asia)
31. Mrs. Noorainie Awang Anak (Independent)
32. Dr. Forest Ang (Independent)
33. Dr. Nadine Ruppert (Senior Lecturer, Universiti Sains Malaysia)
34. Ms. Nur Izzati Roslan (Juara Turtle Project)
35. Dr. Reza Azmi (Executive Direction & Founder, Wild Asia)
36. Dr. Yek Sze Huei (Senior Lecturer, Monash University Malaysia)
37. Dr. Mohd-Azlan Jayasilan (Associate Professor, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak)



Because we NEED a jungle out there.

Rimba, 22-3A Casa Kiara II, Jalan Kiara 5, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<http://rimbaresearch.org>

About Rimba

Rimba, which means 'jungle' in Malay, is a Malaysian non-profit research group focused on conducting conservation science. We use the results of our studies to engage constructively with policymakers, natural resource managers, and other stakeholders to help improve the protection and management of Peninsular Malaysia's biodiversity. We take a collaborative and inclusive approach to our work, and function as a virtual lab to connect like-minded people. For more information about our durian-related work see: <https://rimbaresearch.org/project-pteropus/>