

Cabinet paper to facilitate Sabah wildlife action plan



(File pix) Camera trap picture of a Sunda clouded leopard in the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary. Pix courtesy of DGFC Wildlife

By **Avila Geraldine** - September 19, 2018 @ 3:08pm

KOTA KINABALU: A cabinet paper is expected to be tabled soon to facilitate an action plan to save Sabah's endangered Sunda clouded leopard, proboscis monkey and Bornean banteng.

Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) director Augustine Tuuga said the cabinet paper would most likely be tabled by the state administration soon, and this will pave the way for the action plan to be tabled during the next state assembly sitting in November.

He said the action plan signalled the final final lap towards implementation of measures to protect endangered wildlife. He said with the cabinet paper in place, it only needed approval from the state government to be set into motion.

“A cabinet paper will be prepared and we hope the plan will be approved by the state cabinet. We are hoping that the action plan could become a reality by the end of the year.

“The Chief Minister’s (Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal) support of these plans will also boost conservation efforts of these three endangered species,” said Augustine in a statement, which coincided with the soft launch of the wildlife action plan today by Deputy Chief Minister Christina Liew.

The SWD and Danau Girang Field Centre (DGFC) produced the 10-year action plan for the Sunda clouded leopard, proboscis monkey and the Bornean banteng following several years of gathering biological and ecological information on the three totally protected species in Sabah.

The efforts were supported by Yayasan Sime Darby since April 2011 with a total commitment of RM3.96 million. The funds included allocations for consultation workshops and international conferences with various stakeholders, which involved governmental departments, subject matter experts and industry leaders.

The recommendations made during these workshops and conference were included in the action plan.

DGFC director, Dr Benoit Goossens said the three species were threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching and road developments such as the upcoming Pan Borneo Highway.



(File pix) A male Proboscis monkey photographed in the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary. Pix courtesy of DGFC Wildlife

“The decline in the proboscis monkey population is directly attributed to the expansion of aquaculture projects in mangrove areas. An example of this is the shrimp farming project in Pitas.

“The population of this animal is also decreasing due to the conversion of riparian or wetland and riverine habitats into agriculture land and human settlements,” said Goossens, who is from Cardiff University, United Kingdom.

He said the Sunda clouded leopards also have a low population now, while the Bornean banteng, which is a type of wild cattle suffered from low numbers due to heavy poaching, snaring and fragmentation.

Goossens said the establishment of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting (SMART) patrols has also become important in saving these three species.

“But more specifically, for the Bornean banteng, which now has a minimum population of 300, the setting up of a captive breeding programme is imperative,” said Goossens.

He said any area with the presence of bantengs must be managed sustainably by developing and maintaining pastures within and near the home ranges of the existing herds.

As for the proboscis monkey, Goossens said increasing suitable mangrove and riparian forests and the habitat connectivity between them was crucial for their survival.

“For the Sunda clouded leopard, which has a population size of 750, it is imperative to halt the loss and degradation of their habitat and maintain landscape connectivity.

“The proposed Pan Borneo Highway could have a detrimental effect on the Sunda clouded leopard by increasing fragmentation and the number of road kills,” he said.

Goossens said DGFC also recommended that an Endangered Species Conservation Unit be set up to monitor the implementation of the action plan.



(File pix) Two Bornean banteng bulls in a forest reserve in Sabah. Pix courtesy of DGFC Wildlife