

Liwagu environment in tip-top condition

BP 19-06-2012 A12

KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS) and WWF-Malaysia recently organised a workshop to share and disseminate the findings from their scientific expedition held in the Liwagu catchment area, Tambunan on November 10-14, 2011.

The purpose of the expedition was to gather important information for supporting better management of the catchment area.

The Liwagu catchment in Tambunan has been WWF-Malaysia's project area since January 2010, under a three-year project funded by HSBC Bank Malaysia Bhd. This project focuses on sustainable management of freshwater resources and water catchment.

The expedition proved to be a step through the doors of conservation as findings showed that the environment and natural resources in Liwagu, Tambunan was indeed in top condition.

Results from the six research areas were reported at this workshop, namely on ant diversity, freshwater fish distribution, catchment and community, amphibian diversity, aquatic insect diversity and distribution and river water quality.

Among the promising findings was of the water quality of the



The caecilian (*Ichthyophis* sp) found in the Liwagu area. Caecilians are rarely found due to their secretive habit. It is presumably found at undisturbed areas – primarily in the most tropical and moist forests. - Photo by Yong Huai Mei

Mensangoh River. It was found that the score indicative of cleanliness status of the river hit a mark of 94.5.

As explained by conservation and science officer of Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society, Lee Ka Han, "the score for river water quality according to the Water Quality Index (WQI) is exactly like the school system – a mark of 100 means the water quality is at its best. The Mensangoh River has scored a high mark of 94.5 based on readings taken at 10 monitoring stations along the river. This indicates that the river water quality status is clean and it

falls under class I of the Interim National Water Quality Standards (INWQS) which specifies that the river can sustain very sensitive aquatic species and is beneficial to the conservation of the natural environment. The communities have done a great job in taking care of their river and I strongly urge them to continue their efforts as rivers are easily polluted."

Associate professor Dr Abdul Hamid Ahmad, who is director of the Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation, University Malaysia Sabah (UMS), agreed and said the water quality of rivers in Liwagu, Tambunan is still high as shown by the findings



A *Limnonectes finchii* frog species spotted in the area. The male frogs of this species are notably known to guard their own eggs and carry the tadpoles on its back to nearest freshwater river. - Photo by Paul Yambun

by my research team that studied freshwater fish. "Altogether, we recorded freshwater fishes from three families, with a total of 16 species, and 61 individuals, all of which are known to occur only in fresh and clean river waters. This is good news because this means that the Mensangoh River is biologically healthy and the community of Liwagu should commend themselves for taking care of and sustaining their environment."

The recorded data of amphibians from seven different families (six for frogs and one for caecilian) with a total of 16 species (five of which can only be found in Borneo) and a total of eight orders of aquatic

insects belonging to 63 families and 2,157 individuals from the expedition further strengthened the conclusion that the quality of the environment in the Liwagu area is still at its peak.

The workshop attendees comprised students of SMK Dewa Wawasan and head villagers in the area. They were delighted upon hearing the positive results from the expedition.

They also communicated their hopes that UMS, SWCS and WWF-Malaysia will continue to assist through scientific research in assessing and monitoring the environmental quality of the Liwagu catchment area as well

as in disseminating information to the local community through awareness events.

Janyera Linus, a student from SMK Dewa Wawasan, said he had thoroughly enjoyed attending the workshop as it had been an eye-opener and very educational to learn about the environment in this area.

"I am always open and willing to participate fully in any similar events in the future," he said.

WWF-Malaysia freshwater coordinator Daria Mathew said the workshop had a clear objective which was to disseminate information from research conducted during the expedition to the community in the area.

"We are pleased with the outcome as students and head villagers have expressed that the workshop was beneficial to them in terms of learning and acquiring better understanding of their surrounding and requested events like this be continued in the future. The collaboration and support from our partners, UMS and SWCS, and funding by HSBC are crucial in realising the organisation of the workshop and meeting its objectives."

Following this community workshop, WWF-Malaysia and its partners will hold another workshop in Kota Kinabalu to convey the expedition findings to a larger audience.