

## TITLE: Kinabatangan, Sabah (Malaysia)

### LOCATION/Geography:



The 560km Kinabatangan River is situated on the Malaysian island of Borneo in South East Asia. The entire catchment of the river represents approximately one-quarter of the land area of the state of Sabah.

### BACKGROUND

Six basic habitats are represented along the river corridor, including small patches of dipterocarp forest, riparian forest, freshwater swamp forests, limestone forests, oxbow lakes, and mangroves. Some 50 mammal species (including 10 primates) and approximately 200 bird species have been recorded in the area. Among these are several charismatic and keystone species including Asian elephants (around 100 individuals), orangutans, Sumatran rhinoceros, and proboscis monkeys. The forests of the lower Kinabatangan contain the largest concentration of orangutans in Sabah: believed to be around 800 individuals. Eight of Malaysia's threatened birds are found in the area, including Storm's stork and a number of hornbills. The key environmental processes are associated with the river and its flooding. Local communities depend to a large extent on the river and non-timber forest products around it, for their livelihoods.

### PROBLEM/THREAT:

Land-use conversion, most recently and drastically for oil palm plantations, has reduced natural forest cover to a relatively thin (or even nonexistent) strip. Currently, there remains a small amount of forest along the river, 27,000 ha of which are gazetted as the kinabatangan wildlife sanctuary. There are several gaps in the riparian buffer that will be a real challenge to connect with forest, including a village/highway that crosses the river. These gaps are critical to close if the river is to remain an intact corridor for wildlife populations, especially elephants. Invasive vegetation is a problem in some of the rivers and lakes.

### WWF'S ACTION

WWF's programme seeks to engage government, local communities and businesses in reaching a sustainable solution for all. It is working at various levels to ensure the goal of re-connecting some of the key forest fragments. This objective will not only extend the habitat for some key species, but in addition will ensure that the river's flooding is less destructive, improves water quality for the benefit of local communities, and promotes alternative sources of income for local people such as ecotourism.

Specific actions include working with the plantation companies to change their behaviours and for instance not plant oil palms right up to the river bed. Actions are also undertaken at the market end, increasing awareness amongst consumers to discern products coming from well managed oil palm plantations. WWF is working with the local government to change legislation encouraging further conversion of natural forest to oil palm plantations.



© Nigel Dudley, Equilibrium

Finally, some site-specific restoration activities that are targeted at improving the overall landscape are being undertaken together with local communities.