

Forest Fires and Disruption of the Elephants' Home Range in Hutan Harapan

The wildfires that have ravaged forest areas in much of Sumatra and Kalimantan during August and September of this year have not only affected millions of people on those islands and beyond, but also animals.

The herd of 8 elephants in the southern portion of Hutan Harapan travelled outside of their usual home range in order to avoid the forest fires. Seven of them moved into the south-western area which they had ne-ver done before. In the process, new human-elephant conflicts were triggered with villages outside of Hutan Harapan. Fortunately, the Hutan Harapan team was able to herd them back to Hutan Harapan. At the same time, one of the male elephants, Haris went off in a north-easterly direction in order to avoid the fires.

"Forest fires can affect the movement of elephants and it is also possible that they affect the movement of other wildlife in Hutan Harapan," said Elva Gemita's Environmental, Research and Development Manager. The availability of water and food is the main determinant in elephants' decision to move. Elva added that this is one of the reasons why preventing and extinguishing forest fires is so important. (ETBS)



Batin Sembilan Indigenous Peoples: We Die if the Forest Disappears

The Batin Sembilan have been particularly affected by the forest fires this year. Their nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles which rely heavily on the collection of non-timber forest products, such as honey, rattan and jernang (resin) have been disrupted by the fires. According to Rusman (60), a representative of Batin Sembilan in the Kandang Rebo area of Hutan Harapan, the forest is their home.

When the forest is burned, it is the same as killing them. "We die if the forest disappears. We suffered a lot because the forest was burned. The bees have moved because of the smoke and the rattan has been burned out. If the forest is gone, where are we going to go?" asked Rusman.

The majority of the fires have been set by illegal cultivators with the aim of planting oil palm. The Batin Sembilan gave warning letters to them but they were ignored. So too were warnings by Hutan Harapan's patrol team and the district police. As the fires worsened, an integrated local government team led by the district police arrested 22 people for illegally setting fires in Hutan Harapan.

Rusman along with a team from Batin Sembilan are working with Hutan Harapan staff to secure the burned areas and develop a strategy to restore the forest. With the rainy season due to start in November, the timing is right to start planting. (HOS)





Al-Azhar Jambi Students Study with Batin Sembilan Children

Junior and senior high school students from Al Azhar Jambi visited Hutan Harapan on Saturday, September 9, 2019 as part of their community outreach program with Batin Sembilan children.

After introductions, the students went straight to Meranjat's house, where the joint learning activities were held. "If the Governor of Jambi and even the President of the Republic of Indonesia saw firsthand the Batin Sembilan children learning, they would be proud and happy," said Dwi, one of the Al Azhar Jambi students.

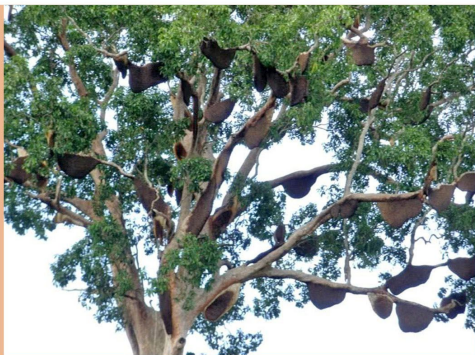
The Jambi students did not expect that the Batin Sembilan children could already read and write, even though there were some difficulties. "Spelling and counting can be done but they have to study regularly," said Ari, an Al Azhar Jambi School teacher.

Many of the Batin Sembilan Indigenous Peoples still live a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle which is often not conducive to learning in a formal school setting. Recognizing these constraints, the Education Director of Diniyyah Al Azhar Jambi University, Muhammad Hafiz El Yusuf expressed his apprecia-

tion for the hard work of the Besamo school teachers and Hutan Harapan management to provide an education for Batin Sembilan children.

In addition to joint learning, the students also provided social assistance, such as food, clothing, religious and school equipment to the Batin Sembilan and Besamo School students.

The students also showed their support for the Harapan Hutan ecosystem restoration activities by rejecting encroachment and forest fires. **(AWI)**



Sialang Honey Production: A Niche Market for the Batin Sembilan Indigenous Peoples

Hutan Harapan has an abundance of Sialang trees (*Koompassia excelsa*) making it an ideal location for producing Sialang honey. The Batin Sembilan have a long tradition of harvesting the honey for their own consumption and selling it locally to intermediaries. In addition to its health benefits, the honey is valued for its distinctive taste which varies depending on the sources of pollen that the bees collect from the forest. The Sialang honey is produced by honey bees (*Apis dorsata*) that build their nests in the branches of the tree. The trees can grow to 88 meters in height and thus each tree can have anywhere from 15-50 hives.

Harvesting the hives is done by a *pawang madu* (honey handler) who harvests the honey at night in order not to disturb the bees. Traditional harvesting methods have not always been sustainable, however, because fire was often used to drive the bees out of the hive and then the entire hive was harvested. This resulted in long periods when there was no honey because of the time needed for regeneration. With the support of Hutan Harapan, 15 Batin Sembilan received training from the Honey Farmer's group located in Riau on how to sustainably harvest the hives.

In 2018, 2,427 beehives were harvested by the Batin Sembilan producing 6,696 kg of honey. Production varies depending on the season and the health of the forest. After the forest fires in 2015, for example, production dropped since the bees had moved away. A similar phenomenon is being experienced this year. Although the quantity fluctuates, the quality has improved due the introduction of processing standards. PT REKI buys the honey from the Batin Sembilan at a premium price and markets it under the label of Madu Hutan Harapan. But there is still more work to be done to improve the honey supply chain and to ensure that the benefits go to the communities and protecting the environment. **(Syafrizal)**